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Efendilik: Civility, Urbanity, and Homohistoricism in Contentious Istanbul

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Abstract

This paper forwards the concept of homohistoricism as a historicism that narrativizes the nation's past as the site of illicit or authentic relations/affections that have the power to pervert or rescue the public sphere in the present-now. In the case of contemporary Turkey, I identify republican, Islamist, and queer homohistoricisms as divergent political projects with interconnected rationales. I analyze two sets of primary materials on queer contention from Istanbul's Gezi Park uprising: Protest records (fliers, brochures, zines, pictures, banners, posters) from Kislak Center's "Gezi Park Protests 2013" collection and the meeting minutes from 657 neighborhood forums produced and archived by the protestors. I argue that queer homohistoricism in Turkey as a contentious repertoire of invoking nostalgic visions of Ottoman cosmopolitanism and urban civility may succeed in authenticating a certain kind of queer politics, but would do so at the expense of perpetuating just as authentic mechanisms of oppression.

Keywords: Gezi uprising; historicism; Istanbul; modernity; Ottoman Turkey; queer culture; urban culture

Rıza Zelyut, a "proud Gezici" and columnist for the daily secular newspaper *Aydınlık* (Enlightenment), writes: "Today, the governing Islamist political circles continuously argue that the Ottoman order was superior to the republican order and that Ottoman morality was superior to republican morality. But that Ottoman order they praise so much was rotten to the core."¹ Those familiar with Turkish politics would recognize this gesture as the ideological shorthand within the ranks of Kemalists against the ghosts of the empire. They would also recognize that such gestures, which implicate secular versus pious morality, often invoke sexuality. Zelyut's column is no exception. In the rest of the piece, he rehearses the prominent moral critique of Ottoman sexuality in modern Turkey: boy love. He lays out the unacceptably rich expressions and social categorizations of boy love in Ottoman society—unacceptable, that is, to the modern moralist. Zelyut details his disdain toward the *iç-oğlans* (inner palace boys) or boy-servants in the Ottoman palace; the *parlak-oğlans* (literally shiny boys, as in pretty boys), who danced, served wine, and entertained in the mansions of the rich and the powerful; the *hamam-oğlans* (bathhouse boys) and the boy prostitutes of Istanbul, who served the lower classes of the city; and the *kulamparas*

¹ Rıza Zelyut, "Esirci Osmanlı'nın Düşük Ahlakı," *Aydınlık*, 11 March 2016, <https://www.aydinlik.com.tr/esirci-osmanlinin-dusuk-ahlaki>. All translations are mine. As the 2013 Gezi Park protests in Turkey are slipping into the past, the lingering term Gezici (those who are "for Gezi") signifies one's political stance on a nebulous category of dissent that the lexicon of Gezi came to symbolize in contemporary Turkish public discourse.

(specifically Ottoman sodomites, pederasts), who lusted after them. The list continues outside of the confines of specific sexual acts to include male homoerotic affection in general. Zelyut makes his case by retelling the common stories of the sultans who fell in love with boys—in the case of Mehmed the Conqueror (r. 1444–46, 1451–81), to the extent of ordering his royal tutor Şair Ahmet Pasha’s execution, “because he had eyes on the same beautiful boy”—and by pointing to the numerous examples of homoerotic Ottoman poetry that address the male same-sex beloved. He concludes: “It is this disgusting sodomite lifestyle that the republic destroyed. This is why these sodomites never liked the republic. The enemies of the republic are these sodomites’ descendants. . . . Secular people, especially Kemalists, do not gravitate toward such disgusting relations. Because the republican regime cultivates virtuous individuals, not *kulamparas*.”²

In an effort to make sense of the centrality accorded historical same-sex relations in contemporary political critique, I forward the concept of “homohistoricism” as a generalized platform on which political claims are articulated and contested. By homohistoricism, I mean the narration of a historically developing account of homosexual public presence according to criteria of judgment that frame contemporary political debates in terms derived from an imagined past. This past is understood as the site of illicit sexual relations that have the power to pervert the public sphere in which competing representations of tradition are at stake. A homohistoricist narrative, then, is one that casts same-sex relations as crucial to the symbolic meaning of the past for the present. This paper lays out the clashing ways in which homohistoricist narratives have been developed within republican and Islamist official doctrines in Turkey and how, in response, a distinctively queer homohistoricism has emerged, which was on display as part of the contentious repertoire of the Gezi uprising. I argue that the ubiquitous appeal of this crowded platform of homohistoricist politics lies with the fundamental anxiety of inauthenticity largely shared across the experiences of third-world political modernity. I further argue that although homohistoricism can and is inhabited by contemporary LGBT activists with certain emancipatory potentials in Turkey, it is at the expense of closing boundaries and mainstreaming the radical inclusivity of queer politics. I suggest that the warning signs that emerge from the Turkish case do not replicate the largely neoliberal mainstreaming of queer politics in the West, but are likely to apply to the potentials and hurdles of queer politics in the Global South, where similar cultural pressures are at work.

In what follows, I begin by theorizing politics of homohistoricism that consist—in my thinking—of three concentric circles, with historicism at the center, homohistoricism in the middle as a kind of historicism, and the politics of homohistoricism on the outside as a generalized platform where official and contentious homohistoricisms are articulated to serve various political functions. Second, I discuss the place of same-sex desire in Ottoman sexuality, from which I extract two operational threads: urban civility and respectful silence. Third, I tease out the official (non)transformation of the politics of homohistoricism from republican anti-Ottomanism to Islamist neo-Ottomanism, which differentially interpret the contemporary political function of historical queer practice. By tracing the changing semantics and referents that constitute the moving parts of this transformation, I aim to animate the main bearings of official homohistoricisms in Turkey as an enduring political analytic that serves different ideological masters. Last, I present data to document LGBT activists’ inhabitation of homohistoricism from within the contentious repertoire of the Gezi uprising. In doing so, I aim to underline the various noncumulative ways in which the politics of homohistoricism can be performed outside of the official context as well as to question the long-term strategic value of homohistoricism for LGBT activism.

The primary materials were collected from two sources: the “Gezi Park Protests 2013” collection (protest zines, fliers, brochures, pictures, and banners or placards that were produced or circulated during the Gezi uprising), housed at the University of Pennsylvania’s Kislak

² Ibid.

Center, and the digital archive *Direnış Forumları* (Resistance Forums) where the meeting minutes from a total of 657 Gezi forums held in various urban parks during the summer of 2013 have been compiled by the protestors.

Historicism, Homohistoricism, Politics of Homohistoricism

Historicism is the idea that behind a current sociopolitical state lies a meaningfully unified and developing past narrative. How a historical narrative culminates in the various life practices that constitute the political in the present-now can vary. It can be normatively linear; for example, in Eurocentric historicism that understands modernity as spreading globally and uniformly in what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls the “first in Europe, then elsewhere” structure of global historical time, whereby all countries must go through the same developmental stages to arrive at the same destination.³ The same normative linearity can be observed in the Marxist stagism history, in which the conditions of feudal oppression culminate in capitalist emancipation, and the conditions of capitalist oppression ought to culminate in socialist and ultimately communist emancipation—all of which narrates an upward mobility desirable from the Marxist point of view.

But historicism, as a mode of thinking, need not be linear in this way. It can allow for “complexities and zigzags” and incorporate certain wrong turns and regressions.⁴ Although one can find isolated examples of this mode of historicism in the West (for instance, narrating slavery or the Holocaust as regressive mistakes, a kind of “one step back” from which the larger civilizational march derives meaningful lessons), it is typically the domain of third-world political modernity. Chakrabarty exemplifies this with the ex-colonial struggles for self-government that produced a practical rejection of the linear trajectory for political maturity that European historicism prescribed to the world.⁵ Subsequently, contemporary third-world historicisms have inhabited predominantly the zig-zag narratives of history, for instance in considering colonial subjugation as a regressive and a meaningful episode of the nation’s history. It is this aspect of historicism—making meaning of past problems—I invoke with regard to the historicist reflexes of Turkish modernity.

There is a fundamental tension that arises between appropriating historicism in the making of third-world modernity and having to do so through a contradictory relationship with European modernity. On the one hand, third-world modernity is built on an understanding (and inevitable reproductions) of Europe’s acquisition of the adjective “modern” for itself.⁶ On the other, the making and upkeep of third-world modernity necessitate rejecting the centrality of Europe and the image of the non-Western as the nonmodern subject par excellence. Chakrabarty underlines the two ways that commonly circumvent this tension. One is producing a local version of the diffusionist narrative that replaces Europe by some locally constructed center.⁷ The other is discovering an image of the nonmodern (to be improved and matched with the standards of that local center of modernity) while avoiding (to the extent possible) reproducing the colonialist vistas of European historicism. Often, the answer is the “peasant,” which acts “as a shorthand for all the seemingly non-modern, rural, non-secular relationships and life practices.”⁸ This way, a distinctly modernist historicism can be inhabited in relative safety, because the hegemony of the mechanisms of European historicism are discursively replaced with local mechanisms that are imagined to be authentic. As I shall show, Istanbul is an example of this phenomenon insofar as it plays the role of the authentic center of a historical urban civility (replacing Western modernity to distinguish

³ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 22f.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

and authenticate Turkish experiences of modernity), cloaking its own peripheral positioning to the Parises and Londons of the world, while anchoring its domestic others, the “peasants,” who serve to delineate incivility in reference to presumably authentic standards.

Homohistoricism delineates a type of historicism that articulates a meaningful and developing historical narrative of homosexuality. Like historicism, homohistoricism need not be normatively linear. Rather, it can render meaningful zigzagging vistas of historical homosexuality to make sense of the political in the present-now. Think, for instance, of the homohistoricist narrative of contemporary Western tolerance of homosexuality, which imagines Greco-Roman antiquity as originally tolerant of homosexuality (as well as the mythic origin of a Western civilization), construes the historical loss of that social tolerance as a sort of regressive incivility, and, subsequently, narrates the contemporary expansion of LGBT visibility, expression, and rights as a historical/civilizational course correction. If I referred to a given homophobic attitude as “medieval” before a Western audience, I would be automatically understood as deriding the incivility of that attitude, because my audience would be reflexively aware of this particular zigzagging homohistoricist narrative, regardless of their personal stance on my judgment.

As the above example attests, normative nonlinearity of homohistoricism is not reserved to third-world political modernity. Similarly, there are ways to think about linear homohistoricist attitudes outside of the West, for instance, in imagining and looking up to a Western sexual modernity (that developed and matured to accommodate homosexuality) from a third-world locale that lacks such luxuries, and articulating “our sexual backwardness” by reproducing the various vistas of third-world sexual barbarisms (which are “on the way” to their sexual modernity). However, nonlinear homohistoricism, like nonlinear historicism, also predominantly serves certain shared conditions and anxieties of “the third world.”

The politics of homohistoricism lies on the outside of this layered concept and connotes a political discourse within which multiple official and contentious politics are articulated in homohistoricist manners, and in response to each other. In the Turkish case, the official actors and attitudes populating this discourse reflect the transformations of the state. Republican Kemalists, the primary political elites of the 20th century, inhabit an anti-Ottomanist homohistoricism by establishing a narrative of perverted Ottoman sexuality being course-corrected by secular heteronormative morality. In response, the contemporary Islamist political elites inhabit a neo-Ottoman homohistoricism by establishing a narrative suggesting that the republican obsession with radical social transformation is the cause of sexual immorality that can be course-corrected by rediscovering *our* historical pious roots. Now, LGBT contentious actors inhabit these official pathways and spin their own homohistoricist narrative to simultaneously push back on Islamist erasure of historical non-heteronormativity and republican militarization of heteronormativity.

Public Love, Public Loving: Homoeroticism in Ottoman Divan

The public visibility and role of male homoeroticism in Ottoman early modernity, what Walter Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı would refer to as “the age of beloveds,” is in stark contrast to the increasing heteronormativity of Ottoman modernity, and starker still to the hypermodern ambitions of republican Turkey.⁹ The age of beloveds connotes an era of Ottoman public attitudes that are not only more comfortable with male homoeroticism compared to the contemporaneous European societies, but also one in which public

⁹ For discussions of the changing dynamics of heteronormative governmentality as part of Ottoman modernity, see Dror Ze’evi, *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500–1900* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006); Tuğçe Kayaal, “Twisted Desires, Boy-Lovers, and Male-Male Cross-Generational Sex in the Late Ottoman Empire (1912–1918),” *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 46, no. 1 (2020): 31–46; and Elif Ceylan Özsoy, “Decolonizing Decriminalization Analyses: Did the Ottomans Decriminalize Homosexuality in 1858?” *Journal of Homosexuality* 68, no. 12 (2021): 1979–2002.

eroticism is expressed overwhelmingly through male homoerotic desire.¹⁰ More specifically, expressions of public eroticism in early modern Ottoman society invoke affection mostly between men and younger men, rarely between men and women, and never between women and women.¹¹

Most Ottomanists turn to poetry to illustrate this cultural milieu for pragmatic reasons. Ottoman artistic literature was nearly all poetry (divan) until the 19th century, and nearly all Ottoman poetry was love poetry, albeit at times in circuitous ways. Poets expressed love to various addressees in the prescribed thematic genres of divan. Love of the sultan, God, prophets, self, city, wine, and beloveds are all common divan themes. At the same time, these themes bleed into each other and render the act and kind of loving transitive across addressees. Often, in divan, one can be drunken with the love of god as if pious love is wine. One can liken the beloved to a particularly handsome prophet (classically Yusuf/Joseph) to articulate the beloved's physical attractiveness. One's love of a city can reflect one's love of the sultan under whose sovereignty the city flourishes.

The theme of the love of the city is the first point of interest constitutive of an imagined source of historical civility that is key in the attempted authentication of Turkish modernity. Urban praise as a distinct poetic genre, called *şehirngiz* in divan, flourished in Ottoman early modernity, praising the empire's cities, especially Istanbul—the so-called Sublime Porte. In *şehirngiz* poetry, love of the city was expressed through a peculiar formula of cataloging the beautiful boys who inhabit it, which, in turn, was intended to praise the sultan. The logic goes that the sultan should be proud of such flourishing cities filled with such beautiful boys. The homoeroticism of these urban depictions is the rule rather than the exception. Of all the *şehirngiz* poems that remain, only one is devoted to the beauty of urban women, whereas others feature long lists of various boys one would find in an early modern Ottoman city, from boot-makers and Qur'an reciters to slave soldiers and upper-class boys.¹²

The only *şehirngiz* that casts women as the object of poet's love is one of Istanbul by Yedikuleli Mustafa Azizi (d. 1585). In this outlier poem, Azizi is self-aware of the unorthodoxy of publicly acknowledging women's desirability.¹³ This is underlined by the poem's introductory narrative of a discussion between Azizi and his friends about the nonexistence of a *şehirngiz* that casts women as beloveds. A considerable amount of the poem (45 of 224 couplets) is reserved to describing how Azizi's friends insist that he should compose such a *şehirngiz* for the first time, and how Azizi, eventually, succumbs.¹⁴ In other words, in divan, a poet's love was almost always expressed (or metaphorized) as male-male love. This general attitude applied even in the rare cases in which the poet was a woman. The rationale that lies behind this, which I shall refer to as "respectful silence," is the second point of interest.

For women poets, divan's sexually explicit nature often necessitated taking precautions to exist in these literary circles, lest their morality was questioned.¹⁵ Andrews and Kalpakli interpret this phenomenon as an abandonment of silence and invisibility for public speech.¹⁶ I would suggest, however, that women poets' public sexual presence was contingent on a particular kind of collective silence: respectful silence. Think of respectful silence as a cultural game in which the speaker, whose public sexual presence is inappropriate, gets to speak only when she is mannered and civilized to the degree that she is not explicit

¹⁰ Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpakli, *The Age of Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early-Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 39–43.

¹² *Ibid.*, 27–43.

¹³ B. Deniz Calis-Kural, *Şehirngiz, Urban Rituals and Deviant Sufi Mysticism in Ottoman Istanbul* (London: Routledge, 2016), 133f.

¹⁴ Ülkü Çetinkaya, "Bir Kadın Şehirngizi: Azizi'nin İstanbul Şehirngizi," *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Cografya Fakültesi Dergisi* 54, no. 1 (2017).

¹⁵ Didem Havlioglu, *Mihri Hatun: Performance, Gender-Bending, and Subversion in Ottoman Intellectual History* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2017), 31.

¹⁶ Andrews and Kalpakli, *Age of Beloveds*, 196.

about her sexual presence. In return, the audiences get to adore the speaker, as long as they are mannered and civilized to the degree that they can pretend the speaker's inappropriate sexual presence does not register with them. In this way, civility is inextricably tied to a notion of collective sexual self-mastery.

As a result, the rare women divan poets had to register as men when revealing a public sexual presence. Take, for instance, Mihri Hatun (1460–1506), who casts herself in the masculine role of the lover: “We are among those who came manfully to the playing field of love.”¹⁷ Subsequently, her desire for the beloved, who also needed to register as male, is depicted through common divan allegories of homoerotic boy love. In the verses below, Mihri Hatun allows herself the freedom to publicly express desire, by casting the lover (herself) in a masculine role, and the beloved as a beardless boy, insinuated by the allegory of rosy cheeks:

In one hand the wine goblet, in the other the beloved's locks
Now let him take a rose from his cheek, then wine from his lip,
Now let him embrace his waist, then sit close and kiss him.¹⁸

Mihri kept silent on her womanhood if she was to speak at all, and her audiences kept silent on their knowledge of her womanhood if they were to adore her. This is the cultural game of respectful silence, considered urbane and proper in Ottoman society, the rules of which were mastered by both poet and audience.

That the lover and the beloved were predominantly men and younger men in Ottoman cultural production should not be interpreted as though early modern Ottoman society had no negative views of male homoeroticism. A sense of excess existed, limiting the boundaries of permissible men's love for young boys (or women, for that matter) by the stability of the family or the community.¹⁹ This is reminiscent of Foucault's complication of what is popularly invoked as ancient Greek tolerance of homosexuality. Foucault argued that ancient Greeks associated masculinity with the ability to resist the forces of sexual pleasures (“moderation”), and unchecked self-indulgence in the world of sexual pleasures (“immoderation”) with femininity. A man could engage in sexual pleasures with boys or women and remain masculine “provided he was active in the sexual relation and active in the moral mastering of himself.”²⁰ The extent of de facto tolerance of male homosexuality in both Ottoman early modernity and Greek antiquity, therefore, was based on patriarchal norms, and not tolerance qua tolerance of homosexuality.

An emergent school of thought considers homoerotic expression in early modern Ottoman literature as reflective of the place of homoerotic love and sexuality in society.²¹ Previously, high Ottoman literature, with its myriad rules of eloquence, overly pompous and multilingual prose, crowded commitment to multiple poetic traditions, and repeating allegories was considered too stiff an artistic genre to reflect anything other than an intellectual game at the hands of cultural elites. The contemporary scholarly approach overturns this position and expresses a consensus that the homoerotic themes and attitudes of early modern Ottoman literature did not flourish under such sterile aesthetic conditions and therefore were not divorced from life outside of poetry. The points of consensus are that the relations of love and sexuality between men were visible and prevalent in the early modern Ottoman urban centers. Although a romanticized view of indulgent Ottoman

¹⁷ Havlioglu, *Mihri Hatun*, 191.

¹⁸ Havlioglu, *Mihri Hatun*, 192.

¹⁹ Andrews and Kalpakli, *Age of Beloveds*, 17.

²⁰ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 2, *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley, (New York: Vintage, 1990), 85.

²¹ For instance, see Andrews and Kalpakli, *Age of Beloveds*; Ze'evi, *Producing Desire*; and Selim S. Kuru, “Sex in the Text: Deli Birader's *Daf'ü'l-Gumum* ve *Raf'ü'l-Humum* and the Ottoman Literary Canon,” *Middle Eastern Literatures* 10, no. 2 (2007): 157–74.

homosexuality is not warranted (much like the same is not warranted for Greek antiquity), this state of affairs constituted a *de facto* air of social tolerance toward some male-male sexual relations after all. The cultural regulation of this fine-tuned level of legitimation was governed by a set of disciplinary mechanisms. The limits of permissibility of sexual desire were, first and foremost, generated (and understood) by their patriarchal and pederastic rules. Sex was understood as what men did to others, be it young boys or women. Men's love and affection toward both boys and women were natural extensions of this erotic universe, but only the former could be legitimately expressed in public, whereas the expression of the latter would have been disrespectful. The relative lack of offense in being a beloved boy was further strengthened by the transitional casting of this role. The (beardless) boy will ultimately grow into a (bearded) man, lose his (feminine) desirability in the eyes of his pursuers, and develop his own attractions to the next generation of boys in a circular and egalitarian fashion.

Changing Times, Enduring Analytics: (Non)Transformations of Official Homohistoricisms

In the last century, anti-Ottomanism has become a discursive shorthand for a kind of politics in republican Turkey that mounts a critique of the prevailing "backward" social attitudes. It is a resilient political language partially because of its multitasking capabilities. Today, one can convey a medley of undesired meanings through anti-Ottomanism in colloquial critique. By adopting various anti-Ottomanisms as ideological shorthands one can gesture toward one's supposed guardianship of secularism, republicanism, modernity, development, and gender equality. Such gestures constitute a discursive constellation that utilizes facts and fantasies of the failure of the empire that had to fall so that a republic could be born. If calling out Ottoman imagery in this way and depicting its referents as essentially nonmodern, underdeveloped, undemocratic, sexist, bigoted, and zealous sounds reminiscent of the colonialist vistas of the "uncivilized," it certainly is. Republican Turkey's modernizing project resolved to "colonize," in a sense, the previously overlooked Asia Minor provinces of the empire that remained after its dissolution to become the new "national heartland." As a result, that the uncivilized aspects of what is left from a backward and failed empire must be dragged into the light of civilization has been at the core of the official self-narratives of the republic's nation-building project.

But, in the 21st century, Kemalist elites have lost their primary position to their Islamist counterparts. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the latter's cultural response to the anti-Ottomanism of what is now the secular opposition has been an officially revitalized Ottomanism—a so-called neo-Ottomanism. The neo-Ottomanist discourse utilizes a medley of facts and fantasies of past imperial grandeurs, dynamics, and relationalities to make sense of contemporary politics. It churns out urban architecture the primary function of which is to be Ottoman theme parks; it conducts executive government work from new palaces; and it articulates contemporary diplomacy with imperial vocabulary that gazes at peoples and places as historical Ottoman subjects, traitors, friends and foes.

This circular relationship between anti-Ottomanism and neo-Ottomanism emanates from the trials and tribulations of Turkish modernity, and reflects its concern with sexual discipline. That the discourses of modernity are saturated with mechanisms of sexual discipline is not surprising. What may be lost in translation, however, is how organically non-Western politics of sexuality can produce its own contingent and specific experiences of modernity—as opposed to automated derivative interpretations of a central Western modernity that exports standard discourses of sexual modernity to the world.

The republican heteronormative sexual discipline draped over anti-Ottomanism in Turkey is born out of a genealogy that remits the full array of its local guardians' political agenda. In this sense, it is not only a disciplinary tool that regulates same-sex desire. It is also a

disciplinary tool that regulates memories of the monarchy, limitations of pious morality, and the place of women in society. It suggests that the normalcy of heterosexual desire is disturbed only under conditions of servanthood (to the sultan, pasha, or bath-goer client) as opposed to the egalitarian visions of republican citizenship. It suggests that the vices of same-sex desire flourish under pious morality, because pious morality is intrinsically hypocritical, as opposed to the republic's secular morality. It suggests that (male) same-sex affect is a toxicity born out of a (male) society that does not allow a public place for (its) women, as opposed to the public and at times mandated visibility of emancipated republican women. In other words, its particular reading of the vices of same-sex desire is essentially, not contingently, tied to the needs of the Turkish republic. The republic understands, disciplines, and legitimates itself through its anti-Ottomanist homohistoricist gaze. The manifestations of official anti-Ottomanist homohistoricism can be summed as the following. The prevalence of homoerotic desire in Ottoman cultural expression was abundant, and morally repulsive. This moral abnormalcy must have existed only because the normalcy of heterosexual desire was unnaturally censored. In this theocratic and domineering society, where natural heterosexual desire was censored, male homosexual desire festered at the intersection of the hypocrisies of pious morality and the miseries of imperial subjecthood. The solution is a secular republic, where women, saved from the yoke of religious oppression, are publicly visible, and the relationships of dominance and submission are replaced by those of equal citizenship. Republican men should no longer need to resort to same-sex desire.

Contemporary Islamist elites of Turkey are building the new official discourse of heteronormative discipline primarily in response to this lineage of republican homohistoricism. This discourse does not understand European modernity as a cultural centrifuge that produced (and then condemned or exported) homosexuality in ways that would resemble Joseph Massad's fundamental concerns around cultural imperialism and cannot stand in for all Islamist heteronormativity outside of Turkey.²² Rather, more akin to what Chakrabarty argued, it reinvents its own Europe, its own center, and its own others to serve its own needs.²³ In Islamist homohistoricist logics in Turkey, the main function of "a historical Europe" is to be misunderstood by Kemalists and weaponized against our authentic piety. The manifestations of this reading can be summed as the following. The republican narrative of transforming gender norms in the name of Turkish modernity was not as much a replication of Western modernity as it was a cloak for Kemalist hostility toward pious morality. The republic executed pious men who were uncompliant with its 1925 Hat Revolution for not wearing European style hats and called it modernity. The republic forced pious women either to appear nonpious or disappear from the public view altogether and called it gender equality. The republic actively undermined public pious expression, while at the same time conjuring historical images of perverted homosexuality that it nefariously equated to Ottoman sexuality. Yet, it is under the republic's watch that piety eroded to the degree that made perversion the norm. The solution is to course-correct the course correction, and undo this damage by rediscovering our pious roots centered in a historical and authentic location of civility.

An example can illustrate this inward focus. Take, for instance, the position of the Ottoman Wisdom and Insight Foundation (Osmanlı İlim ve İrfan Vakfı), a monarchist antiseccular foundation founded in 1994, on the popular interest in Ottoman homoeroticism. In public seminars by its founder, in response to the audience question "Was there homosexuality in Ottomans?"[sic], the foundation holds that the materials documenting homoeroticism and homosexuality in Ottoman society should be taken as collections of individual (albeit, immoral) behaviors and not as representative of social norms. It also holds that the Ottomanist scholars and intellectual figures who "poke these aspects of history"—as opposed

²² Joseph Massad, "Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World," *Public Culture* 14, no. 2 (2002): 361–86.

²³ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.

to remaining respectfully silent, we could speculate—do so “out of Kemalist ideology” or perhaps out of their own questionable sexual dispositions, “because a thief fears the most an upstanding man, a prostitute fears the most an honorable woman.” The bottom line is that “Every society has depraved individuals. But if this was one in a million, now it is one in ten,” for which the responsibility lies with the Kemalist war on piety.²⁴

Efendilik: Homohistoricism in Queer Contention

The ostensible incommensurability between the anti- and neo-Ottoman official homohistoricisms is in fact a paradoxical form of continuity. It is an agreement that a perverted past needs to be left behind, leaving up for debate the imagined timeline of under whose watch perversion became the social rule rather than the anomaly. Perhaps it was a perverted Ottoman past that was purified by the secular republic, or it was a nefarious republican past that is to be purified by neo-Ottomanist rediscovery of public piety. Either way, there is no room for a queer present to exist within the confines of the official, and claim rootedness, nuance, continuity. In what follows, I show that the primary response of LGBT activists to the heteronormative synergy of official homohistoricisms in Turkey has not been an outright rejection of historicist logics (for the sake of freely deliberating a democratic and just present). Instead, the response has been the creation of a new homohistoricism in the service of contemporary LGBT activism—one that aims to interject its presence into the established discursive pathways of the official.

Queer Homohistoricism and the Image of the Ottoman

Throughout the summer of 2013, amid the Gezi uprising, the so-called Gezi forums brought together urban crowds in weekly public meetings in neighborhood parks. The opinions that were voiced in these forums, as captured by the participants' own meeting minutes, predominantly reflect the gamut of the familiar ways anti-Ottoman historicism is invoked to articulate some of the main political grievances in Turkey. Because today secular Kemalists form the backbone of “the opposition” against the Islamist political elites, this makes sense. Take, for instance, a forum participant's statements that illustrate the generic way the sacred republic is invoked in opposition to Ottoman backwardness: “The second speaker of the night . . . spoke of the beauty of our movement and reiterated that the republic was in danger. . . . After praising Atatürk, he finished by warning that we shouldn't be captured by the sluggishness of the Ottomans.”²⁵ Or, in another participant's words: “Those who are the enemies of the republic started an insidious war against all progress, and in all aspects of life. They continue waging this war today.”²⁶

Most Gezi participants effortlessly inhabit the nebulous understanding of Ottoman backwardness to serve various contentious functions. Often, it is to signify religious zealotry, for instance when a participant addresses a forum: “What do they mean when they say ‘the abolishment of the monarchy and the caliphate is against shari'a law’? This is why they liken democracy to a tram.”²⁷ Here, the speaker's first reference (“the abolishment of the monarchy and the caliphate is against shari'a law”) is to the well-known lines of the last letter of

²⁴ See Kadir Mısıroğlu, “Civelek Taburu Nedir? İç Oğlanları Kimlerdir?,” Kadir Mısıroğlu, 11 January 2016, <https://kadirmisiroglu.com/civelek-taburu-nedir-ic-oglanlari-kimlerdir.html>; and Kadir Mısıroğlu, “Saygı Duruşu Dinen Caiz midir? Osmanlıda Eşcinsellik Var mıydı?,” Kadir Mısıroğlu, 2 February 2015, <http://kadirmisiroglu.com/saygi-durusu-dinen-caiz-midir-osmanlida-escinsellik-var-miydi.html>.

²⁵ “(3 Temmuz) Kriton Curi Parkı Forumu Notlar/Kararla,” Direniş Forumları, 4 July 2013, <http://direnisforumlari.boards.net/thread/298/temmuz-kriton-forumu-notlar-kararla>.

²⁶ “Kozyatağı Kriton Curi Parkı Forum Notları (23 Temmuz),” Direniş Forumları, 25 July 2013, <http://direnisforumlari.boards.net/thread/535/kozyata-kriton-forum-notlar-temmuz>.

²⁷ “Kartal Meydan Forum Notları (26 Haziran),” Direniş Forumları, 27 June 2013, <http://direnisforumlari.boards.net/thread/188/kartal-meydan-forum-notlar-haziran>.

the Ottoman sultan, Mehmed VI Vahdettin (r. 1918–22), from exile in Italy to US President Calvin Coolidge. Vahdettin’s letter reflects his last-ditch attempts to garner international support against the nascent republic, which abolished both the monarchy and the caliphate. The speaker’s second reference (“they liken democracy to a tram”) is to another well-known line that earned a spot in Turkish political history. It refers to a 1997 speech by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, then Mayor of Istanbul, who declared: “Democracy is a tool, not a destination. Like a tram, we shall get on it, and leave it when we get to where we want to be.”²⁸ By referring to both Sultan Vahdettin and President Erdoğan as “they,” the speaker insinuates that they are of one cloth—those who are the natural enemies of this secular democratic republic and would return it to the throes of shari’a.

As mentioned before, the automated translations that equate Ottoman backwardness to religious zealotry often make that point by an appeal to pious sexual or moral hypocrisy. At times, it is to critique what many Kemalists commonly see as the Islamist obsession with the overpolicing of women’s sexuality caused by the sexual repression that plagues the zealot’s worldview. A forum participant’s speech, which, the minutes note, was much applauded, can serve as an example:

They tried to start a secular-antiseccular civil war in this country. They didn’t succeed. This country has internalized the secularism that the republic brought. I’m a child of rural peasants. In my village, when guests come to a home, no one sits “haremlük selamlık.” And this is a Sunni village. In this village women embrace men. These are our folk customs. This is not sexuality.²⁹

The speaker’s reference to sitting *haremlük selamlık* connotes the gender-segregated way in which some Ottoman homes were designed, where women were confined to *haremlük*, and men to *selamlık*. This is a classic accusation articulated in these circles by many colloquial idioms in Turkish that are reserved to connote the sexual repression of the zealot, who is imagined in a state of constant and absurd arousal, ironically, as a result of his sexual repression. Some examples are “those who get aroused by women’s ankles,” “those who get aroused by the flying bird,” “those who get aroused by air and water,” or “those who cannot think about anything but their [rural/traditional] waistbands.”

Contrast this with LGBT activists’ invocation of Ottoman imagery as part of the same forums. Following the model created in the Abbasağa Park Forum, neighborhood working groups were established by other forums, many of which included specific LGBT working groups alongside others like women’s, education, health, media/communications, archiving/documentation, stray animals, and environment/ecology working groups.³⁰ The LGBT working groups’ participation in Gezi forums reflected queer publics’ justifiable concern with the sustenance of a present politics of difference. The resolve for a politics of difference certainly could have been—and at times was—articulated in a straightforward (albeit, romanticized) language of democracy. As captured in one forum participant’s words:

I’ve been living in this neighborhood for 30 years. Why did we all take to the streets? How did the LGBT, different faiths, different political ideologies, women and men, all ethnicities come together? What changed? Before, women took to the streets for their rights, but men didn’t join. The environmentalists took to the streets, but were left alone. The answer is taking to the streets for everyone else.³¹

²⁸ Lütfi Kaleli, *Şeriatlaştırılan Türkiye: Türkiye’nin şeriatlaştırılması/inceleme* (Istanbul: Berfin Basın Yayın, 2014), 15.

²⁹ “Antalya Yavuz Özcan Parkı Forum Notları (24 Haziran),” Direniş Forumları, 25 June 2013, <http://direnisforumlari.boards.net/thread/118/antalya-yavuz-forum-notlar-haziran>.

³⁰ “Duyuru: Çalışma grupları,” Direniş Forumları, 26 June 2013, <http://direnisforumlari.boards.net/thread/165/duyuru-al-ma-gruplar>.

³¹ “25 Haziran 2013 100.Yıl İzci Parkı Forum Notları,” Direniş Forumları, 26 June 2013, <http://direnisforumlari.boards.net/thread/146/haziran-2013-park-forum-notlar>.

More often, however, the desire for sustaining the practical politics of difference was articulated by an appeal to another romanticized imagination, one that is based on particular visions of an Ottoman urban cosmopolitan past. One can discern this appeal's prevalence within the LGBT activists' contentious repertoire from multiple examples. The LGBT working group of the Kurtuluş (Independence) neighborhood's forum, for instance, deliberated the necessity of a formal group name and decided upon Tatavla LGBTI, "Because we use too many names, and we should focus on one name to be used for posters and logos, the name "Tatavla" was chosen by consensus."³² Tatavla is the bygone Greek name for this once predominantly Ottoman-Greek, but also Armenian and Jewish neighborhood. The working group, by selecting the name Tatavla, harks back to these visions of Ottoman urban cosmopolitanism. For LGBT activists, the political strategy embedded in these nostalgic references to "our cosmopolitan past" is an important part of framing the practical possibility of a politics of difference in the city as both authentic and desirable. Queer homohistoricism in Turkey brands its contemporary politics of sexuality as a natural extension of past ethnic and cultural plurality.

I want to start weaving in at this point a critique of queer homohistoricism with the disclaimer that I do not intend to devalue the work of LGBT activists in Turkey. However, it is important to debate the historicist blind spots perpetuated by queer homohistoricism. Chief among them is the fact that the particular form of urban cosmopolitanism this contentious performance primarily incorporates in its repertoire is gone. It was decidedly done away with by intense and sustained systems of official and communal violence, ranging from the Armenian genocide to the Greece-Turkey population exchange, from pogroms and assassinations to non-Muslim taxation schemes and sustained cultural hostility. The contemporary remnants of the Greek, Armenian, and Jewish communities of Istanbul are mere shadows of what they used to be. Today, the various public spaces of the Independence neighborhood carry names that invoke aspects of republican and ethnonationalist mythologies, such as Freedom Street, the Monument of Liberty Avenue, the May 19th Avenue (commemorating the symbolic start date for the Turkish independence war), Turkish Master Street, Gray Wolf Street (the symbol of Turkish ethnonationalism), Ergenekon Street (the fictional ancient motherland in Turkic creation mythology), Talat Pasha Primary School (after Talat, the mastermind of the Armenian genocide). Certainly, the performances of yearning for a past Ottoman cosmopolitanism amid this space that is aggressively intent on its republican nationality have merit. However, the overwhelmingly nostalgic expression of these performances can minimize a multitude of past sins in ways that render autocritical possibilities further difficult than they already are. The general shape this takes is the juxtaposition embedded in the inherent exoneration of "we the people," who lived together peacefully with a diverse array of neighbors, and the fully externalized forces of "the regime," which operated the various kinds of violence that systematically eroded people's peaceful co-living. This fails to confront the lived experiences of communal violence that were enacted by the very same "we the people"—some as perpetrators and others as victims.

Second, there is a contradiction embedded in Tatavla LGBTI's strong preference for the neighborhood's historical urban cosmopolitanism over its current urban cosmopolitanism. Amid the poorly attended Orthodox churches and synagogues of Kurtuluş live more recently arrived minorities. Predominantly Kurdish domestic migrants, systematically pushed away from Turkish Kurdistan by state violence and economic hardship, call Kurtuluş home, followed by Syrian refugees, immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa, and the Roma displaced from more gentrified neighborhoods of the city. They do not provide Tatavla LGBTI with the visions of urban cosmopolitanism the group is most attracted to performatively enacting.

³² "18. FORUM: 25 Temmuz 2013 Perşembe," *Direnış Forumları*, 18 August 2013, <http://direnisforumlari.boards.net/thread/657/18-forum-temmuz-2013-embe>.

This is partly because, urban, in this sense, is also code for the established fantasies of an authentic civility emanating from a local center of our modernity. In Istanbul parlance, this particular meaning is intimated at with the expression “being an Istanbulite of seven generations,” lest one is not really urban, but a peasant clogging the city’s arteries. That the presence of Kurds, Arabs, Africans, and the Roma do not contribute to the contemporary political imaginations of cultural riches articulated with metaphors of Ottoman cosmopolitanism can also be read as a continuation of Ottoman Orientalism.³³ Ottoman Orientalism connotes the internalized adoption of the governing logics of Orientalism by Ottomans to read their own empire as composed of Western provinces/peoples/cultures that drive the empire’s progress and high civilization and Eastern provinces/peoples/cultures that are the theaters of permanent backwardness and need to be pulled into what official rationales deemed *daire-i medeniyet* (the circle of civilization).³⁴ The irony is that Tatavla LGBTI’s historicist operationalization of Ottoman cosmopolitanism in the service of a contemporary politics of difference is inadvertently reflective of both the failures of Ottoman cosmopolitanism and the contemporary shortcomings of politics of difference in Turkey.

A telling nuance relating to the visions of the city as a space of plurality embedded in the internal logics of queer homohistoricism can be discerned from another contentious performance. The posters and banners used for queer protest during the Gezi uprising reflected the same cosmopolitan yearning exemplified above. Consistently, only about half of the placards and banners used in LGBT protest featured writing in the Turkish language. Others featured slogans written in Armenian and Greek (illegible to the majority of their carriers and audiences, but symbolically registering the protestors’ yearning for cosmopolitanism), in English (when the protestors addressed international audiences), but—this time—also in Kurdish and Arabic (Fig. 1). There are differences between the non-Turkish language slogans in popular circulation. For example, most Armenian slogans convey the protestors’ cosmopolitan yearning for a pluralistic society. The most popular Armenian slogan in circulation can serve as an example: “Մենք բոլորս հայ ենք” (We are all Armenians). No equivalent sentiments are expressed in Kurdish or Arabic. Absolutely never are there any signs that suggest “We are all Kurds/Arabs.” Instead, the Kurdish and Arabic slogans feature the desire for solidarity in action to reach common outcomes. Most popular Kurdish signs, for instance, display slogans like “*Welew ku em qunek in*” (Suppose we are faggots), “*Evin bi rexistinbun e*” (To love is to mobilize), “*Trans can e*” (Trans people are beloved), and the ubiquitously linguistically incorrect “*Ew simsata berxwedane*” (an attempted translation of “That kind of resistance,” a popular LGBT slogan in Turkish).³⁵ In the contentious repertoire of Turkish queer publics, it is the non-Muslim minorities of old Istanbul (of whom there are fewer than a hundred thousand left) that decorate the desired visions of urban cosmopolitanism. The ones who are there in large numbers today (more than four million Kurds, or half a million Syrians, for instance) neither contribute to the desired visions of urban cosmopolitanism nor create a sense of coidentification. But they are invited—at times clumsily, with bad grammar—to share the contentious labor necessary to establish queer visibility, mobilization, and justice.

Queer Homohistoricism and the Image of the Republic

The other main component of queer homohistoricism is its response to republican homohistoricism. This can be best observed in the queer injection of antimilitarism in the face of the

³³ Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998); Ussama Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” *American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (2002): 768–96.

³⁴ Selim Deringil, “‘They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery’: The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 2 (2003): 311–42.

³⁵ Item 8, Box R32M21S24T04, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books, and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania (hereafter Kislak); Item 14, Box R04M28S13T09, Kislak; Item 28, Box R04M28S13T09, Kislak.



Figure 1. Multilingual placards used in queer protest during Gezi uprising. Image courtesy of Kaos GL.

Turkish republic's hypermasculinized militarism. As established, republican homohistoricism imagines an Ottoman past of perverted homosexuality and republicanism as the establishment of healthy unrepressed heterosexuality. Chief among the gendered characters idealizing the republican citizen is Mehmetçik, an affectionate colloquialism for the unknown soldier. Mehmetçik's masculinity is fearless and sacrificial. His intense loyalty to the nation is attested to by his willingness to die for it. Of course, such fantasies of the nameless national soldier are largely ubiquitous among all nationalisms. A less ubiquitous quality of this particular mythology is that the Turkish version casts the national soldier as the primary protector of secularism. Mehmetçik is the ultimate secular soldier-citizen. His willingness to die does not apply in isolation to his devotion to the nation. He is willing to die for the secularity of that nation.³⁶

The marriage between secular Kemalism and militarism was reflected in an array of contentious performances that made up the Gezi uprising. Fliers were handed out in Gezi Park reimagining the Taksim Republican Monument (a monument in Taksim Square featuring Atatürk in front of his generals) with an illustration in which it is Gezi protestors who stood behind Atatürk in place of his generals (Fig. 2).³⁷ In Gezi forums, many participants articulated what they interpreted as Islamist victimization of the Turkish army with statements that are simultaneously resentful and hostile, for instance, in one participant's words: "Our soldiers were imprisoned when those with headscarves came to power."³⁸ The most prominent Kemalist slogan chanted, written on posters, painted on walls, waved on flags was "We are Mustafa Kemal's soldiers!" (*Mustafa Kemal'in askerleriyiz!*). Although the image of the soldier-citizen plays an important role in the contentious performances of secular Kemalists, its employment as part of the Gezi uprising was contested internally, primarily by LGBT activists.

At odds with fellow protestors, queer homohistoricist contention became the most prevalent form of opposing soldier-citizenship in the Gezi uprising. The most common strategy for opposing soldier-citizenship was the invocation of the late Zeki Müren, the quintessential queer figure of the 20th-century Turkish music scene. It is interesting to decipher the political work Müren's image was expected to do for queer contention. It is interesting, because by no means was Müren an activist or an ostensibly political character in his lifetime (1931–

³⁶ Erik J. Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's Turkey* (London: I. B.Tauris, 2010).

³⁷ Item 9, Box R04M28S13T09, Kislak.

³⁸ "Kozyatağı Kriton Curi Parkı Forum Notları (23 Temmuz)," *Direnış Forumları*, 25 July 2013, <http://direnisforumlari.boards.net/thread/535/kozyata-kriton-forum-notlar-temmuz>.

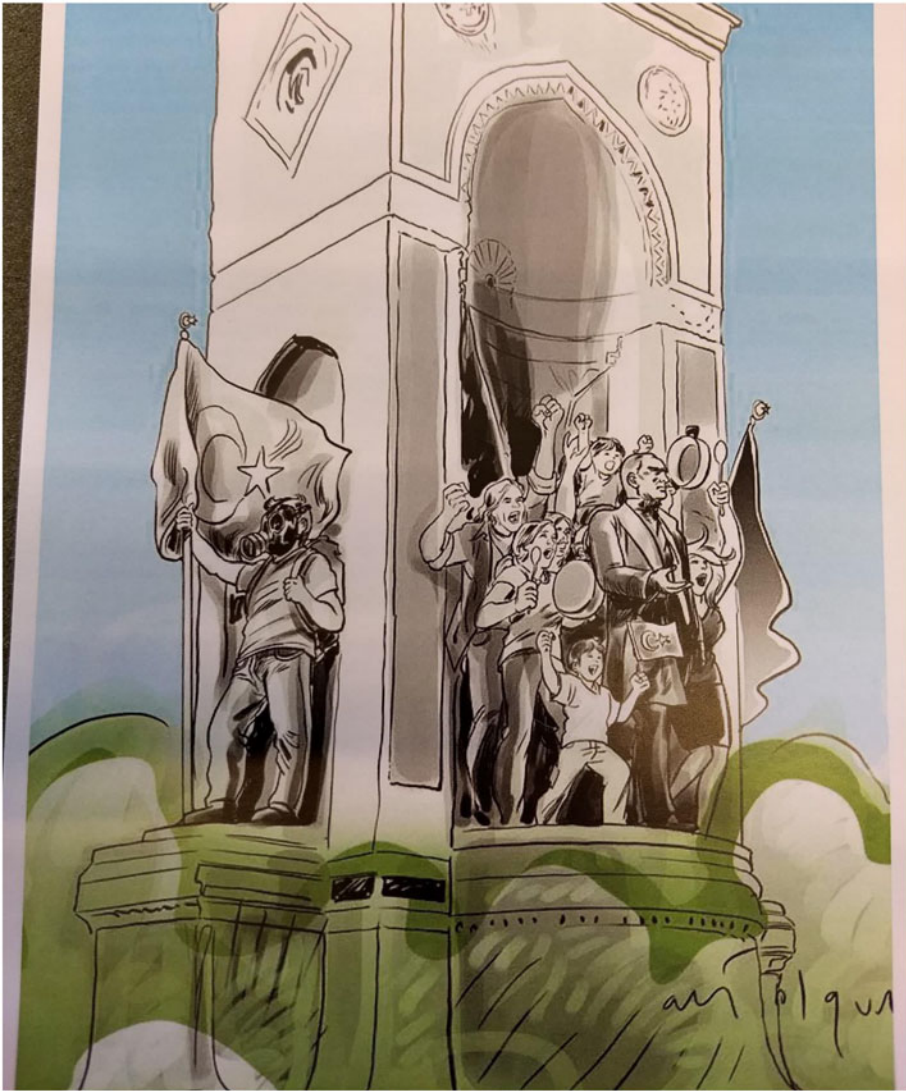


Figure 2. Flyer reimagining the Taksim Republican Monument. Image courtesy of Ali Olgun.

96). Yet his image was put to work abundantly on signs and banners, in graffiti, and in fliers in 2013. Posters read “We are Zeki Müren’s soldiers!” (*Zeki Müren’in askerleriyiz!*—in direct response to the Kemalist “We are Mustafa Kemal’s soldiers!”) and “There is no other Pasha! (*Başka Paşa yok!* This played on Müren’s nickname as “Pasha of Music” and “Pasha” as a high-ranking military officer). Why was it Müren who emerged as the queer protest icon of Gezi, when there were activist figures that could have served in this role instead?

Part of the answer lies with the affective role Müren’s image plays in the national imagination. Müren enjoyed a reputation as the singer par excellence in the genre of “Turkish Art Music,” and was nicknamed the “Sun of Art” (as in the best, the most prominent in Turkish Art Music), as well as the “Pasha of Music.” Martin Stokes’s *Republic of Love* argues that Müren was the first cultural character (one of three such characters) in Turkish music who became central to the national self-imagination not merely because of his musical talent, but because he provided certain affective political functions that were opposite to the official

republican imagination of the nation. The republic wanted soldiers who were ready to kill and die for the nation. Müren provided an attachment to love and life. The republic wanted citizens who were rational, resolute, molded. Müren provided a celebration of vulnerability, malleability, ambiguity. The republic, in its fundamental mission to denounce the ancien régime, wanted to de-Ottomanize (thereby dehistoricize) Istanbul and reinvent it in the national imagination as a new source of urban modernity. Müren provided a way of seeing Istanbul nostalgically, as part of the historical circulation of urban praise reminiscent of the early modern *şehrengiz* poetry, and cast it as a place of lovers and beloveds. In Stokes's reading, by inhabiting the historical circulation of the narratives of beloveds in cherished cityscapes, a civic identity alternative to the republican soldier-citizen was provided: the "lover-citizen."³⁹ Indeed, when contemporary LGBT activists declared "We are Zeki Müren's soldiers," they intended to tap into the affective politics of love and nostalgia conjured by Müren's image and, ironically, connote that they were not soldiers at all. By declaring themselves Müren's soldiers—soldiers to someone known to be impossibly gentle and urbane—LGBT activists do not merely state their unavailability to be recruited as Mustafa Kemal's soldiers. Rather, they are queering the state of being soldiers to a cause. A protest zine distributed in Gezi Park reads:

Let Zeki Müren sing: "There is an issue between the lover and the beloved / I am stuck amidst the fires of sorrow." The song is in the genre of Hisarbuse [literally: fortress + kiss]. It will tear down the regime's hisars [fortresses], while resurrecting the lover and the beloved with a life buse [kiss].⁴⁰

These lines imagine a historically layered cultural location (referencing divan allegories, articulating contemporary contention by playing on Ottoman Turkish words, and indirectly invoking that history through Müren's own, more recent, historical character) from which to derive a nostalgic love to guard against the militant and loveless republic.

I would suggest, however, that using Müren's image as representative of queer contestation does more than branding LGBT activism and invoking nostalgic love. It inhabits the pathways of deeper cultural im/possibilities of public loving. Over decades of national fame, Müren was neither outspoken about his sexuality, nor in hiding. His cross-dressing flamboyant public presence was unmistakably queer to the nation that adored him equally unmistakably. Müren's respectful silence on his homosexual presence was reciprocated by the respectful silence of his adoring audience. His sexually ambiguous image in miniskirts, diamond tiaras, and heavy makeup was welcome in living rooms, but on the condition that one could pretend that his sexuality remained undisclosed even when intimated aesthetically. Müren sang on stage about his heterosexual love and desire for beloved women, chased women in the movies in which he starred, and was featured in celebrity gossip regarding potential heterosexual love affairs. The national audience needed not to be shocked by him to be able to adore him. I am reminded of Mihri Hatun's divan and her audience's respectful silence on her female sexual presence as long as it was cloaked in a publicly proper way, which in the case of the Ottoman divan was poetic gender-bending. The reader will remember the discussion about this simultaneously emancipatory (for it allowed a space of ambiguity Ottoman women poets could inhabit to break into the public "playing field of love") and problematic (for it reproduced the fundamental logics of patriarchy in reaffirming that one needed to be "among those who came manfully" to that playing field of love) double work of respectful silence. Müren's public presence as a queer lover needed a similar cloak in the same cultural game of denial, the point of which was not to fool anyone but

³⁹ Martin Stokes, *The Republic of Love: Cultural Intimacy in Turkish Popular Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

⁴⁰ Item 21, Box R30M31S14T05, Kislak.



Figure 3. Many Gezi placards featured various versions of a common illustration: “I asked Zeki Müren, he said #Resist!” Image courtesy of Funambulist.

to be “civil.” Inhabiting Müren’s image to declare a collective queer sexual presence is invested in this particular genealogy and continues its double work.

Gezi posters, featuring a smiling Müren, read: “I asked Zeki Müren, he said #Resist” (*Zeki Müren’e sordum #Diren dedi!*), the letters often printed in rainbow colors (Fig. 3).⁴¹ Posters featuring Müren’s piercing gaze read: “It’s me Zeki Müren, standing against water cannons” (*Tomalara göğüs geren işte benim Zeki Müren;* Fig. 4).⁴² That to resist and stand one’s (queer) ground against the technologies of state violence required Müren’s permission from beyond the grave might be a riddling rationale for those who are not familiar with this cultural vocabulary. What it does is invoke Müren’s excessively urbane persona to legitimize the act of resistance as nonmilitant. By legitimizing the act of resistance as Müren-approved, LGBT activists are making the tacit argument that they may be on the streets amid what can at times look like warfare, but they are not militant. How can the resistance be militant if Müren, the most courteous of public figures, says it is okay to resist?

These visions of authentic and urbane courtesy, which are concentrated in the term *efendilik* in Turkish, might suggest Wilson Chacko Jacob’s “effendi masculinity.” Jacob coined the term (effendi, from Arabic transliteration) to demonstrate the performative acts that make up an essential aspect of the construction of modern Egyptian masculinity.⁴³ In Jacob’s reading, effendi masculinity, although based on visions of the Ottoman bureaucratic class (*effendiyya* in Arabic, *efendiler* in Turkish), evolved in time to designate in Egyptian modernity a capacious view of the cultured urban classes to the extent that one was not a peasant, a worker, or an aristocrat (neither Ottoman nor British). My designation of *efendi* (with a

⁴¹ Item 17, Box R04M28S13T09, Kislak.

⁴² Item 25, Box R33M06S02T07, Kislak.

⁴³ Wilson Chacko Jacob, *Working Out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870–1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).



Figure 4. “It’s me, Zeki Müren, standing against water cannons.” Image courtesy of Kaos GL.

single *f* in Turkish orthography) in the making and practice of Turkish modernity is an attempt to signal both resonance and dissonance vis-à-vis Jacob’s effendi masculinity.

Efendilik (the state of being *efendi*) connotes a kind of bourgeois identity in the Turkish imagination, like it does in the Egyptian one. In both cases, one cannot exactly equate it to a Marxian view of class, as it can so obviously be embodied across economic classes where one does not expect to find it or be lacking where one expects it most. Crucially, it belongs in the domain of the urban, but technically only in a cultural sense insofar as urbanity can be performed as sophistication. This allows for a concept of the urban that is simultaneously exclusionary (that excludes the category of urban thugs, for instance, *al-baltagi* in Egypt or *kulhanbeyi* in Turkey) and inclusionary (that includes sophisticated nonurbanites who may register as culturally urban).⁴⁴

But *efendilik* is gendered decidedly more ambiguously than visions of effendi masculinity. In contemporary Turkish, *efendilik* primarily registers as a particular form of gentillesse: a mellow and pliable state of politeness that is considered an authentic (understood as one that Westerners lack) and historical (understood as one that is getting rarer in time) form of urban civility. In this sense, its primary masculine referent is a notion of moral self-mastery à la Foucault, rather than *efendiler/effendiyya* as a class of men who share certain performative characteristics imagined as setting the codes of authentic masculinity. As a result, the linguistic gender-bending around *efendilik* is pervasive uniquely in Turkish. The Turkish words for gentleman/sir and lady/miss, which are *beyefendi* (literally, mister *efendi*) and *hanimefendi* (miss *efendi*) attest to this. To praise someone’s politeness, one says “A very *efendi* person,” for men and women. To talk about how well-behaved (often meaning silent) a child is one says “S/he is a very *efendi* child.” Even more tellingly, one can increase the scale of that praise by invoking the image of Istanbul, and only Istanbul, regardless of the person’s

⁴⁴ Ibid.; Paul Amar, *The Security Archipelago: Human-Security States, Sexuality Politics, and the End of Neoliberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

actual location (“S/he is an absolute Istanbul *bey/hanim-efendi*”), and even further by historicizing the urban image (“S/he is an absolute old Istanbul *bey/hanim-efendi*”). The three qualities of *efendilik* I want to underline by these examples are its dependence on urbanity, historical authenticity, and its gender-bending application in contemporary Turkey.

With those three qualities in mind, perhaps no one could be considered a more “old Istanbul *bey/hanim-efendi*” than Zeki Müren. The affective political strategy for LGBT activists embedded in conjuring Müren’s image is not merely an attempt to capitalize on the popularity of someone who happened to be queer, but an attempt to appeal to the value of queer *efendilik*, which will presumably render being queer acceptable. The habitual gender-bending usage of *efendilik* allows for someone like Müren to inhabit its core principles with a *beyefendi* name and a *hanimefendi* dress. More importantly, Müren’s *efendilik* does not emerge as a certain breaking of a glass ceiling, but as the epitome of *efendilik*. His excelling in the type of civility that the Turkish public most desires—a courteous, loving, and historically authentic civility—is contingent on his freedom from the codes of masculinity that very same public most desires: a nameless and resolute soldier-citizenship. The contentious use of Müren’s image is meant to ask the public to rethink its priorities in reference to the clash between its own historical desires: Do you want *efendilik* or not? You are giving mixed signals.

That LGBT activism is betting on the public’s ultimate preference for *efendilik* should be problematized, however, for its willingness to close the boundaries of queer. The trans sex workers of the “rough streets” of Tarlabaşı who might use the nearby Gezi Park to meet clientele, the migrant or refugee queer youth who might be spending the night there, the cruisers who might not exist in the world of Beyoğlu’s gay bars and clubs half a mile away from the park are not, and cannot be, included in the *efendilik* visions this contentious strategy is hoping to sell to the public. The question this strategy may be unable or perhaps unwilling to ponder is which mechanisms of exclusion and oppression the very concept of civility would perpetuate, should it reach a level of cultural success. Jasbir Puar and Maya Mikdashi’s work on pinkwashing and homonationalism comes to mind; they detail the ways in which homonormativity can become its own mechanism of the formation of the (homo)national by casting the role of desirable queer identities in national sexual modernity, subsequently structurally delegitimizing and devaluing the others of that sexual modernity in registers that are not confined to sexuality (for instance in territorial registers, in the case of Palestine).⁴⁵

Consider this in relation to the kind of cultural investment *efendilik* has emerged to be for LGBT activism in Turkey. Its appeal to an authentic sexual civility replaces the ubiquitously feared potential appeal to an external (Western) sexual modernity. This is on brand with the fundamental anxiety of third-world modernities about looking unoriginal or cultivating tastes indistinguishable from those of the West.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, the articulation and the authentication of sexual civility necessitates a cultural location, which *efendilik* pins in historical Istanbul. The politics of *efendilik* is homohistoricist both in and of itself (because it articulates a historical narrative of queerness that is supposed to be continuously meaningful, connect with the state of affairs in our present-now, and affect future attitudes toward queerness) and in relationality (because it directly provides alternatives to the militarist masculinity of republican homohistoricism and the minimized past queer authenticity of Islamist homohistoricism). If *efendilik* emerges as the proper way of being queer in Turkey, it may well serve as the inclusion of a kind of queer subject within the bounds of urban civility who would remain respectfully silent in return for the same. It may even do the work of

⁴⁵ Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Jasbir Puar and Maya Mikdashi, “Pinkwashing and Pinkwashing: Interpenetration and Its Discontents,” *Jadaliyya*, 9 August 2012, <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/26818>.

⁴⁶ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*; Toufoull Abou-Hodeib, *A Taste for Home: The Modern Middle Class in Ottoman Beirut* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017).

articulating that civility as authentic, thereby avoid (to the extent possible) the delegitimizing effects of “Western influence” dreaded by far-flung corners of the ideological chorus that chimes in on the issue. But it will do so at the expense of perpetuating other just as authentic mechanisms of oppression that will continue to reproduce their internal others to define the boundaries of culturally authentic civility.