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Of Parks and Hamams: Queer Heterotopias in the Age of Neoliberal Modernity and the Gay Citizen

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Abstract: This article attends to queer heterotopias, distinct spatial formations in which the experience of sexuality resists the idioms available to fundamentally normative political imaginary. In the context of Turkey, queer heterotopias contest and are imperilled both by neoliberal state intervention into public space and by a liberal political discourse pivoting around the figure of the gay citizen. In the first part of the article, the author posits Gezi Park as a queer heterotopia, albeit a lost one, and follows the civil resistance that saved the park from a government-propelled redevelopment project that planned the destruction and privatization of a portion of Taksim Square. The reclaiming of the park during what came to be known as the Gezi Park protests occasioned the salience of the LGBT community members as denizens of the public space, accelerating the maturation of the LGBT political movement in the country. The article presents a reading of the gains of the Gezi Park protests – the revamped Gezi Park and the public acknowledgment of the LGBT demands for constitutional recognition – against what the park once signified as a queer heterotopia. In the second part of the article, the author turns to Ferzan Özpetek's *Steam* (1997) to think through the critique that queer heterotopias embody. The film constructs the site of hamam as a queer heterotopia that spatially breaks the teleological logic of modernity, housing modes of being, relationalities, and socialities inassimilable into an identitarian sexual liberalism. The analyses of Gezi Park and *Steam* reveal both the precariousness and potency of queer heterotopias in the age of neoliberal modernity and the gay citizen.

Keywords: queer, heterotopia, Gezi Park, *Steam*, hamam, neoliberalism

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Of Parks and Hamams: Queer Heterotopias in the Age of Neoliberal Modernity and the Gay Citizen¹

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In their pioneering contribution to queer studies in Turkey, Cüneyt Çakırlar and Serkan Delice foreground ‘the sexual ambiguity and irreducibility of the local Turkish context’ vis-à-vis a domineering universal epistemology of sexuality grounded in identity politics.² I share the same motive in my endeavours to bring to the fore a queer sexual economy rooted in the local and exceeding the confines of a regimented, identity-based sexual episteme. Framing the local as queer, Judith Halberstam, however, reminds us that the local has come to signify the antithesis not only of ‘the global’, but also ‘the abstract, and even the universal’,³ as a result of which, to quote from Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘the universal and the analytical produce forms of thought that ultimately evacuate the place of the local’.⁴ An abstraction of a mesh of sites, the local, then, stands in the way of, and thereby exposes the workings of, the social, cultural, and economic formation of the global, as well as universal ways of being and knowing. In this regard, these insights can be understood to speak to the urgency of a project that recuperates the local as a

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² Cüneyt Çakırlar and Serkan Delice, ‘Yerel ile Küresel Arasında Türkiye’de Cinsellik, Kültür ve Toplumsallık’, in *Cinsellik Muamması: Türkiye’de Queer Kültür ve Muhalefet*, ed. by Cüneyt Çakırlar and Serkan Delice (İstanbul: Metis, 2012), p. 13. Translations from Turkish sources are my own.

³ Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), p. 11.

⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 18.

queer space. And yet, the same insights also point to the challenges that threaten the local. As we witness on a daily basis, the epistemological violence of the universal on the local that Chakrabarty's 'evacuation' registers plays out more violently on an ontological level, as the local is reconfigured according to the logic of global capital that acts as the purveyor of the universal in the twenty-first century. I particularly have in mind the destructive force of the neoliberal imaginary insofar as its work consists of topographic de- and reterritorialization of the public space.

Istanbul's Gezi Park is a site from which one can read this project in its Turkish instantiation, one that illustrates the peculiarities of the current phase within the history of the nation's integration into the neoliberal world order. What makes this phase unique is the way in which the ruling Justice and Development Party (JDP) harmonizes this external process with a rhetoric of Islamic conservatism at home by invoking, more often than not, an idealized Ottoman past. The marriage of neoliberalism, neo-Ottomanism, and Islamism is intended to produce a renewed national identity, a countermodernity, if you will, promoted now as 'New Turkey', an economically strong global power that derives force from its history. Public space is the stage onto which this fantasy is projected by way of rendering it available for the global capital market. The construction business, then, becomes the pivot on which the 'development' of the JDP turns, whereby development on the ground translates into economic development of the nation. That Gezi Park was a target of a redevelopment plan to build luxury residences and a shopping mall in the shape of a resurrected late-Ottoman military barrack tellingly encapsulates the neoliberal logistics of the Turkish government.

However, Gezi Park was unlike many other cases in which JDP successfully put its neoliberal policies into effect, thanks to a month long local resistance and national protests, as well as international reaction to the government's handling of these demonstrations. It seems like, for now, the contestation between the local and the global ended in favour of the former, as Gezi Park continues to stand still, rehabilitated and revamped. The anti-authoritarian and anti-neoliberal triumph of the Gezi Park resistance is indisputable, and yet, in the following, I wish to consider Gezi Park as a queer space, more specifically, a lost queer heterotopia. While the park has been preserved, its renovation nonetheless comes to signify the fragility of queer heterotopias in the face of neoliberalism. On the other hand, thinking of queer heterotopias with the example of Gezi Park brings into relief unquestioned universal givens to which liberal sexual politics of our age must adhere. Using the rise of the LGBT movement during Gezi Park protests, I hope to critically engage the implied political normativity and subjectivity that undermine embodied ways of being and practices harboured in such heterotopias.

One of the consequences of the local resistance to save Gezi Park from a redevelopment project was the public acknowledgment of the LGBT movement's demands for political recognition, revealing the limits of sexual politics inevitably grounded in a universalist discourse of political subjectivity. While the LGBT movement was part of the local struggle to reclaim public space in defiance of an imposed neoliberal subjectivity, its own politics nonetheless inherited in a categorical understanding of the homosexual, namely, a self-identified, publicly-recognized, and state-approved gay citizen, one that has now gained universal currency within the lexicon of sexual politics. Demarcating a political telos within liberal sexual politics, it is this gay citizen who makes up and travels across the world as a viable subject position. What the

Gezi Park protests mark as a watershed moment in the history of sexuality in Turkey is the emphatic introduction of this novel discourse in the public sphere on the homosexual as a politico-juridical subject that demands recognition and rights from the state.

The various cadences of this gay subject as a citizen in direct correspondence with state reflexes, ideologies, or policies have been analysed in the context of homonormativity. In such discussions, the *norm* of 'homonormativity' is understood with reference to the normative premises of the state that the gay citizen comes to embody by way of laying right to citizenship.⁵ Unlike those examples where we can note complicity between the state and the gay citizen, in the case of Turkey, one could not speak of a gay subject position formed as a citizen before the law of the nation. Whereas the western gay subject is already construed as a citizen and produced in reference to the written and unwritten codes of the nation, the homosexual in Turkey speaks from outside discourse, a position he or she is ready to jettison. The Turkish case, then, makes available for critique the understanding of homosexuality as an identity category, in the shape, that is, of the gay citizen, and its circulation across the globe.⁶

What concerns me here is this not-yet-subject position insofar as it is anchored in physical spaces I call queer heterotopias that are in constant threat on the road to a (neo)liberal modernity. While the LGBT voices in Turkey express willingness to forsake this prediscursive position in order to embrace a model of a universally recognized sexual identity, the Turkish

⁵ For neoliberal gay subjectivity, see Lisa Duggan, 'The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism' in *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, ed. by Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002). For a discussion of the gay citizen in the context of nationalism, see Jasbir Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁶ So, while Joseph Massad views the global trafficking of the identitarian notion of homosexuality as a normative western imposition and coercion, I am here interested in the evolution of this identity into political subjectivity. The purchase of homosexuality as an identity category in Turkey demonstrates the willingness and volition in subscribing to this political subjectivity, lately articulated within the discourse of citizenship. See Joseph Massad, 'Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World', in *Public Culture*, 14.2 (2002), 361-385.

state's neoliberal schemes for the public space point to the precariousness characterizing queer heterotopias, one that is, I hold, epitomized by Gezi Park. It is, therefore, in the face of this universal subject that I advance to think through the impingement that defines queer ways of being already imperilled by neoliberal globalization. In the first part of my argument, I propose to conceive Gezi Park as a queer heterotopia, albeit a lost one, shadowed by the struggle between the neoliberal Turkish state and the peoples' resistance wherein the LGBT movement and its claims to legal recognition gained salience. Giving a narrative of the Gezi Park protests by which I put into perspective the rise of the LGBT movement, I show that what underlies the neoliberal logic targeting Gezi Park and the identitarian discourse of the LGBT is the 'heterosexualizing'⁷ force of modernity. I argue that the homogenizing effects of this modernity take their toll on queer heterotopias, which I describe as spatial formations sheltering unintelligible relationalities and socialities.⁸ Post-resistance Gezi Park becomes a testament to the extent to which reorganization of the urban public space reorients bodies and refigures identities through the force of neoliberal modernization. In the second part of my argument, I turn to Ferzan Özpetek's debut film *Steam* (1997) in an effort to expand on our understanding of queer heterotopias. *Steam*, I argue, configures the homosocial space of hamam as a queer heterotopia, while animating the same pressures of neoliberal modernization that threaten the site. A look at the space of hamam by way of this film allows us to elaborate on queer heterotopias' unsettling relation to modernity.

⁷ Here, heterosexualization refers to a binary logic that straightens out the ambiguous world of sexuality, as Massad uses it. (p. 383).

⁸ For an account of a nationalist project of modernization that drives the 'heterosexualization' of the Iranian sexual economy, see Najmabadi Afsaneh, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties in Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Najmabadi provides the context for the social transformation that facilitated the obliteration of the Amrad as a gender category in Iran under the rule of Qajar dynasty in Part I.

I.

Before May 30, 2013, arguably no one would have foreseen that Gezi Park, the small and the only green space situated in Istanbul's renowned Taksim Square, would become the cause of a month-long worldwide protest that shook Turkey. The initial two-day, small-scale local environmentalist resistance of park sleep-ins arose from the government-promoted and municipality-sponsored development project slated to demolish the park and privatize it along with part of Taksim Square into an Ottoman military barrack housing a shopping mall and luxury residences. But, it was not until the ruling JDP's ferocious commitment to set in motion its relentless neoliberal policies at the heart of Istanbul were violently clear that Gezi Park became an arena for a larger struggle in the eyes of the world.

At dawn on May 30, 2013, Turkish riot police made a foray on Taksim Gezi Park to oust those civilians camping in the park to protest the government's enforcement of the park's demolition. The police force, along with a team of construction workers, furtively trapped civilians by setting fire to the tents in which they were sleeping. The subsequent public reaction to the vicious police crackdown on the participants of a peaceful sleep-in was unexpected and unprecedented. Having witnessed the violation of human rights and dignity, many flooded into the park in support of the environmentalists, only to face relentless and ever-increasing police violence. As the size of the protests grew, so did police brutality including abusive attacks on civilians with truncheons, tear gas, pepper spray, and water cannons. By the last day of May, the park's boundaries could no longer confine demonstrators.

The protests were rapidly expanding across the city, intensified mostly around the Taksim area, and gradually across the nation, while people in anguish were striving both to protect the park from destruction and to protest the unjust and unjustifiable treatment that they were receiving. The then Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, further escalated the worrying circumstances in which the nation found itself, labelling the protestors as ‘just a few looters’⁹ at a moment when the protestors were already in thousands including people from all walks of life. Such provocations from figures of authority declaring ownership of the project resulted in an anti-government sentiment that came to define the struggle. Due to the heightened level of state oppression by means of censorship, detainment, arrests, and encouraged use of extra police force, what started out as a pacifist local protest with green concerns took sway of the entire country in the form of an anti-government uprising. The epidemic of clashes between protestors and the police had dire consequences in many Turkish cities. Eventually, the outcome of the Gezi Park protests would be dreadful: 10 fatalities with more than 8000 injuries, and a divided nation.¹⁰

Apart from blood-filled police brutality, what prominently characterized the Gezi Park protests was above all the wide array of constituencies that partook in them. To suggest that

⁹ Jose Miguel Calatayud, “‘Just a Few Looters’”: Turkish PM Erdogan Dismisses Protests as Thousands Occupy Istanbul’s Taksim Square, *The Independent*, 2 June 2013, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/just-a-few-looters-turkish-pm-erdogan-dismisses-protests-as-thousands-occupy-istanbuls-taksim-square-8641336.html>. Among other provocations by the PM are his repeated declaration that he would rebuild the Barracks, his naming of the police violence as legendary heroism, and his accusation of protestors as terrorists.

¹⁰ ‘Göstericilerin Sağlık Durumları’, Türk Tabipleri Birliği, date modified 1 August 2013, <http://www.ttb.org.tr/index.php/Haberler/veri-3944.html>. These numbers are borrowed from the latest report of the Turkish Medical Association on the health status of the demonstrators. The number of deaths increased ever since the report’s last update. The latest loss of life related to police violence was 15 year old Berkin Elvan who died on March 11, 2014, after spending 269 days in a coma having been hit on the head by a tear-gas canister. The outburst of hundreds thousands of people into his funeral next to the those who booed his mother in one of Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s presidency election campaigns poignantly demonstrates the widening rift within Turkish society, a rift between pro- and anti-government camps.

the protests brought together political bodies that had never come together in the history of Turkey would hardly be an overstatement. After the outrageous police ambush and the ensuing clashes against the police in late May 2013, at the height of the protests, the park was reclaimed for encampment in a fashion reminiscent of the Occupy Movement. With the growing support from a large range of individuals, groups and organizations, the park became a habitation of ideologies that would otherwise be in conflict elsewhere in many respects. The span of the self-identified groups and organizations that camped in the park included, for instance, Anti-Capitalist Muslims, Kurds, Nationalists, Liberals, Communists, and the fans of the three rival Istanbulite football clubs. The cohabitation of bodies with supposedly irreconcilable standpoints attests to the fact that the protests were suprafractional, as these radical and unparalleled alliances formed solidarity around shared values.¹¹

One way to make sense of this complex picture may be through recourse to Judith Butler's notion of grief that 'exposes the constitutive sociality of the self, a basis for a thinking a political community of a complex order'.¹² Butler finds in the affective modality of grief a potential that might take us 'beside ourselves' by means of which unforeseen alliances might be established.¹³ Certainly, it was the grief experienced over the voices, bodies, lives deemed completely insignificant and sometimes unreal that initiated and intensified the protests, while the shared grievance drew people together from such disparate social, ideological, and political backgrounds. The idyllic days of the occupation took place within the affective economy of grief

¹¹ This is despite the government's and the international media's incessant reductionism of the events into antagonistic political camps. While the JDP, led by Erdogan, propagandistically categorized the protestors as pawns used by domestic and foreign forces to overthrow the government, the reception of the events in the West has predominantly been in terms of a clash between the Islamists and secularists.

¹² Judith Butler, 'Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy,' *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 19.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

in which differences did not necessarily melt away, but were, on the contrary, acknowledged in the process of mutual suffering over loss and destruction. In other words, the peoples of Turkey began to learn to live together, cohabitate in a space in solidarity through grieving and grievance.¹⁴ However, the Elysian vision of the Gezi Park occupation was short-lived due to the police intervention that wiped the protestors off the park.¹⁵ Subsequently, the park was quarantined and closed to the public for months to follow.

LGBT organizations were amongst the diverse range of groups that occupied Gezi Park. Actively taking part in the protests from its inception, their members were without doubt one of the most colourful components of the eclectic and yet harmonious political climate of the times inflected with the economy of grief. The viral image of the rainbow flag planted into a makeshift barricade in the midst of the clashes became yet another symbol of the struggle, along with that of the woman in red who was being casually pepper sprayed by a police officer, an image to foment the civil unrest. If the latter image emblemized the arbitrary violence that the government exercised on people, the former, and particularly the rainbow flag, represented the possibility of a bright future that might be built on the rubble of the country. The rainbow flag came to stand for a future in which differences could peacefully coexist as evinced by the occupation of the park.

The espousal and the symbolic value of the rainbow flag point also to the salience that the LGBT community gained in this environment of cohabitation. The period of coexistence in the park during its occupation by protestors seems to have significantly influenced the

¹⁴ One striking case in point that epitomizes this novel ethos was the no-alcohol rule that was voluntarily followed on the park grounds on Laila al Miraj as a sign of respect for the Muslim population observing the holy day.

¹⁵ This is by no means a statement on the achievements of the movement. The Gezi Park protests can be considered successful on many levels, including its essential goal of saving the park from destruction.

perception of the LGBT members, enabling their visibility and acceptance in the broader social order. Taking place soon after the height of the protests and in the wake of the take-over of the park by the police, the 2013 Istanbul Pride entertained over 100,000 participants, a record-breaking number ever since its genesis. The chant, 'Nerdesin Aşkım? Burdayım Aşkım', already heard at times in the earlier segment of the protests, became the anthem not only of the LGBT community, but also the rest of the protesters.¹⁶ When uttered by the members of the LGBT community members, the words become an insistent declaration of their existence within the Turkish society. When uttered by the rest, the same words, in turn, express an acceptance, an approval of this existence, in solidarity for the same cause.

The shared flag and chant, I would argue, hint at the extent to which the LGBT community has recently been co-opted into the larger political life in Turkey. Without a doubt, the LGBT movement folded into not only the social but also the political consciousness of Turkey to an unprecedented degree. As heightened mainstream media attention further increased the visibility of the LGBT community as a result of the Gezi Park resistance, the members seem to have gained a recognized constituent body in the representative politics of the country. For instance, Republican People's Party and Peoples' Democratic Party, two major opposition parties in the parliament, have begun to interact with the LGBT organizations, openly addressing their concerns and demands in their programs. Along with the official acknowledgment of the members of this community as viable citizens to be represented, these parties, furthermore, proposed candidates from the community for various administrative positions in the local elections of March 2014. Prior to the presidential elections of August

¹⁶ 'Aşkım' literally reads as 'My Love' as a form of address like 'My Beloved' or 'My Darling'. The chant can be translated as 'Where Are You, My Darling? I Am Here, My Darling'.

2014, Kurdish candidate Selahattin Demirtaş, in his campaign for ‘a new life’, recognized the LGBT community among the marginalized and oppressed groups in Turkey, overtly expressing his commitment to LGBT rights.¹⁷

These developments bring to mind Butler’s account of subjectivity in ‘Beside Oneself’ grounded in the Hegelian notion of desire for recognition. It seems clear that, for Butler, recognition takes place in a progressive trajectory, originating from the affective and resulting with the discursive acknowledgment of the other. If the Gezi Park protests enabled public recognition of the gay subject within an affective register, what followed in the aftermath of the protests was the gay subject’s political recognition beyond this affective economy. We can suggest that LGBT individuals became ‘recognizably human’ by entering into discourse in the Turkey of the post-Gezi Park resistance.¹⁸ In a sense, what we witnessed all along, in Butlerian terms, is the production of the gay subject as such out of the domain of the unreal that marks the limit of the human.

Butler’s notion of the human inevitably implicates a juridical understanding of subjectivity. In so far as norms of recognition make one an intelligible subject, that is, human, we are caught up in a juridical frame of reference in the context of the nation where the human is transcribed and indeed circumscribed as the citizen. The subject can become human only when the subject is cited in the language of the state, that is, when the subject becomes the citizen. The distinction between the ‘real’ and ‘unreal’ lies, then, in the recognition of the

¹⁷ ‘LGBT Associations Announce Support for Demirtaş’, *Hurriyet Daily News* [Istanbul], 8 August 2014, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/lgbt-associations-announce-support-for-hdp-candidate-demirtas-.aspx?pageID=238&nID=70163&NewsCatID=338>. In a press statement, twelve LGBT associations announced their support for Demirtaş in the elections. The elections marked the first public voting for presidency. Recep Tayyip Erdogan won the elections receiving almost 52% of the electorates.

¹⁸ Butler, ‘Beside Oneself’, p. 31.

homosexual in legal terms on which the LGBT movement in Turkey as elsewhere sets its eyes. Butler's account is indeed an invaluable conceptualization in the realm of the politico-judicial, and yet can be criticized precisely because of its exaltation of this realm as the framework definitive of the subject in its almost teleological formulation. The notion of subjectivity in this account is insufficient insofar as it is grounded in legal recognition not only because it predicates homosexual subjectivity on the politico-judicial category of the citizen whose foundational normative premises remain largely unquestioned and beset homosexuality, but also because it does so by subordinating expressions and experiences that resist translation into a discursive understanding of subjectivity. It is in this spirit that I want to bring to the fore other subject positionalities based on embodied set of practices and ways of being and relating that are accommodated in queer heterotopias.

Although the ethos from the Gezi protests onwards seems to have favoured the LGBT movement on many levels, I hope to bring into relief what is left behind in times when the LGBT movement in Turkey came out of the closet, as it were, on a national scale by way of blending into the spirit of protests that swept the country. While the Gezi protests provide us with a lens to view the maturation of LGBT politics, the rising of this identity-based sexual politics eclipses the degree to which queer spaces sheltering queer ways of being have been threatened by political forces in endless struggle to define the contours of Turkish modernity. In other words, I am suggesting that such queer spaces and ways of being are in constant danger in Turkey where public space is taken up as the locus within which the political begins to give form to

Turkish modernity.¹⁹ I am, in particular, drawing attention to the crude sense of urban modernity, in this case a neoliberal one, that lingers over queer spaces like Gezi Park.

Occupying a central position in the media spotlight, Gezi Park is now perhaps inconceivable for many as a marginal space. And yet, in truth, Gezi Park prior to May 2013 was strikingly peripheral to the lives of Istanbulites, especially during nights, albeit physically situated at the heart of Istanbul in Taksim area. In the social imaginary of the Istanbulites, the park is – or rather was – associated with figures from the fringes of society who would render the park ‘unsafe’ to traverse after dark.²⁰ The park was notorious for criminal activities such as theft and prostitution and was known as a cruising spot for paid or unpaid anonymous queer sex.²¹ To invoke Foucault, the park was a space of otherness, a queer heterotopia, as it were, which was cut off from the unfolding of the life that surrounded it.²² Eventually becoming prey

¹⁹If we consider modernity itself as the fixed problematic of Turkish modernity, we can see revisionism as a defining parameter in the political lineage of the nation. Insofar as public space is believed to represent, or even embody, this modernity, its politicization in a revisionist register has been inevitable and integral. The manifestation of this project in the early republican era can be understood in terms of modernization in efforts to *construct* a modern westernized and secular national identity whereby the visibility of the Islamic and Ottoman heritage was minimized. Alternately, we note an espousal of this heritage, the ramifications of which have been clearly noticeable under the rule of JDP. What makes JDP unique in the political history of Turkey, however, is its coupling of a conservative rhetoric with neoliberalism, a combination epitomized by the word *development* in its name. *Development* here suggests conversion of the public space befitting ‘New Turkey’ within a neoliberal agenda guaranteeing the economic growth of the nation. Consequently, if we are to understand JDP’s investment in (re)construction and development within the ideological continuum of architectural engineering – the everlasting work of reforming the face of the nation – we must do so in the context of neoliberalism to which JDP loyally subscribes by making public spaces and resources, from recreational areas to natural parks, globally available for privatization. In the neoliberal modernity that JDP envisions, urban development comes to represent and galvanize economic development. Shopping mall and high-rise become the paradigmatic signifiers of this modernity.

²⁰ One is tempted to even speculate that the marginal status of the park might have contributed to the enforcement of the development project – the rebuilding of Taksim Military Barracks from the Ottoman period that would house a mall and luxury residences – to replace the park.

²¹ This is not to suggest that the Park was a scene for casual public sex, but a spot for cruising with certain risks at night. Gezi Park has been listed as a cruising spot on many gay travel websites such as <http://www.istanbulgay.com/cruising.htm> where testimonies from two users reveal scams that result in theft. This picture of the park is in stark contrast to its recently sterilized version.

²² To define the notion of heterotopia, Foucault contrasts it with utopias. Functioning like mirrors, heterotopias are actual spaces of otherness that attest to the space in which we live by contesting it. They contradict all other sites

to a development project of a different kind and size, Gezi Park is now engulfed in the life that once encircled it.

When the municipality reopened Gezi Park to public use, what was once on the verge of oblivion and later of destruction emerged as renovated. Polished with a renewed landscape, the park is no longer a distinctly secluded site with borders, merging now with Taksim Square after the shaving of its contours overlooking the square. The park's current state calls to mind the 'fantastic, untroubled region in which [utopias] are able to unfold,' opening up 'cities with vast avenues, superbly planted gardens,' the very image with which Foucault describes utopias against heterotopias.²³ And, if we are to identify a manifestation of a utopia in Gezi Park, it is one that belongs to the heteronormative middle class idealism. For, while the plan to supplant Gezi Park with a residential and shopping complex failed, the park was still subject to another kind of a development project: gentrification. Insofar as gentrification conveys a modelling in accordance with the standards of middle class taste and use, it is indivisible from the concomitant heterosexualization that follows the process. In this sense, Gezi Park neither bears any resemblance to what it once was, nor represents what it once stood for. The remodelling of the park renders it permeable to the masses traversing the square. Just as the park's visitors have increased in numbers, their profile has altered. The park is now the playground for families, couples, children, and the elderly, who are under continuous surveillance of the guarding police officers day and night.

by, to an extent, mirroring, but more so unsettling the relations inherent to them. Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces,' *Diacritics*, 16 (1986), 22-27, (p. 24).

²³ Michel Foucault, 'Preface,' *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. xviii.

As such, Gezi Park is a living testimony to the precariousness of such queer heterotopias harbouring queer modes of relationality and sociality, which are threatened by the heterosexualizing force of neoliberal modernization in Turkey and elsewhere. And, at this juncture, I wish turn to Ferzan Özpetek's *Steam* (1997) in order to substantiate my discussion about the relationship between queer spaces and queer ways of being that are at odds with both liberal sexual politics and neoliberal modernity. If Gezi Park tells us the story of the disappearance of a queer heterotopia, *Steam* will provide a vista from which we can elaborate more on queer relationships taking place in queer heterotopias. While the film startlingly prefigures the ramifications of the Gezi Park incidents in queer lives, its configuration of the site of hamam as a queer heterotopia at the same time exemplifies a particular endangered queer mode of being that defies translation into the modern sexual lexicon.

II.

In the wake of *Steam*'s increasing critical acclaim in Turkey in 1997, a reactionary voice was making its way in many facets of the media. Hosted by several news shows and interviewed by the national press, the head of the Chamber of Hamams, Ali Yilmaz, was becoming a familiar personage. Viewing himself as a custodian of a cultural heritage, Yilmaz vociferously expressed his concerns over the misrepresentation of the hamam culture in the film with its undertones of homosexuality. Yilmaz caused such uproar that the Ministry of Culture's overruling of the film as the Best Foreign Film nominee of Turkey in the Oscars was immediately imputed to the alleged homophobia of the selection board.

Yılmaz's reaction targeted a particular scene in the film in which two men, Francesco and Mehmet, start making love inside a hamam. With reference to that scene, Yılmaz is quoted to state, 'This kind of perverted, shameful stuff does not take place in our baths'.²⁴ Despite having *not* seen the film and yet mysteriously offended by this imagery, Yılmaz even threatened legal action to discontinue the exhibition of the film.²⁵ Strikingly, however, Yılmaz calmed down and stepped back after having watched the film. Publicly acknowledging his regret nine years later, Yılmaz apologetically declared, 'I was terribly provoked by others. It was all haphazard. I should have watched the film'.²⁶ Perhaps more astonishingly, referring to the film's most contentious erotic imagery of two men making out in the bath, Yılmaz recognized that such kissing would do no harm to anybody.²⁷

Popular film critic Atilla Dorsay details the manner with which the film works its charms in the notorious scene Yılmaz alludes to. In an interview with director Özpetek, Dorsay says,

I have never encountered a scene of two men kissing that is less disturbing, that comes across most naturally, and that – whether homosexual or not – almost everyone would welcome with unparalleled ease.²⁸

The latent homophobia aside, Dorsay hints directly at the becalming affectation of *Steam* that we most certainly see in action when we compare Yılmaz's contradictory reactions to the film before and after he saw it. It seems to me that this remarkable transformation, as a result of which the homosexual lovemaking becomes acceptable, is due to Özpetek's particular use of

²⁴ Yalman Onaran, 'Gay Turkish Movie Loses Oscar Bid', *Associated Press*, 3 November 1997, <http://www.apnewsarchive.com/1997/Gay-Turkish-Movie-Loses-Oscar-Bid/id-39de4798ce959fa37e1044bd585c37c7>.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Enis Umuler, 'Hamamda Çeteye Asla İzin Vermem', *Sabah*, 11 March 2006, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2006/03/05/cp/gnc126-20060305-102.html>.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ferzan Özpetek, 'Ferzan Özpetek: İtalya'da Türk, Türkiye'de İtalyanım', interview by Atilla Dorsay, *Sinema Söyleşileri: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Mithat Alam Film Merkezi Söyleşi ve Panel Yıllığı*, (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2009), p. 45.

the hamam in the diegesis, to an effect that defies the foreclosure tied to the notion of homosexuality as an identity category. In other words, Özpetek makes best use of the homosocial space of the hamam to accommodate a queer modality that evades fixed identity categories. In this regard, I argue that *Steam* configures the heterotopia of hamam as the site of queer attachment and cohabitation that is challenged by an ongoing process of neoliberal modernization. By the same token, I maintain that the queerness of *Steam* can be identified not in the representation of the homosexual kiss, but in its critical posing of alternative models of queer being and relating that fall outside the scope of modernity.

Turkish-Italian director Ferzan Özpetek's *Steam* follows the story of a married Italian couple, Francesco and Marta, whose lives dramatically change after Francesco's aunt Anita bequeaths to him all her property, including a hamam, in Istanbul, the city where she lived and died. As a consequence of his enchantment with the city, his growing intimacy with the Turkish family who has taken care of the building and his aunt, and his developing affinity for his deceased aunt, Francesco leaves Marta and Rome behind to embark on a new life. As an architect, the Italian ventures to undertake the restoration of the hamam that he initially intended to sell, while immersing himself into the lifestyle of the Turkish household. The hamam becomes the embodiment of this new life as it connects Francesco to his aunt, the city, the Turkish family, and particularly, as will be seen, Mehmet, the son of the Turkish family.

The film's driving story is, unexpectedly, not a conflict of sexual identity. The film skirts around that question by making use of the homosocial space of hamam that accommodates an ambivalent sexual subjectivity that cannot be reduced to any categorization. However, this very space itself makes up the main problem around which antagonisms turn. Foreseeing the

oppositions in the Gezi incidents on a smaller scale, the primary antagonism of the film is set up between those who strive to conserve and those who desire to demolish the hamam in the name of urban development. *Steam* depicts the process by which Francesco ends up in the camp that tries to withstand the pressures of neoliberalism. Francesco's transformation is primarily premised on what the hamam comes to embody as a site of queer heterotopia.

The way in which the hamam functions as a queer heterotopia first and foremost depends on hamam's status in the contemporary moment. A scene from halfway into the film visualizes hamam's relation to modernity by invoking the question of the ruin. The scene takes place when Francesco is increasingly uncomfortable with his initial decision to sell the hamam to the consortium that plans, unbeknownst to him, the development project at the expense of the entire neighbourhood in which the hamam is situated. In his meanderings through Istanbul, Francesco stumbles on a building in ruins that enchantingly draws him inside. At its gates, he realizes a tilted plate that announces Italian Carlo Zanichelli as the architect of the building erected in 1921. The sign marks a pre-Republican, late-Ottoman time, the cosmopolitanism of which is on the brink of disappearance like the building in ruin itself. As such, it demarcates an entryway into a realm in which time and space coalesce outside the modern time.

After Francesco steps into the crumbling building, the camera assumes his point of view, moving along the tumbledown interior of the building. On his right, Francesco notes piled up broken objects. As he turns his head forward, we see a living room framed by a windowed door at the far end of the rundown apartment. Francesco enters the room with a single armchair in its centre and notes a detached and overflowing dusty drawer. Inside, a clock that has stopped and three framed black and white photographs sit side by side amongst aged newspapers,

magazines, and an empty cologne bottle. Francesco raises his head up and glances at the armchair as he walks toward the windowed door. When he looks outside through the vertically split up panes, we see a neighbouring high-rise under construction in the foreground of a sprawling cityscape.

Here, the sequence juxtaposes two spatiotemporal dimensions intrinsic to the urban modern setting with the contrasting shots of the non-functional clock and the growing city. Instead of establishing a dialectic, the film underscores the disjunction between these two realms that characterizes urban modernity resulting in alienation. Özpetek's camerawork makes a commentary on a sense of alienation in which the modern subject finds himself or herself due to this tension. The point of view shots and close-ups inside the disintegrating house create an intimate embodied spatial reality from which Francesco views the panorama of the city. Francesco occupies the position of the outsider, outside the space and time of modernity, a position emphasized with the muntins distorting the view and distantiating Francesco further from the rest of the city. If we recall Walter Benjamin's observation that history becomes physically one with the setting in the formation of a ruin,²⁹ the ruin here embodies a spatial expansion in which time has stopped within the developmental and future-driven logic of modernity. The building in ruin symbolizes what Istanbul may offer him with spaces that 'provincialize'³⁰ modernity's undergirding temporal and spatial configurations.

And yet, the progressively invasive city reaching next door indicates the fragility of these spaces. While the ruin is a modern phenomenon, that is, its condition of possibility as ruin is

²⁹ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), pp. 177-8.

³⁰ I borrow the term from Chakrabarty. For a complete account of the term's conceptualization, see *Provincializing Europe*.

modernity itself, it becomes the antithesis of the modern in the neoliberal moment as the site to be modernized for investment. What underlies modernization under the rubric of development is destruction and duplication. The scene in which Francesco is in an office to officialise the selling of the hamam succinctly conveys this. Özpetek enters the scene with the view of the city, abound with high-rises and scattered with skyscrapers, stretching along the horizon from inside the office with the on-going conversation about the details of the contract. As Francesco is handed the contract, he notices the model project, which essentially replicates the landscape with which the scene opens: a towering skyscraper surrounded by identical high-rises. We hear that Mrs. Filiz, the headwoman of the consortium, 'is buying the whole area to build instead a big trade centre, hotels, restaurants, a supermarket, and tennis courts. It will be very beautiful.' Realizing the damaging nature of the project, Francesco renounces his decision, which we find out through a sudden cut from Mrs. Filiz's stern face to Perran, the mother in the Turkish family, who announces the decision from a window to her neighbours.

A heterotopia outside the logic of modernity, hamam shares with the ruin the spatial expansion that eludes the chronotope of the modern. The film reinforces this connection by presenting the bequeathed hamam in ruins, which simultaneously amplifies the predicament of the site of hamam in modern Turkey. An inoperative inheritance in decay, owned by an Italian lady and inherited by an Italian man, the hamam stands for the uncanny legacy, a foster child, of the nation. Perran suggests that the hamam has long been in disuse even before Madam died, attesting to the fact that hamam connotes outdated practices that modernity in general has left behind. While the increasing privatization of hygienic practices parallel to the development of the modern bourgeoisie rendered hamams useless, hamams nevertheless

embody sensibilities and socialities marginal to those of the modern experience. Just as the personal objects on which Francesco chances in the decrepit building, the dilapidated and defunct hamam opens the doors of the alternative world.

What *Steam* achieves is the mapping of a particular mode of sociality onto the heterotopic nature of the site of hamam. In other words, the hamam Francesco inherits allows him to be part of a life similar to the one represented in the black and white photographs he discovers in the run-down building. The film posits hamam as the embodiment of a traditional life largely premised on homosocial demarcations, the sort that the Turkish family leads and with which Francesco is increasingly at home. The proximity between the hamam and the household is concretized with the passage that connects the hamam to the house of the custodian family where Francesco spends his sojourn. It is as though the homosocial arrangement unique to the hamam blends into the daily lives of the family members, creating closely knit, gender specific interpersonal relationships. As Francesco adopts the conventions of this life, he becomes an adopted family member, assuming his deceased aunt's position at the dinner table. The boundaries within this novel kinship formation collapse as Francesco finds himself in an intimate relationship with Mehmet.

Steam turns the site of hamam into an epitome of a queer heterotopia. It does so less by incorporating the hamam as the site in which sexual desire is slippery than by investing in homosociality to foster queer models of relationships and ways of being that are unintelligible within the economy of modern sexuality. As Francesco frequents hamams, not only does his decision to sell the site change, but his entire personality also transforms. Concomitant with his adoption of the traditional culture, Francesco assumes an orthodox Turkish masculine identity,

as visualized in a sequence of shots in which he consumes Turkish tobacco and raki, plays backgammon, goes to a soccer game. What seems to be a caricature-like depiction of masculine identification appears as an embodied reality when we pay attention to how these codes allow Francesco to navigate freely in the social domain that is in part homosocially stratified. By means of these masculine codes to which he willingly surrenders, he is able to develop a close friendship with Mehmet and his entourage, while, Mehmet's sister Füsün develops feelings for Francesco who is still married to Marta. Füsün cannot seem to penetrate into the homosocial web of relations from which Francesco and Mehmet's relationship stems.

It is in this homosocial bonding that the friendship between the two men matures, giving birth to a queer relationality in which homosexuality is implicated in homosociality and sex is implicated in friendship. Upon walking in on Francesco making love with Mehmet in the notorious scene, Marta bitterly accuses Francesco of running away to do things he cannot do in Rome. While Marta's words signify the persistence with which she attempts to construe her husband's homosexuality in terms of a predetermined sexual identity, she counter-intuitively and yet pointedly envisages Rome as his closet. Rome acts as a closet insofar as it presupposes homosexuality as an identity category in the formation of the modern gay subject. Thus, the seemingly closet space of the hamam acquires a liberating agency, accommodating a queer subjectivity incommensurate with a modern gay identity.

In the same confrontation, Francesco undermines the question of sexual identity in framing his relationship with Mehmet. Continuing the civilizational dichotomy Marta draws, he compares his unhappiness in Rome with the Turkish social environment that brought change into life. Thanks to these social relations – adopted family life and homosocial friendship –

Francesco discovers the person he wants to be and the life he wants to lead. Thus, he understands his relationship with Mehmet within this web of relations. 'This is something between us. I feel better with him,' Francesco says. He does not come out as a self-affirming gay subject, nor does he attempt to name his desire. For Francesco, his relationship with Mehmet is one that thrives through mutual understanding, connection, and affection. Therefore, Francesco is able to pursue his sexual life without any discursive constraints on his sexual identity. In this regard, the transformation of the hamam from disembodied debris to a living site brings with it a queer subjectivity outside the purview of the modern sexual ethos.

Steam conveys a queer mode of being that resists assimilation into the categories in our lexicon of identity based sexualities. It further insinuates queer relational models when Marta comes to terms with her husband's sexuality. Frantic and accusing, Marta initially categorizes him as a closeted gay. And yet, once Marta bears witness to Francesco's personal transformation, noticing a more passionate, confident and, in a sense, more manly Francesco thanks to his acculturation, she soon realizes that she has fallen in love with Francesco again, despite visiting Istanbul with the intention of getting a divorce from him. As Francesco resists and deemphasizes the language of sexual identity, Marta eventually comes to understand Francesco in that limbo between heterosexuality and homosexuality.

Indeed, this is also the limbo of friendship, the indeterminate and unpredictable space that Marta, Francesco, and Mehmet dwell in. As the film eschews questions of identity and identification, it promotes a queer model of affective relationality that we may categorize as

friendship, 'the co-belonging of nonidentical singularities'.³¹ In addition to the relationship between Francesco and Mehmet, the emerging one between Marta and Mehmet attests to this sense of friendship. Marta and Mehmet come together after an assassin, likely sent out by the frustrated chairwoman of the conglomerate behind the urban renewal project, stabs Francesco to death. Before the final scene, Marta grieves shoulder to shoulder with Mehmet in tears in front of Francesco's hospital room, almost replicating the unanticipated alliances that transpired in the Gezi protests; the shared grief over Francesco's loss enables their acknowledgment of the other. However, this acknowledgment does not necessarily result in the type of normalization that we have witnessed in the course of Gezi Park incidents, a normalization that was epitomized with the effacement of a queer heterotopia.

Steam posits hamam as a queer heterotopia in that it emblemizes alternative models of relationality and sociality, which Marta embraces with her decision to stay in Istanbul. In the end, through Marta's voice-over reading her journal, we learn that she carries on the restoration and the management of the hamam, espousing her deceased husband's legacy. Thus, the hamam as a queer heterotopia continues to destabilize public space as well as political imaginary by reminding us that 'singularities [can] form a community without affirming an identity, that humans [can] co-belong without any representable condition of belonging'.³² Therefore, when read against the plight of the Gezi Park, *Steam* is relatively optimistic about the future of queer heterotopias, despite the looming danger of fierce neoliberal modernization.

³¹ Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 26.

³² Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 85, quoted in Gandhi, *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Preserving the hamam as a queer heterotopia, *Steam* takes us back to the zone outside discourse, a zone with which we can identify Gezi Park in its earlier incarnation. This is the site in which sexuality as non-translatable resists language. As Foucault says:

Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which cause words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to 'hold together'.³³

We have seen with Gezi Park and in *Steam* that this contestation takes place against both the transformational violence of neoliberalism and the translational force of sexual liberalism. A queer approach to Gezi Park and *Steam*, then, sheds light on the heterotopic nature of the local that lays bare neoliberal and sexual universals to which much of our understanding of sexuality is indebted. Queer heterotopias point to a world beyond both the gay citizen and neoliberal modernity.

³³ Foucault, 'Preface,' p. xviii.

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