Politics in the *Piyasa*

Marching, Marketing and the Emergence of Gay Identities in Istanbul

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Abstract: The emergence of *gay* identities in Istanbul is often regarded as a practical result of mobilisation by minority sexual rights NGOs. Indeed, Istanbul Pride emerged in the early 2000s as a widely-referenced exemplar of the political promise of street-level activism in Turkey. Tracing how *gay* initially was used in the nightlife market around İstiklal Street and reconstructing the early history of agitation for an annual Pride march, I argue that street traders and small-scale entrepreneurs, not street-level campaigners, have played the critical role in prising open spaces where men could come to identify themselves and be identified as *gay*. Moreover, spaces afforded by particular fixed-place businesses in the nightlife market critically shaped the initial forms of political association involving *gay* men that were able to develop and consolidate in the city.

Keywords: group identity, identity politics, Istanbul, markets, sexuality, structures, Turkey, urban space

[The so-called mosaic system of social organization so often held to be characteristic of the Middle East generally] is [. . .] difficult to characterize succinctly, but surely one of its outstanding features is a promiscuous tumbling in public settings of varieties of men kept carefully segregated in private ones – all-out cosmopolitanism in the streets, strict communalism [. . .] in the home. (Geertz 1974: 41)

This article examines the emergence of a variety of men over recent decades in Istanbul – men who have come to identify themselves and to be identified by others as *gay*. This loanword, often transliterated as *gey*, emerged with limited circulation in Istanbul by the late 1980s and achieved wider currency during the 1990s and early 2000s. The word drew significance partly from an

older term, *eşcinsel* – itself a calque or morpheme-for-morpheme translation of 'homosexual' – which by the late 1960s had begun to move beyond scientific circles and gained some public prominence after 1980 (Hocaoğlu 2002; Yüzgün 1986).

Although broadly similar in meaning to cognate terms elsewhere, there are nuances to how *gay* has come to be used in Istanbul. As Hüseyin Tapınç (1992) observed in the first academic study to analyse the term, *gay* has never identified all men who have sex with men in the city but rather refers to a specific variety – a man who has sex with men like himself. What men like himself means, however, is difficult to characterise succinctly and among other things specifies coordinates of gender, sexuality, class and generation (Bereket and Adam 2006, 2008). The term's prototypical sense is to identify a variety of men who particularly esteem 'same-same' sexual relations: relations between men who aspire to similar ideals of masculinity; relations that do not cleave into clearly defined *aktif/pasif* sex roles; between men of a recognisable class defined in part by income and education; and between men who are roughly similar in age. Moreover, in so far as positing a 'same-same' relation makes a claim of likeness between men, there is an interconnection between a man's identifying himself as *gay* and being identified by others as *gay*. If a man does not identify himself as *gay*, it is generally infelicitous for others to identify him as *gay*: the nearest English translation is perhaps not 'gay' but 'out' (Williams 2018). While self-identifying as *gay* is thus a necessary felicity condition for ascription of the identity by others, it is not a sufficient condition: a man of the wrong class may be said to lack the wherewithal really to be *gay*, and a man of the right class who is known to have sexual relations with men not deemed sufficiently like himself may discover the validity of his own self-identification being questioned (Özbay 2017).

While curious, these semantic and pragmatic subtleties may seem at first blush rather less striking than the more outstanding feature that people in Istanbul are readily identifying themselves and others by sexual variety at all. Such practices of identification, researchers often suggest, emerged quite suddenly in the wake of an 'undocumented and [. . .] ambiguous period [that] starts from the late Ottoman Empire and continues for a hundred years or more into the [. . .] Turkish Republic [. . .] when there were no sexual self-identities or medical diagnosis of sexual "abnormalities", but same-sex sexual acts took place and virtually everybody had knowledge about them' (Özbay 2015: 870). Following the rough contours of a larger debate in Middle East studies (Massad 2002, 2007; Whitaker 2006, 2007), scholars of Turkey faced with this historical puzzle have sometimes sought to explain the emergence of *gay* identities as a result of political mobilisation by sexual rights NGOs that developed in Istanbul during the 1990s (Durgun 2013; Fishman 2013; İlaslaner 2014; Pearce 2014; Sarı 2017). Prominent in this empirical literature on Istanbul are appeals to grassroots mobilisation around Istanbul Pride, a summer march commemorating the Stonewall protests along İstiklal Street,

one of the city's main retail boulevards. The protest march, which was banned in 1993 and eventually permitted after 2003, precipitated the formation in 1993 of what would consolidate during the late 1990s to become Turkey's oldest continuing minority sexual rights NGO, Lambdaistanbul.

Yet, if the historical emergence of *gay* identities in Istanbul is something of a puzzle, then explanatory models that tie this to a successful movement of public protest risk explaining a puzzle with a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. Studies on social movements in twentieth-century Turkey have tended to find that demands were simply not granted when people used public means such as demonstrations and petitions (Aymes et al. 2015; Dorronsoro 2005), a finding largely borne out by early research on political criticism, opposition and dissent during the twenty-first century under the Justice and Development Party rule (Cizre 2016). Instead of solving the first puzzle, scholarship that singles out the political success of agitation around Istanbul Pride seems rather to confront us with a second puzzle: how did a protest movement that seemed to have failed so conspicuously in 1993 manage, against historical odds in Istanbul, to regroup and consolidate by the early 2000s?

My contention in this article is that the answers to these two questions are indeed interrelated, although not quite along the lines suggested by this prior research. Based on oral histories collected from 2009 to 2011 among a score of customers and traders in a small laneway off İstiklal Street, I shall trace how petty-capitalist marketing, rather than marching, proved institutionally critical for elaborating the socio-economic and cultural organisation required on the ground for a term like *gay* to have a ready referent in the city. My argument is that it was not street-level political activists but rather street traders, particularly those earning a living from sex, and small-scale entrepreneurs in the nightlife market around İstiklal Street who have played the vital historic role in creating public settings in Istanbul where men could come to identify and be identified as *gay*. Moreover, if 'promiscuous tumbling' in a certain kind of market afforded the distinct dimensions of socio-economic and cultural organisation required for these 'varieties of men' to emerge in Istanbul (Geertz 1974), then I shall suggest it also offered distinctive possibilities for political organisation among these men, which help explain why a successful protest movement was able to develop and institutionally consolidate there for a time. Drawing on oral history research with some of those involved in the 1993 march and archival research at Lambdaistanbul concerning its formative years, I shall argue that contrary to the conventional picture of 'the history of the development of the LGBTI+ movement [. . .] [beginning] with small gatherings in private houses' and developing into grassroots civil society 'associations, NGOs, informal initiatives' (Savcı et al. 2019: 125), the institutional roots of Turkey's oldest continuing minority sexual rights NGO lay in fixed-place businesses in the nightlife market around İstiklal Street – businesses that shaped both the possibilities and limits of political organisation around minority sexual identities.

Making *Piyasa:* Marketing and Sexual Variety along İstiklal Street

If there ever really was an 'undocumented and [. . .] ambiguous period [. . .] when there were no sexual self-identities' in Istanbul, one should not be too quick to assume that there were no terms for identifying persons by sexual variety in the city, especially in that particular area of the city around İstiklal Street. While it is reasonably well known that this market area, or *piyasa*, around İstiklal Street has had a special significance for many men who have sex with men in the city dating back at least to the late nineteenth century (Koçu 1946), what is less appreciated is the wider significance of this *piyasa* as a public space (with up to three million visitors a day during my fieldwork) where people from diverse walks of life have learned socially how to recognise and distinguish varieties of sexual possibility in the city (Schick 2009). Indeed, there is a connection between these forms of significance: among habitués of the laneway where I conducted fieldwork, some with personal memories dating back to the early 1970s, words that had come to hold such special significance for them were all terms that they had discovered 'on the *piyasa*' (i.e. 'in public'), and they had encountered them by 'making *piyasa*' – literally, 'making street', 'making market' or more colloquially, 'walking around' İstiklal Street. By tracing these men's memories of how they came to discover the significance of three words in particular – 'wheel', 'frame' and 'coterie' – I argue that well before the 1980s and the emergence of the term *gay*, institutions that had emerged through petty-capitalist marketing in this area enabled men to become orientated and navigate distinct varieties of sexual relations between men in the city.

Wheels

A wheel [*çark*] is a variety of man who is recognised by the characteristic way he walks around the *piyasa*. Walking around a *piyasa* in Turkey is rather different from walking around a piazza in Italy. Because a piazza is a town square, making *passegiata* often literally involves walking around and around, but because a *piyasa* is a long street, making *piyasa* typically involves walking back and forth and is thus punctuated by abrupt about-turns called *volta*. Practically speaking, men learn to identify a wheel by the distinctive way he performs his *volta*: he moves back and forth like a cog, wheeling in on other men making *piyasa*, encouraging one or other of them to start wheeling in on him. What ensues is a kind of back-and-forth pursuit – one wheel overtaking the other and then turning back, waiting for the other to turn heel and now overtake him – gradually wheeling towards their final destination, which along İstiklal Street was classically a quick duck behind the bushes at the end of the *piyasa* in Gezi Park.

The laneway where I worked, which I shall call Küçük Sokak, was one of those little streets around İstiklal Street that in the early 1970s had still not fully commercially recovered from the events of 6–7 September 1955, during which many of the area's remaining non-Muslim minorities were violently expropriated. Men's earliest memories of Küçük Sokak was that a secluded yard of a derelict church had emerged as a haunt to which men who were trying to earn a living from sex would take customers, and this extensive com-mercialisation of sex between men on the *piyasa* around İstiklal Street was a recurrent theme when men reflected on what historically made wheeling in the area distinct from other *piyasa* in the city.

Frames

The ideal of a successful night's wheeling around İstiklal Street is that it not only ends in sex but that it is with a man whose frame [*çerçeve*] one does not recognise. This contrast between identifying and being identified on the *piyasa* as a wheel versus by frame or face is quite close to Georg Simmel's (1906: 449–453) distinction between a 'special purpose relation' and 'acquaintance'. When wheeling, each man is 'exclusively the agent of a definite performance and whatever individual motive may impel him to this activity [. . .] [is] a matter of complete indifference'. Once men who have sex with men are able to recognise and be recognised by face around İstiklal Street, however, these relations become animated by concerns over discretion that cut against much of what men enjoy about wheeling.

While many men come to İstiklal Street to wheel precisely because they do not want to be recognised, being able to identify men who have sex with men by frame has historically been vital to wayfaring along the *piyasa*. In particu-lar, it was through following frames on the *piyasa* that a man could discover a range of fixed-place businesses dotted around the area – cinemas, hotels, *hamam* – that had developed well before the 1980s as venues for different kinds of sex between men. The precise conditions under which sex between men is possible at such businesses tend to be rather complicated and prone to change, and practically speaking, men only really know if sex is possible if they are able to identify some frames around, especially frames of men who earn a living from sex on the *piyasa* and typically have a detailed knowledge of what these conditions are. Indeed, they know the conditions because they negotiated them, and these trader-trader relations between men working the street and traders in fixed-place businesses have been critical over the years in opening up a range of different kinds of space for sex between men on the *piyasa*.

Coteries

While spaces like the derelict churchyard in Küçük Sokak afforded a variety of acquaintance that could help men discover a range of fixed-place businesses on the *piyasa* where different forms of sexual relations were possible, none of the men I spoke with could remember such a business ever existing on Küçük Sokak. Rather, the earliest business on the laneway anyone could recall that had a special significance for them was a traders' restaurant [*esnaf lokantası*]. The restaurant was a place where men went not to have sex but to eat and talk, and it came to be identified with coteries [*zümre*] of men who regularly frequented other local fixed-place businesses for sex.

Although members of such coteries were readily identified as friends, these relations between men who have sex with men had a distinctive quality that is also reminiscent of a term from Simmel (1906: 458). These were 'differentiated friendships', a kind of special friendship which demands 'that the friends reciprocally refrain from obtruding themselves into the range of interests and feelings not included in the special [relation] in each case'. In the case of coteries, the specialised concern was generally searching for sex with particular kinds of men on the *piyasa*. Indeed, many of the terms that developed a special significance for these men (like *çark*, *çerçeve*, *zümre*) were words they first learned to use among coteries, and this highly polyglot argot developed as a slang used by men who have sex with men (Biondo 2017; Kontovas 2012) adapted from the terms of a wider marketplace vernacular used widely around İstiklal Street (Kaptan 1988).

Well before 1980, there thus existed terms for distinguishing persons by sexual variety in Istanbul, and a vital way in which people learned to recognise such variety was in public, literally 'on the *piyasa*', around İstiklal Street. Characteristic processes of 'making *piyasa*' were critical to how men who had sex with men could come to identify themselves and be identified 'on the *piyasa*'. A range of public settings – streets, parks, derelict premises, *hamam*, cinemas, hotels, restaurants, bars, coffee houses – afforded spaces where men both discovered and elaborated varieties of sexual relations between men, public spaces prised open in the larger nightlife market largely by the commercial activity of traders and entrepreneurs. It was market activity around İstiklal Street, moreover, that made these varieties of sexual relations between men not only meaningful but socially and economically feasible: wheeling enabled men to find men for sex beyond their immediate circles of kith and kin; varieties of acquaintance forged in these public settings allowed men to make relations with other men explicitly because of their sexual interests rather than as a result of already existing social relations; and coteries, among other things, afforded forms of association that could potentially reach across the city or even beyond. More tentatively, it was possible for men who chose to reside and work around İstiklal Street, particularly by becoming traders or entrepreneurs in the nightlife market and entertainment industry, to live as unmarried

men, divorcees or widowers, and to forge forms of household in and around the marketplace where they could engage exclusively in sexual relations with other men.

Doorkeeping: The Emergence of *Gay* Identities along İstiklal Street

If 'making *piyasa*' around İstiklal Street afforded dimensions of socio-economic and cultural organisation for varieties of sexual relations between men that resemble what Barry Adam (1985) once dubbed the 'structural foundations of the gay world', the men I worked with in Küçük Sokak did not recall the term *gay* having much currency 'on the *piyasa*' before the 1980s. Indeed, if Adam writing in the 1980s tends to treat 'gay' and 'homosexual' as near synonyms in English, when men on Küçük Sokak reminisced about the emergence of *gay* identities along İstiklal Street at the end of the 1980s, they generally evoked a much more fraught association between *gay* and *eşcinsel*. I argue here that much of the enduring nuance of these words in Istanbul has been shaped by the morally and politically charged ways in which they were initially understood as referring to particular sexual varieties that one might encounter 'on the *piyasa*' around İstiklal Street in the wake of the 1980 coup.

Eşcinsel became a widely familiar term in Turkey in the military-controlled press in the immediate aftermath of the coup (Ertür and Lebow 2014). While regulating extramarital sex between men has seldom emerged as an explicit concern among policy makers in Turkey, the politics of moral order in the immediate aftermath of the 1980 coup is one significant exception. Perhaps part of the explanation for this seeming anomaly is that, in practice, the concerted focus of the campaign was much more localised: what the coup leaders especially wanted to crack down on was certain varieties of men specifically along İstiklal Street. This area had emerged during the late 1970s as a centre for political violence between leftists and nationalists, most prominently in the Taksim Square Massacre of 1 May 1977. Any claim to be restoring order in the country meant being seen to restore order along İstiklal Street. Although tens of thousands of men were caught up in a campaign that focused particularly on leftists, the varieties of men who have sex with men especially targeted along İstiklal Street tended to be those who earned a living in the nightlife and entertainment market, especially *travesti* and men who were markedly feminine, which came to be the prototypical sense of *eşcinsel*. The explicit aim of this sudden and violent policy was forcibly to deport all such men away from İstiklal Street and out of Istanbul to the provinces – publicly to purge İstiklal Street of some of its well-known variety (Öktem 2008; Yüzgün 1993). Men who had sex with men and who earned a living through trade in this marketplace found under threat not only their business but also the special forms of relations between men which that market activity was making possible. One

way entrepreneurs responded, which proved of enduring significance in the city, was to invent a new kind of nightlife business – the club.

Men in Küçük Sokak were of two minds about just how new the concept of a club was around İstiklal Street in the 1980s. Some readily identified certain fixed-place businesses that existed in the late 1970s as clubs, venues such as Vat 69, 1001 and Valentino. Others demurred that these venues were not really clubs per se but rather socially mixed venues not that different from the little restaurant in Küçük Sokak, albeit venues that had developed strong associations with several more well-to-do coteries associated with the area's entertainment industry. All men I spoke with agreed, however, that the kind of clubs that developed in the 1980s were significantly different, and the name they most often associated with this development was Ceylan Çaplı.

A rural migrant from Tarsus who initially found work in the area's theatre scene and then apprenticed in the nightlife market under Cavit Kılıç at Valentino (Karaahmet 2003), Çaplı set up two businesses in quick succession in the wake of the coup – Tekila and Cumba. The men in Küçük Sokak recalled these venues as roughly similar to the model that Kılıç had finessed at Valentino. Only with Club 14, which Çaplı opened in 1986 a short walk from Taksim Square in Abdülhak Hamit Caddesi, did he pioneer a new model of nightlife venue in Istanbul (Alpman 1994). Spatially, he removed all tables and chairs, forbade *türkü* [Turkish folk songs] and created essentially a small black box with a tiny bar. Commercially, he set outrageously higher prices than those of rival businesses, trying to carve out a niche for the venue as *sosyetik* [high-toned] and enforcing a notoriously restrictive door policy. A long list of proscriptions was posted at the door, which was enforced by a specially hired team of rugged, largely Kurdish door attendants. No suits or ties, no beards or moustaches, and most especially no journalists. Çaplı created a club so exclusive, so ostentatiously secret, that no one in Istanbul ever really knew whether they would be let in.

If the coup leaders' highly mediatised intervention had breached an open secret about İstiklal Street in Istanbul – that kind of secret where what is concealed is the disclosure (Jones 2014) – Çaplı created a business model of a literal black box in the nightlife market that branded itself on a kind of secrecy where what was disclosed was concealment. To adapt the framework of Simmel on which I drew earlier, it was a form of 'purposeful concealment' – a distinctive kind of secret society defence to create a space where the social formation is known but the membership is concealed. It was a model broadly compatible with the military government's agenda of being seen to purge sexual variety from the *piyasa*. The particular men Çaplı was trying to conceal amid a throng of celebrities, super-rich and well-to-do young men lined up at the door were a specific coterie he had formed during his years in the area centred on the ageing entertainer Zeki Müren. Several men in Küçük Sokak bitterly recalled that Çaplı was not much given to providing a secret society defence to anyone else, especially if he felt their presence might endanger the security of his own

coterie. This particularly meant leftists, *travesti*, poorer young men who might be deemed *eşcinsel* and most anyone who was trying to earn a living from sex.

Yet, the strictness of Çaplı's doorkeeping, his sieving of people (Kockelman 2013), had unexpected results among the motley he assembled in the black box of Club 14. By 1988, persistent fights had begun to emerge among the customers, lines of cleavage that divided largely by generation. Initially about music, the fights evolved to other topics, including the very presence of women in the club; indeed, it was as if the more the membership came to know each other, the more the social formation emerging inside the black box became perplexing for everybody involved. To make matters worse for Çaplı, a handful of nightlife venues had started to imitate his black box concept (albeit without the prices), most notably a club called Prive. Among men in Küçük Sokak, the earliest memories I was able to collect of the emergence of the term *gay* on the *piyasa* was among men who had frequented Club 14 during this period. They recalled first encountering it at Club 14 as a way of identifying some of the well-to-do young men who came there, distinguishing them from men who went to clubs like Prive, whom the Club 14 crowd deemed *eşcinsel*, and from the older male clientele at 14 (including Çaplı himself), who were deemed neither *eşcinsel* nor *gay*.

By 1989, Çaplı had had enough, and in May he set up a new club a few doors down the street called Club 20, tailored to his well-to-do younger male customers' preference for minimalist techno and with a door policy largely restricting women. In September, with queues for Club 20 reaching down the street and fights emerging between well-to-do young men who wanted to dance with each other and those who wanted to dance with well-to-do young women, Çaplı set up Club 19 next door. Yet, the door policy at 14, 19 and 20 was by no means fixed. During the early 1990s, Çaplı continually experimented with different kinds of doorkeeping, including the creation of a high-concept combined club, 2019, during summer months in a car yard in Maslak.

A logic of doorkeeping that had emerged initially as a defence to allow a social formation to be known while keeping the membership concealed had developed by the late 1980s into a commercial strategy for creating new clubs from nebulous social formations. The process would underpin the elaboration of numerous self-styled subcultures [*alt kültür*] in Istanbul's burgeoning club scene during the 1990s and early 2000s, particularly a scape of new fixed-place businesses dotted around İstiklal Street. These came to constitute a germinal *gay* scene built along the material contours of an older erotic topography, including a self-styled '*gay* cafe-bar-restaurant' that was opened on the site of the old traders' restaurant in Küçük Sokak and was where I met many of the men from whom I collected oral histories. In particular, *gay* had first come to be used publicly in Istanbul along İstiklal Street in a fraught opposition to a term not like 'straight' (for which there is still no ready Turkish equivalent) but like *eşcinsel*, and it was used to identify a variety of men amid this mix with exactly the semantic and pragmatic nuances I outlined at the start of this

article. A word closer perhaps to 'out' than 'gay', it emerged as a term whereby some men who had sex with men could identify themselves and be identified by others in certain settings 'on the *piyasa*' as sharing a 'secret that only emerges as such with its disappearance' (Marin 1984: 60).

Roots of the Grassroots: The Emergence of *Gay* Identity Politics in Istanbul

In an interview with the transnational sexualities scholar Evren Savcı, Şebnem Keniş and İpek Tabur suggest that 'when we look at the history of the development of the LGBTI+ movement that first began with small gatherings in private houses in the metropolitan cities of Istanbul and Ankara, we see that over time the movement has given way to independent structures – associations, NGOs, informal initiatives, student clubs' (2019: 125). Yet a microhistory of the emergence of what would become Istanbul's oldest continuing sexual rights NGO in the wake of the abortive parade of 1993 suggests a rather different story – one that belies the idea that grassroots political mobilisation around minority sexual rights in Istanbul had its institutional roots directly in interpersonal networks that consolidated initially in the domestic sphere.

In fact, the original idea for a parade in Istanbul came from not anyone in Turkey but rather the executive committee of the International Gay Group Berlin (IGGB), a German NGO associated with the larger Lesbian and Gay Federation in Germany (LSVD). Having organised the first Lesbian and Gay Pride Day in Saint Petersburg in 1992, IGGB proposed a similar event for the following year in Istanbul, 'for the first time in a country influenced by Islam' (QRD 2018). If local concerns about the situation of sexual minority Turks in Germany perhaps played a role in the selection of Turkey, the Berlin-based political activists initially organised 'top down' in Turkey, leveraging members' diasporic cultural capital in the context of international fora that were emerging in the midst of the global AIDS crisis. In January 1993, Selman Arıkboğa, not as a representative of IGGB but as a delegate of Berlin's health senate, liaised at the first Turkish AIDS conference to secure informal authorisation from officials in Ankara for an event in Istanbul during early July to commemorate Stonewall. Only after this permission was granted and lines of finance were secured from the Berlin Senate Department for Culture and from the German AIDS Foundation did IGGB dispatch Heribert Mürmann on 3 February to begin to organise 'bottom up' in Istanbul.

Rather than a movement that began in private houses and consolidated into a more formal civil society association, the initial organisation for a parade in 1993 seems on first appearance grist to the mill for Joseph Massad's (2002) contention that explicit political mobilisation around the situation of sexual minorities in the Middle East has been catalysed by the intervention of transnational actors, a putative 'gay international'. Indeed, when Mürmann

arrived in Istanbul, he was unable to identify any grassroots associations, NGOs or student clubs on the ground, and the cadre of 15 to 20 individuals in Istanbul organising the event who came to be known as the Rainbow Group was 'comprised generally of students, young people' whom Mürmann encountered (İnce 2014a). Although, as Mine Yanat – a founding member of the Rainbow Group – recalls, the earliest meetings in Istanbul were indeed held in a little basement apartment not far from İstiklal Street (Yıldız 2007). During his work for IGGB, Mürmann rented this flat in Ülker Sokak with Cem Özipek, a young man he had identified early on as a potential organiser. When the initial flat proved too small and 'each meeting was more crowded than the previous one', they moved with Mürmann's assistance to a larger house in Arnavutköy.

The subsequent formation of Lambdaistanbul out of a splinter of the Rainbow Group might thus seem a perfect example of Massad's contention that political mobilisation by transnational actors is fundamental to creating a grouping of men in a city like Istanbul who come to identify themselves and be identified by others as 'gay'. In this case, it might appear as if Mürmann formed the Rainbow Group *ab novo* out of individuals he randomly encountered in Istanbul. However, as İlker Çakmak – a close friend of Özipek and himself a founding member of the Rainbow Group – recollects, this is not in fact what Mürmann did. Mürmann went to Club 14: 'The people who came to the first meetings [of the Rainbow Group] were the group who went to Club 14. There were other gays, but it was predominantly the folks from 14. Only those from Istanbul with money went to 14 because the prices were steep, and most participants in the meetings were of this demographic' (İnce 2014a). The core cadre of the Rainbow Group did not develop directly from household-based networks or emerge as a singular result of Mürmann's activities on behalf of IGGB; rather, the group of largely well-to-do young men had been drawn together through Ceylan Çaplı's doorkeeping of his clubs.

Moreover, the terms of association that the Rainbow Group specified for their movement were significantly shaped by the norms disclosed in Çaplı's clubs for articulating what it might mean to be *gay*. Roughly the same age, university educated, from affluent backgrounds and making little effort to involve women, Çakmak remembers, for instance, 'there were fierce debates [. . .] about the participation of trans people [. . .] [and] in the end [. . .] trans people were excluded.' Against Mürmann's explicit advice (İnce 2014b), the conditions that the Rainbow Group members insisted on for identifying themselves and being identified by others as *gay* did not follow the semantic contours of how 'gay' was coming to be understood among LSVD members. Rather, the conditions for participation in Rainbow Group recalled by Çakmak – which largely excluded trans people, sex workers and anyone with strong political affiliations to the radical left – followed closely the nuanced meaning of *gay* that had developed by the late 1980s in the emergent club scene around İstiklal Street, specifying one particular sexual variety of man who had sex with men

among others 'on the *piyasa*' according to subtle distinctions of gender, sexuality, class and generation.

State authorities, for their part, had little doubt where the organisational hub of the movement was located. Çakmak recalls when he and his friends went to one of Çaplı's clubs the night before the march:

> We saw a group of soldiers enter the place with their weapons and in military step. We first thought it was one of the costume shows. No one took it seriously. One of the soldiers went up to the DJ cabin and slapped the DJ, and stopped the music by hitting on the record. They seized the clients by their collars, asked their names and hurled them to the ground. They were probably looking for foreign guests. At the end of the night, a lot of people who had nothing to do with the organising were detained. They filled the cars with all the people who were dressed up in interesting fashion. They found the [. . .] T-shirts [for the parade] and took them. The club was vacated and it remained sealed for a while.

Indeed, not only were clubs critical for the initial phases of political mobilisation, but they also proved institutionally vital to the development and consolidation of these political organisations. After the abortive march of 1993 throughout the 1990s, when state authorities forbade Pride marches, Çaplı's clubs and those that had developed after Çaplı's model provided spaces in which the young activists from Rainbow Group could organise parties and reconsolidate into what became Lambdaistanbul, ably assisted by Mürmann, who remained in Istanbul. Çakmak recalls:

> For a while, everyone was dispersed, we had experienced a trauma [. . .] Meetings continued with the core group. It was like group therapy. We talked about topics like how it feels to be gay, we shared our first experiences, told each other about our families, et cetera. It was Lambda's parties that really organised the gays [during the late 1990s]. They were trying to get gays to meet one another. I saw many people for the first time in those parties. They were held in places like 14, Prive, Studio 54. Even if it was hard to reach people, a few hundred came to these parties.

Much as Çaplı's doorkeeping had initially provided a secret society defence for his coterie in the aftermath of the 1980 coup, clubs in the nightlife market around İstiklal Street proved critical in shaping the very possibilities of political organisation around sexual identities during the 1990s, leading up to the first successful Pride march organised by Lambdaistanbul in 2003. Although Lambdaistanbul was to become the city's oldest continuing sexual rights NGO, the 1993 march was by no means the first political action in Istanbul by sexual minorities. Yet, these early mobilisations also began not with small gatherings in private houses but rather 'on the *piyasa*' around İstiklal Street. Ad hoc demonstrations by sex-working *travesti* occurred in the immediate aftermath of the 1980 coup, and the first political organisation in Istanbul that mobilised explicitly for men who have sex with men was not an NGO but a political party. The Radical Democratic Union, a splinter faction of the Workers Party

of Turkey, sought to engage *eşcinsel* men and *travesti* in a broader class-based struggle and organised several protests during the late 1980s (Doğan 2004). If these protests are largely unheralded today in Istanbul, it is because this political organisation fell apart almost immediately after the initial crackdowns. Based on my argument here, I suggest that a key reason the movement was unable to consolidate is that, unlike Lambdaistanbul, the broad coalition of *eşcinsel*, *travesti* and leftists it envisaged had no institutional anchor point on the *piyasa*. It is hard to think of a fixed-place nightlife business around İstiklal Street during the late 1980s that would even let all these people onto their premises, let alone offer this motley the protection of a secret society defence, a real space to explore the political possibilities of any social formation tentatively emerging in their midst.

Conclusion

A language, Ludwig Wittgenstein once opined, 'can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old houses and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods, and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses' ([1953] 1968: 8). *Gay* emerged as a meaningful term for a form of life in Istanbul not in a prosperous modern exurb on the outskirts of the city amid a grid of quiet residential roads, but rather in a busy warren of little laneways and arcades along an old market street, albeit an old market street embarking on one of its fitful periods of gentrification after a time of some social rupture.

If scholars who explain the emergence of *gay* identities in terms of political mobilisation err, I suggest, it is because their various background conceptions of how a language or discourse of sexual identity works lead them to underestimate the facts on the ground necessary for a term such as *gay* to gain any real purchase in a city like Istanbul. Socio-economically, spaces need to be prised open where men can find men for sex beyond their kith and kin, where men can form relations with other men because of their sexual interests, where they can form long-distance relations that reach across the city and beyond, where a man might earn a living and seek a place to live while having sexual relations exclusively with other men. Culturally, while some writers appreciate better than others how qualitatively distinct *gay* is for specifying sexual variety in a city like Istanbul, they typically fail to appreciate the interpretative challenge this poses: a theoretical insistence that 'knowledge is not made for understanding, it is made for cutting' (Foucault 1984: 88) tends to sidestep the empirical question of where exactly people can come to understand what it means to identify themselves and others in terms of such an extraordinary word, not least amid the Borgesian mix of other words for recognising sexual varieties.

My central empirical argument in this article has been that these dimensions of socio-economic and cultural organisation became possible in Istanbul

initially through the institutions of a very particular marketplace that has long afforded a 'promiscuous tumbling in public [. . .] of varieties of men kept carefully segregated in private' and proved vital to how people in the city reckon with sexual variety amid other kinds of variety. Yet, the sexual varieties I have examined do not pattern quite along the lines of Clifford Geertz's 'all out cosmopolitanism in the streets [and] strict communalism in the home', where the way in which a term works to identify oneself or others in the street is 'almost purely positional, location in the general mosaic, leaving the substantive content of the categories, what they mean subjectively as experienced forms of life, aside as something properly concealed in apartments, temples, and tents' (1974: 42). Compared to the ethnic and religious varieties Geertz has in mind, the sexual varieties of men I have analysed depend historically for their very existence on certain kinds of market activity. These relations between men are not embedded in the market, but rather their socio-economic organisation involves a characteristic interplay between embeddedness and dis-embeddedness (Gudeman 2009), as men need a particular kind of marketplace where they can dis-embed themselves incessantly from some relations in the city in order to re-embed themselves into other relations. Moreover, how people come to understand what terms like wheel or *gay* might mean as experienced forms of life in a city like Istanbul is not occulted away in 'apartments, temples, and tents' but rather out there on the street, in the market. To adapt a term from Charles Taylor (1985: 277), the 'spaces of disclosure' where 'things emerge at their fullest, clearest, most salient; where the archetypes emerge perhaps' when it comes to such sexual varieties of men who have sex with men in Istanbul are there in public settings on the *piyasa*, like the derelict churchyard in Küçük Sokak or Çaplı's clubs, each with its own Simmelian reckoning of disclosure and not-knowing.

Rather than grassroots political mobilisation prising open public spaces in Istanbul where men first became able to identify and be identified as *gay*, my secondary argument has been that particular businesses in the nightlife market afforded the very spaces where *gay* men could initially become politically organised and that shaped the forms of political association involving *gay* men who could successfully consolidate in the city. It would be rather hasty, however, to read this microhistory of Istanbul's oldest continuing minority sexual rights NGO as a 'history of the development of the LGBTI+ movement' tout court. If the picture I have sketched of the nightlife market resembles and diverges from Geertz's notion of the market as an enduring space for reckoning with pluralism in the Middle East, the emergent politics in the *piyasa* I have analysed during the 1980s and 1990s around İstiklal Street is both evidence of and caution against a larger notion of a 'market of identities' [*kimlik piyasası*] that some have argued developed in the city during this period, where all identities became 'to an important extent, produced in the context of a marketplace' and 'the politics of identity transformed into a politics over symbols in the context of consumerism' (Navaro-Yashin 2002: 247).

Certainly, I have argued that the ambiguous identity of *gay* organisers on the *piyasa* – customers organising a party, political activists organising an association – proved crucial to the institutional consolidation of a *gay* movement. Yet, not all minority sexual identities were produced in the context of consumption in this marketplace in the same way, which opened divergent trajectories of political organisation during the 1990s. *Travesti*, who were generally barred from being customers at clubs because they were readily identified on the *piyasa* as sex workers, organised initially as vocational associations of workers rather than consumers, particularly in the context of HIV-related public health outreach. *Lezbiyen*, also not readily admitted as customers at many clubs, developed independent NGOs largely outside the nightlife market, especially in the institutional milieu offered by feminist civil society organisations. Lacking the secret society defence afforded by the clubs, however, few of these *travesti* or *lezbiyen* NGOs proved particularly enduring. Having emerged from the protection of the clubs with its own premises in the more relaxed political climate of the early 2000s, it was Lambdaistanbul – still described as late as 1998 as a 'gay men's group' (Kılıç and Uncu 1998) – that was ultimately 'on the ground' to offer a space around İstiklal Street where these varied identities could tentatively organise under the umbrella of an 'LGBTI+ movement'. For a time.

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