

Meetings on Diversity and the Livable City #5

QUEER SPACES: MEMORIES AND MEMORIALS IN ISTANBUL AND AMSTERDAM

Mini-symposium co-organized by the Netherlands Institute in Turkey and the Netherlands Consulate General in Istanbul

Date & time: February 21, 2020, Friday – 18:00 – 20:30

Venue: ANAMED auditorium

Programme

- 18:00 – 18:10 Welcome
- 18:10 – 18:35 Freek Janssens (COC Netherlands & University of Amsterdam)
Gay monuments in queer times
- 18:35 – 19:00 Dilara Çalışkan (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)
"I wish these streets could speak" Curious encounters of family and memory among trans women in Istanbul
- 19:00 – 19:25 İlayda Ece Ova (SU Gender) and Sema Semih (SU Gender)
Curious Steps: Healing through collective walking and storytelling
- 19:25 – 19:40 Coffee break
- 19:40 – 20:00 Concluding remarks by Ayşe Gül Altınay (Sabancı University)
- 20:00 – 20:30 Discussion



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- **Gay monuments in queer times**

By Freek Janssens

When Amsterdam inaugurated the Homomonument in 1987, it was one of the first cities to host a monument dedicated specifically to the lives of gay men and lesbian women. Soon, other cities followed suit. The emergence of transgender activism in the 90s, however, has prompted many gay and lesbian organisations to reinvent themselves as 'LGBT'-organisations, supporting not just gay men and lesbian women, but all sexual and gender minorities. This development presents a challenge to existing monuments that are, quite literally, set in stone. In my presentation, I look at how Homomonument deals with the challenge of being a 'gay monument' in 'queer times.' Based on ethnographic research, I argue that processes of in- and exclusion around Homomonument work both on a discursive and on a social level. Furthermore, I argue that describing Homomonument as a 'queer' space not just hides from view these exclusionary practices, but also leads to semantic inflation of the term 'queer,' both as an identity label as well as a mode of inquiry.

This presentation draws on the fieldwork that Freek Janssens conducted for the Queer Memorials project at the University of Leeds: <https://queermemorials.leeds.ac.uk/>

***Freek Janssens** is an engaged anthropologist working on diversity and inclusion of LGBT people in schools and in society more in general. He is currently programme manager at COC, the Dutch LGBT rights organization and the oldest existing LGBT organization in the world. Besides this, he also teaches at the University of Amsterdam.*

- **"I wish these streets could speak" Curious encounters of family and memory among trans women in Istanbul**

By Dilara Çalışkan

Drawing on 10 years of activism in Turkey's trans movement and ongoing research since 2014, this paper focuses on the everyday experiences of mutually formed mother and daughter relationship among trans women which is often constructed to contend with the ubiquity of social, temporal, economic and legal forms of abandonment. Based on the narratives of trans women who are/were part of this relationship, I argue that trans mother/daughterhoods open spaces to share individual and collective memories of how to live as a trans woman in major cities like Istanbul



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while forming alliances that play and improvise with the social, temporal and discursive archives of urban space.

By focusing on the palimpsestic form of two particular streets in Beyoğlu/Istanbul this paper proposes to trace the circulation of gendered memories of Istanbul within the everyday practices of trans mother/daughterhoods. While chasing memories across time that unexpectedly but constantly come together at certain streets, corners and houses, I ask, how certain spots in the city and memories of women travel in Istanbul among trans mothers and daughters? How existing or demolished buildings as well as seemingly unrecognizable ruins that are unapologetically covered with "promises" of gentrification projects, bring trans mothers and daughters together and play a role in the histories and memories of Istanbul?

***Dilara Çalışkan** is a PhD student in the Anthropology Department and Holocaust, Genocide and Memory Studies with graduate minors in Gender and Women's Studies, and Queer Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She received her MA in Cultural Studies from Sabancı University and worked at SU Gender's Curious Steps between 2014 and 2016. She is also a graduate student fellow of the Center for the Study of Social Difference at Columbia University. Her work focuses on alternative forms of remembering and forgetting that challenges the heteronormative and taken for granted interrelatedness of family, time and memory.*

- **Curious Steps: Healing through collective walking and storytelling**

By İlayda Ece Ova and Sema Semih

Curious Steps Program, conducted by Sabancı University Gender and Women's Studies Center since 2014, brings together diverse groups of people to explore and experience the urban space with gender lens, through collective walking and storytelling. Within the scope of the program, stories of individuals and groups, which have no place in the dominant historical narratives but have traces on the urban landscape, have been searched by young volunteers and shared with diverse publics through "Gender and Memory Walks". Currently organised in three different neighbourhoods of Istanbul, the walks have given voice to the different living places in Istanbul as sites of memory; and the stories have provided perspectives for the project team as well as the participants for dealing with the atrocities of the past, giving a critique of present-day formations of gender and cultural politics in Turkey, and driving a positive social change in terms of reconciliation, justice and democracy. Based on a selection of stories from the program, the healing and transformative effects of the acts of walking and storytelling in the urban context will be discussed in the presentation.



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İlayda Ece Ova has received her BA degree in International Relations at Bilkent University and her MA degree in Sociology and Social Anthropology at Central European University. She has worked as an M&E Officer at an NGO for refugees before joining SU Gender and currently works as a Project Specialist for the GEARING-Roles project, Curious Steps ve Purple Certificate Programs.

Sema Semih was born in 1987 in Istanbul. She studied Philosophy at Boğaziçi University (BA) and Cultural Studies (MA) at İstanbul Bilgi University. She is a project coordinator at Sabancı University Gender and Women's Studies Center of Excellence (SU Gender); working in the projects titled Transformative Activism: Rethinking Gender and Politics (2017-...) and Curious Steps: Gender and Memory Walks since 2016.

Ayşe Gül Altınay received her PhD in Cultural Anthropology from Duke University in 2004 and has been teaching at Sabancı University since 2001. Her research and writing focus on militarism, nationalism, violence, memory, gender, and sexuality. She has been the director of Sabancı University Gender and Women's Studies Center of Excellence since 2016. She is recently among the editors and authors of the volume "Women Mobilizing Memory" (2019, Columbia University Press). She co-edited "Gendered Wars, Gendered Memories: Feminist Conversations on War, Genocide and Political Violence" (2016, Routledge) with Andrea Pető.



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