



Gender, Place & Culture

A Journal of Feminist Geography

ISSN: 0966-369X (Print) 1360-0524 (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cgpc20>

The stage: a space for queer subjectification in contemporary Turkey

Eser Selen

To cite this article: Eser Selen (2012) The stage: a space for queer subjectification in contemporary Turkey, *Gender, Place & Culture*, 19:6, 730-749, DOI: [10.1080/0966369X.2012.674923](https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2012.674923)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2012.674923>



Published online: 01 May 2012.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 775



View related articles [↗](#)



Citing articles: 4 [View citing articles](#) [↗](#)

The stage: a space for queer subjectification in contemporary Turkey

Eser Selen*

Department of Communication Design, Kadir Has University, Istanbul, Turkey

This article focuses on the role of the stage in complex modes of gender performativity in the work of three Turkish performers: Zeki Müren (1931–1996), Bülent Ersoy (b. 1952), and Seyfi Dursunoğlu (b. 1932) a.k.a. Huysuz Virjin [Cranky Virgin]. These three, I suggest, are the pioneers of contemporary Turkish queer performance. Their performances – both on- and off-stage – are validated through a reiterative absence of queerness in their everyday lives and stand in the midst of various negotiations between queers and the secular Islamic nation-state in Turkey. In the works of Müren, Ersoy, and Huysuz, the stage is suggestive of a space where queerness can be managed. It is a contested space that does at least allow for the communication of queer ideas to a wider audience. I discuss the works of these three performers as three variations of queerness in Turkey in relation to different eras and different political climates that are directly related to the nation-state's desire to perform modernity. While explicating complicated modes of gender performativity, I consider the stage as the primary space for a queer body to exist. Through this discussion, I aim to activate debates both within and against the context of secular Islam, on gendered political space, and on those overlooked sexualized spaces in which the nation-state produces powerful yet unstable values to manage queer subjectivity in contemporary Turkey.

Keywords: stage; space; queer; gender performativity; contemporary Turkey

Prologue

When I was 12, I overheard a conversation between my mother and a taxi driver about a famous transsexual singer in Turkey, Bülent Ersoy. As my mother and I sat quietly, the taxi driver looked indignantly at us through the rear view mirror: 'He did everything he could to be a woman', spat the driver, 'he even got the operation and all, but what's with the voice? It ain't gonna change, it'll stay the same'. I do not remember whether the driver was more distressed by the singer's transsexuality or by her voice. Perhaps he thought Bülent Ersoy's operation would magically take away the markers of the voice that demarcate gender. However, I do recall how I felt: uneasy, uncanny, queer. My mother, on the other hand, seemed anxious when she replied: 'I don't know'. Her tone was uninviting, attempting to quell the conversation. Why was a Turkish taxi driver speaking of sexuality and sex changes in front of her prepubescent daughter? But it is not only my mother's voice that I still remember; it is the taxi driver's insistent claim that a voice could stifle new constructions of gender and sexuality that I recall now as vibrantly as when I was 12. And now, in Ersoy's voice, I almost hear that queer feeling I experienced at that age: confused but intrigued.

*Email: eselen@khas.edu.tr

Introduction

In everyday contexts, the stage as a space bridges and challenges the divide between public and private space. By 'stage' I refer to any environment in which a performer and audience meet. It is part of the public sphere, but stages a private space. While it is undeniable that a performance on a theatrical stage differs from a stage performance broadcast on television, I intend to address the role of the stage as a significant space for queer subjectivity without establishing restrictions on the differences between the concert hall, theater or TV broadcast.¹ The stage, as an ideal, enables communication through notions of privacy and intimacy. That is, in persistently upholding powers of social production, the stage enables, in many cases, intimacy, through interaction between the performer and the audience in a given space.

This article focuses on the role of the stage in complex modes of gender performativity in the work of three Turkish performers: Zeki Müren (1931–1996), Bülent Ersoy (b. 1952) and Seyfi Dursunoğlu (b. 1932) a.k.a. Huysuz Virjin [Cranky Virgin]. Their performances – both on- and off-stage – stand in the midst of various negotiations between queers and the secular Islamic nation-state in Turkey. Taking into account that the patriarchal notion of modernity in Turkey is crucial to understanding the current state of affairs. Strong beliefs in secularism, scientific positivism and modernity shape lifestyles in contemporary Turkey, yet they coexist with the Islamic faith. Since Turkey is often argued to be the most 'secular' Islamic society, it is necessary to evaluate how modernization reforms and discourses on citizenship in the Republic encompass and simultaneously erase ethnicity, religiosity, gender and sexuality.² This in turn leads to a question about whether religious patriarchy truly differs from secularism in a nation-state that has aspired to modernity.

These three performers, I argue, are the pioneers of Turkish contemporary queer performance. I propose, however, that their performances are validated through a reiterative absence of queerness in their everyday lives. This is a form of disembodiment in which these performers sacrifice³ their queerness offstage to be able to perform the queer onstage. This disembodiment may be forced or voluntary, real or imaginary, but always emerges from the absence of the body and returns to the subjectivity of the body as the sacrificed. A Lacanian 'lack' (Lacan 1977) reveals itself in the social construct of this process, and this lack results from a sacrificial process which assigns their performances as work onstage and renders their subjectivity as consumption offstage. This lack, however, related to queer performers, exists at all times in the everyday life of queer subjects, and can be seen in their struggle for rights as citizens. What remains unspoken in the process is the 'work of sacrifice'⁴ which is the product of the relationship between these performers and their mass audiences.

From the perspective of an economy of recognition, the work of sacrifice is defined as the unseen activity that precedes and makes labor possible. It refers to the contribution of the subject to the community and the human condition, while also being kept outside of the accepted borders of society. In the context of queer subjectification, 'the work of sacrifice' suggests an economy in which the sacrificial subject suffers from an absence of her subjecthood in every social and political domain in Turkey. The work of sacrifice provides an opportunity to question the vulnerability of the sacrificial body. For Müren, Ersoy and Huysuz, the work of sacrifice can be traced, however ephemerally, in their works and lives. Throughout the article, I engage the performativity of these subjects as displays of the work of sacrifice, or conversely, of their subjecthood sacrificed by the patriarchal subject.

Each of these performers represents queerness differently, traveling as they do the gamut of closeted to disclosed and 'disidentified'⁵ (Muñoz 1999). For example, Zeki Müren, considered a major singer in Turkish music, remained in the closet until the day he

died. At times he hinted at a non-heterosexual orientation, saying, for example, ‘I have murmurs too’ (Seçkin 1998, 60).⁶ However, understanding what Müren implied here requires a queered awareness of the word ‘murmur’, [*mırmır*] which refers to his barely audible non-heterosexual desire. Albeit closeted, Müren performed queerness onstage, and even on Turkish national television, as a cross-dresser. His work of sacrifice is located in his attempts to disclose his sexual orientation through his voice and performance, queering many assumptions on gender, and sexuality in contemporary Turkey.

Bülent Ersoy, in contrast, is a gender-transcending icon of liberation who transformed herself in turn from man to transvestite, transsexual and a heterosexual woman. Her iconic status is profoundly queer since she was the first public persona to be an ‘out’ homosexual even before she considered sexual reassignment surgery (SRS) from male to female. Despite being the first transsexual performer in Turkey to medically ‘correct’ her sex, her later disavowal of transexualism marks the return of the repressed every time she performs. Yet, ironically, her performance challenges her disavowal; her voice demarcates her transexualism, registering her transphobia as a negative effect in her work of sacrifice. The value in her work of sacrifice, however, suggests that there are at least possibilities for queers to exist by way of stage performance.

Seyfi Dursunoğlu, through his drag queen stage character, Huysuz Virjin, a.k.a Huysuz, impersonates well-known typologies of drag acts: the diva and the harlot. Offstage he uses his given name, Seyfi Dursunoğlu, and has repeatedly claimed to be neither heterosexual nor homosexual but asexual. While I take his claim of asexuality offstage as queerness extending toward gender and sexual variances, Dursunoğlu’s asexuality is also associated with the work of sacrifice through sustaining a certain queer livelihood by means of ‘masking’ his sexuality behind an imaginary gender queer body on stage.

These three performers’ works relate to the indivisibility of public and private spaces in Turkish society, which nonetheless are always gendered, in the following ways: (1) they create *spatial practices* for queerness in a secular but Islamic nation that renders queer subjects either as invisible or abject; (2) they perform different variations of queerness to a large audience of Turkish citizens, producing a particular Turkish queer subjectivity in various *representational spaces* (in a proscenium theatre and in everyday life) and in different sectors of the entertainment industry (by releasing albums, appearing on the television screen, and acting in films) and (3) these performers embody *representations of spaces* that are lacking in the nation-state in the quotidian, and they sacrifice who they are offstage to be onstage.⁷ As such, they represent prime examples of how the work of sacrifice is necessary for queer subjects to exist in the secular Islamic nation-state of Turkey.

While exploring queerness in this context, I consider the stage to be a potent space which allows a queer body to exist. By discussing these three artists’ performances, I aim to activate debates both within and against the context of secular Islam, on gender political space and on those overlooked sexualized spaces in which the nation-state produces powerful yet unstable values to manage queer subjectivity in contemporary Turkey. My use of the term queer is an attempt to provide alternative modes of identification that include gender identities and sexualities as well as forms of religion, ethnicity, race and nationality in the ways in which queer deconstructs self-identity. More specifically, I apply Judith Butler’s method of ‘[t]he political deconstruction of “queer”’ (Butler 1993, 229) as I look in particular into how gender performativity in the work of Müren, Ersoy and Huysuz overrides the Turkish nation-state’s prescriptive national identification based on gender and sexuality. Therefore, my focus on the performativity of gender and sexuality requires a queer theoretical perspective.

The stage, in between public and private: a queer space

The Turkish language does not yet have a term to designate queer subjects, yet some politically inclined intellectuals dealing with the issue of gender have been debating whether or not to use the term queer, and if so, how to use it. Some have argued that it should not be used at all, and there is substantial resistance to the term queer on behalf of many LGBTTT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Transsexual) activists and individuals. Significantly, the notion of queer, theoretically and practically, represents a ground for the political component of gender and studies of sexuality while being both a challenging and productive area on its own. Nevertheless, the term's continued absence hints at the element that ties Müren, Ersoy and Huysuz's identifications as queer on the stage in contemporary Turkey.

In their works, the stage is suggestive of a space where queerness can be managed. It is a contested space that, at the very least, allows for the communication of queer ideas to a wider audience. The stage is the space where queers dress up, make-up and perform. They are adored and visible onstage, but condemned and invisible offstage. Their performances onstage benefit from illusory re-creations in and of architectural space, while the saturation of the visual and audial generates possible intimacies with the audience that do not extend into daily life. Whether on- or off-stage, in or out of drag, gender is performatively aligned, socially constituted and thereby differentiated from an 'a priori' normal. This sense of normalcy has a space and place where gender is differentiated and, equally importantly, rendered different through certain techniques. Gender performativity in relation to the queer body is significant; so too is the means by which that queer body subsists. The queer body onstage not only complicates gender performativity but also proposes a distinctive optic in perceptions of gender.

Drawing on the work of Judith Butler, David Bell and Gill Valentine propose that they 'begin to understand the role of performativity and theatricality in constructing the self, and space, as prediscursively straight' (Bell and Valentine 1995, 2). The significance of space and place in gender performativity, constituted in a heteronormative matrix, is an intriguing way to respond to the many criticisms of Butler's discussions of drag. Bell and Valentine's argument that the self in a given spatial setting is prediscursive indicates how the self is constituted in a heteronormative matrix and how these constitutions are dominated by straight discourses. But how straight is the space of the stage?

Spatially, the stage presents challenges to public/private space dichotomy, both theoretically and politically.⁸ While each term encapsulates a part of the other's meaning, the distinction in public/private is forever ambiguous. A stage is as much private as it is public. For instance, a stage is a part of a building which is considered to be public space and yet it has, and is, a private interior. During a performance, however, the space of the stage remains private, as it is exclusively reserved for the use of the performer; nonetheless, it simultaneously retains its public exterior, and thus presents us with the interconnectedness of public and private space by being both open and closed and hence both vulnerable and secure. The stage as a performative space is analogous to Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's conception of the queer world: 'A space of entrances, exits, unsystematized lines of acquaintance, projected horizons, typifying examples, alternate routes, blockages, incommensurate geographies' (Berlant and Warner 2002, 198). It is a space that is permissive for queer encounters to the extent that, at times, it even becomes queer friendly. The same person who discriminates against queers in a public space may enjoy a queer performance on stage in public. The stage, therefore, is a space that dilutes homophobia/transphobia, if not erasing it, until the end of a show. Queer bodies pertain to a

subjectification onstage, as seen in the works of Müren, Ersoy and Huysuz, as they sustain their absence off stage because of the subjectification that the queer entails.

In Turkey, these performers fill a sense of lack by producing willful queer responses through their presence onstage and absence offstage. They do this through the very elements bound to notions of representation, such as language or discourse, and visibility or display. These three artists should therefore be understood as representing major challenges to heteronormativity when performing onstage, yet while offstage they subordinate themselves to queer repression. This is a form of the work of sacrifice, the continuing work of the queer subject in Turkey. There is ambivalence, however, in relation to how these performances are accepted in a heteropatriarchal society where values are strictly connected to notions of secular Islam. Treatment of these performers in relation to the policies of the Turkish nation-state has thus far been repressive and always resulted in violence at the cost of queer subjectivity in attempts to conform to heterosexual patriarchal normalcy, especially as regards how queerness is managed onstage and subjected to repression offstage. While their performances suggest that the opportunity for queers to exist is present in Turkey, I argue that a series of public policies need to be constructed by the nation-state so that queers can become citizen subjects, policies which should include the issues of gender and sexuality, as well as ethno-racial and religious rights for citizenship. This process, however, would require a radical cultural transformation in the structure of core beliefs concerning identity in Turkey.

Queer management: religious versus secular space in contemporary Turkey

Institutionalized (secular) Islam in Turkey plays a major role in queer management, as religion is a marker of identification in state policy: a child is both gendered and 'religioned' at birth, constituted as female/male and Sunni Muslim.⁹ By queer management I mean the ways in which the state regulates gender and sexual variance, renders queer subjects invisible and further represses queerness through enforced policies, traditional norms and moral values. While the secular nature of the Turkish Republic is revered by many, Islam is often held up as a paragon of the essence of Turkish culture. In this context, queerness is stringently repressed by religiously informed normatives of the nation, and the stage represents the sole avenue for tacitly accepted queer expression.

In *Secularisms*, Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini suggest that 'the body's pivotal place in the religion/secularism couple helps to illuminate just why and how some bodies cannot win (women, for example, or homosexuals), no matter which side of the religion-secular divide they come to occupy' (Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2008, 22). They advocate 'multiple shifts in perspective' (*ibid.*, 16) from complications arising from the divide between secularism and religion. Following their suggestion and acknowledging that 'secularism is inflicted by religions (and vice versa)' (*ibid.*) opens up a generative space to demonstrate how queer management functions, taking into account both secularism and Islam rather than re-creating the 'divide' it has supposedly imposed.

Despite their seemingly paradoxical existence, both secularism and Islam justify various forms of aggression, as seen in the hate speeches and violence which queer subjects face. This echoes the paradoxical structure of Turkey as not only an Islamic but also a secular nation-state. Sunni Islam, as the dominant religion, determines how citizenship is established. Religion inscribes identification through state policy, yet disciplines this identification in secular regulations. The nation-state guarantees that religion will not interfere with state regulations, but controls the conditions of performances through intricate censorship mechanisms, based on Turkish moral values derived from religious and secularist ideals.

To cite an example, in December 2007, the Turkish Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) banned Huysuz's drag show from Turkish televised media on the premise that the council did not want to see men impersonating women on TV. In response, for over a year Seyfi Dursunoğlu performed out of drag while keeping his show similar in structure to 'Huysuz'. Two years after the ban, Huysuz returned to the screen. In another instance, one viewer penned a letter to Dursunoğlu stating, 'It is not acceptable in our religion for a man to put on a show as a woman', and asked: 'Are you aware that you are going to hell?' (Atay et al. 2004, 259). Queers are often subject to contentions that they will 'go to hell', and the secular nation-state provides no protection for queer citizenship. While arguments based on tenets of Islamic prescription, which, like the other Abrahamic faiths prohibit homosexuality, attempt to circumscribe narratives of gender, the 'secular' nation-state empowers such claims through official support of Sunni Islam as an integral part of Turkish national culture and identity. Accordingly, the nation-state constructs its secular policies with complete erasure of, and opposition to, queer subjectivity, and the stage represents the only arena for expression thereof.

Jakobsen and Pellegrini point out, in Foucauldian terms, how and why power/knowledge informs this religion/secularism 'couple' and thus operates as a detriment for 'some bodies (homosexuals and women)'. Their argument is particularly relevant in the case of Turkey, where both disciplinary and biopower are subject to state regulation. The ideals of citizenship restrict a subject's sovereignty, which is disciplined for homogenic identification via powers exercised by the nation-state, most notably over women and queers. Both these powers – constituted as bodily disciplines – are articulated around sexuality, religiosity and nationality, and reinforce one another. The nation-state refuses to grant the most vulnerable right, the right to exist, to its LGBTTTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual and Queer) citizens. The most efficient regulation of gender and sexual variance in Turkey is refusal to recognize gender and sexual identification by rendering these subjects invisible or non-existent at the state level. While homosexuality is not illegal in Turkey and homosexual sex is not a criminal act, there is significant pressure to remain closeted due to institutional prejudices that include the threat of job loss without compensation.¹⁰ Furthermore, the secular nation-state itself creates the current marginalization of, and discrimination against, the country's LGBTTTQ population. For example, unregistered prostitution, one of the few ways transgendered women can earn a living in major cities, is heavily persecuted and carries the constant risk of beatings, rape and murder. In the last four years, the murders of more than 30 people working in the sex industry, including gay men and transgendered people, remain uninvestigated.

The documentary *Yürüyoruz, 2006 (We Are Marching)*, directed and produced by two queer artists, Aykut Atasoy and Boysan Yakar, partially illustrates the violence which transsexuals face in Turkey. The film documents a rally for LGBTTT visibility and rights in Bursa, Turkey, which resulted in a violent backlash against the activists by members of the public. In 2006, LGBTTT activists gathered in Bursa to protest the local governments of Ankara, Istanbul and Bursa, following the public prosecution of four non-governmental LGBTTT organizations. The four associations, namely *Kaos GL* [Chaos – Gay and Lesbian], *Bursa Gökkuşakı* [Bursa Rainbow], *Lambdaistanbul* and *Pembe Hayat* [Pink Life], were asked, under threat of legal action, to remove the words 'lezbiyen' ['lesbian'] 'gey' ['gay'], 'biseksüel' [bisexual] and 'transeksüel' ['transsexual'] from all their communications. On 6 August 2006, members of these organizations, together with LGBTTT activists from various cities across the country, met in Bursa for a rally to claim and protect their legal and democratic rights. Acting in concert, the groups released a statement to the press early that morning. Before the rally began, supporters of a local football team, Bursaspor, organized

an Internet forum to prevent the rally at any cost. One member of the forum wrote: ‘We have to stop them! . . . Let’s attack these creatures on Sunday before the match’ (Atasoy and Yakar 2006). When LGBTTT protestors met on Sunday morning in front of the premises of the newly banned *Bursa Gökkuşığı* Association, there were already around 300 policemen in and around the area of the demonstration. The officer in charge told the activists to get back into the building because the football supporters were extremely incensed and appeared ready to attack. He also stated that if the groups insisted on marching, he would be forced to arrest them, despite the fact that they had not committed any illegal acts. The activists went inside the building to regroup. Meanwhile, crowds outside the building chanted: ‘Die, die, die, you will die, you will see, motherfuckers!’ (*ibid.*).

Hours later, the LGBTTT activists were able to leave the building, but immediately forced onto a bus. As they left, fanatics started stoning the vehicle and the activists had to lie on the floor to protect themselves. Escorted by police, the activists were taken directly to an intercity bus terminal instead of the protest. The march was thereby impeded by both the homophobic crowds rallied by regional football league supporters as well as the police. Concerning the attempted protest in Bursa, one commentor on the football team’s website forum wrote: ‘One should burn them alive just like Hitler did! But the thing is, those freaks are defaming our [city of Bursa’s] reputation. I am anti-travestite . . . Do you know why? Because I am from Bursa!’ (*ibid.*). Two irrational motives lie behind this commentator’s hate-speech act: both his hypernationalistic and simultaneously parochial gender identities. Bursa is sometimes referred to derogatorily as rife with homosexuality, and it is also the city where Zeki Müren was born and raised. With this speech, the commentator reclaims Bursa as a city free of queers, while performing misogyny to the extent of desiring the total annihilation of queers.¹¹

Despite their established status as recognized and beloved figures in the Turkish media and society, neither Müren nor Ersoy or Huysuz participated in these protests. On the contrary, their visibility in LGBTTT activism has remained insignificant and reductive. Furthermore, all three performers have made significant homophobic claims. These include: Ersoy’s statement that she has nothing to do with the Turkish LGBTTT community, since she identifies herself as a heterosexual woman, not a transsexual; Dursunoğlu’s aversion to homosexuals in his statement that he neither likes nor wants to be around ‘these kind of people’;¹² and Müren’s notoriety as a ladies’ man, as evidenced by the claim he had sexual relations with over 100 women in his heyday as a performer (Türker 1998, 40).

As much as their performances produce value to validate queer existences onstage, I propose that these claims are detrimental to Turkish queers’ existence offstage. The discomfort these performers express regarding queerness hinders any possibility of attaining value outside their onstage performances. Significantly, however, the popularity of their queer performance is not just because they are excellent performers, but also because their performances and characters are performatively aligned as out-of-the-ordinary in relation to the heteronormative social matrix. In return, offstage they not only sacrifice what is queer in them but also negate the very possibility of a life that requires no sacrifice.

Zeki Müren: spaces of difference in the closet

In “‘Alaturka fantasies’: Deceit, the voice and the arabesk stage in Turkey’, Martin Stokes claims that ‘[m]any Turkish musicians stress the paramount importance of being understood, of revealing meaning and expression’ (Stokes 1992, 57). Indeed, Zeki Müren has been praised for being highly skilled as a singer and performer, as well as for being very adept with handling the nuances of the Turkish language. These capabilities aligned him

with the secularist and reformist tradition of the Kemalist regime, as both a 'true' Turkish citizen and member of the elite. Many fans, including the media, referred to him as a 'Pasha' (a heroic military commander). When asked why he allowed himself be addressed as such, he cunningly replied, 'They will not call me a faggot if they call me Pasha'.¹³

Müren's artistic excellence in singing, together with his commitment to Turkish classical music, has been held in high regard, and in 1991, he was endowed with the honor of 'State Artist' for his lifetime of musical achievement. Müren's iconic status as the Republican ideal of a well-spoken, educated and sophisticated modern Turkish man and gifted artist illustrates the complexity of national identity bound up with paradoxical conceptions of transvestism and masculinity. He not only introduced queer to Turkish audiences with his unique style in (cross) dressing but also pioneered the closeting of a public figure's same-sex desire. His gender and sexuality have been an issue of debate since his debut in an hour-long radio program at the beginning of his career in 1951, after which many listeners dwelled on his gender status: Was it a she or a he? (Kahraman 2003, 19). Listeners' desire to locate his gender and sexuality led to a curious pseudo-phallic ambiance around his personality, registering his voice as timeless, intrusive and captivating. The invisible space of a radio station, his first stage, provoked a desire for both his personality and his performance. The voice that came out of the tiny space of the radio speakers phantasmatically introduced queer to Turkish listeners.

The ambiguity of gender in Müren's voice allowed him to maintain a style of his own. So what exactly is the relationship between Müren's male sex and alleged homosexuality and his soft, but weighty and cautiously dramatic, but at the same time festively lyrical, gendered voice?¹⁴ Butler warns us against assumptions of sex and sexuality as she argues for a non-constructed or non-determined scheme of sexuality that should be evaluated in relation to the subject's other identifications (Butler 1993, 95). In Müren's case, although his sexuality was questioned, his sex never was. He was, after all, an exemplary male citizen of the Turkish Republic. The ambivalence about his sexuality was a result of his stage presence, as reflected in his vocal performance and appearance. He often dramaturgized lyrics with his gestures, while the hint of alto added more than just color to his vocal performance.

Müren's shows usually took place in three parts accompanied by three different costume changes. He designed his own costumes as well as those of his musicians and backing vocalists, and also the décor for his performances and the choreography of the dancers. He would start his performance dressed in a tuxedo and sing major works from Ottoman court/Turkish classical music. While performing these songs, Müren would adopt a fixed posture and gaze to signal his respect for this genre, as if there was nothing between him and the music. Following these heavy and slow-paced pieces, he would move on to lighter songs from Turkish art music, wearing more colorful suits. Finally, Müren would appear in suits with sparkling accessories or even mini-skirts with platform shoes and sing popular, dynamic, fast-paced tunes without regard to genre.

Müren's endeavors may illuminate why the space of the stage resists heteronormativity. The costume changes between his performances are significant since, through them, Müren gradually revealed the essence of his performance, which can be described as 'idiosyncratic camp'.¹⁵ The stage was thus the space where he opened his closet to his audience figuratively. Onstage, Müren came out of his homosexual closet, metaphorically, each time with a new performance and new spectacular costumes. As he changed his costumes, he also changed his interaction with the audience, transforming his gender identity before their very eyes on stage. The impact of his stage presence, however, was not just related to his costumes or vocal performance.

As a gifted designer, Müren introduced numerous innovations to the stage in Turkish entertainment. Inspired by Western examples, he adopted a T-shaped platform, having it installed as an extension of the stage (for a proscenium theatre stage) or as a raised aisle that cut through the audience (for a platform stage) to enable more intimate interaction. These applications, together with his use of a handheld microphone, allowed him to be seen and heard from all angles. The T-shaped platform created a sexually charged space that privileged interaction, while the amplification allowed by the handheld microphone eliminated the distance between the body of Müren and the body of the audience. Every member of the audience was as close to him as if he was singing solely for them. The sexually charged connotation of this spatiality was unmistakable: his amplified voice penetrated his audience's ears as if he was physically penetrating them. In Müren's body, the juxtaposition of private and public space converged, corporeally and phantasmatically. The stage is the queer measure of Müren's world-making audially, visually and affectively.

After a performing career of over 40 years, Müren remains an icon and inspiration for younger artists and queers in Turkey.¹⁶ Many Turkish queers model themselves after him, and he was known as a perpetual melancholic and loner. Melancholy both as an affect and a 'structure of feeling' (Williams 1977) was the immanent vehicle of communication between Müren and his audience. He was aware of the prohibitions and taboos on homosexuality, especially how homosexuality might have affected him as an icon of modern Turkish men and as a performer. His work of sacrifice was the source of his melancholy.¹⁷ Müren's loss, as phantasmatic as it might have been, was central to his queer subjectivity, as he neither avowed nor disavowed either homosexuality or heterosexuality. His gender ambivalence remained existential to his stage performance and his work, for which he sacrificed his queer subjectivity offstage. Between the 'manly' and the 'unmanly', the ways by which he managed his queer subjectivity are emblematic, exemplary and perhaps indicative of an economy where his work of sacrifice was rendered valuable.

Bülent Ersoy: in search for a space for freedom between the ward and the restroom

Bülent Ersoy began performing as a male singer in the restricted political atmosphere of the 1970s. Those years were marked by tensions between official state secularism and Islamism, leading to fears of a religious revolution, and violent confrontations between left and right wing political parties led to widespread destabilization. In 1971, a military ultimatum set the stage for a coup as various revolutionary movements (Islamic, communist and socialist) coalesced and as armed revolutionary groups began taking action. While many in Turkey saw the coup as a necessary means to deal with the dire economic situation and safeguard the future of the state, some intellectuals and many of their queer subjects were justifiably alarmed. The military's nationwide intervention began on 12 September 1980, and trials and disappearances began soon thereafter. Estimates of the number of people detained after the coup vary from a quarter to over half a million, and nearly a quarter of a million were tried and some 14,000 lost Turkish citizenship. In addition, a great many of detainees were tortured. Many intellectual figures and artists, including queer and transgendered public figures, were affected by the coup, and some either left the country because of explicit or implicit threats or for fear of imprisonment.

Like Bülent Ersoy, Müren, and Huysuz also performed in the most popular nightclubs in Turkey, and have taken leading roles in various films. However, they all have also been banned from national television channels and repeatedly barred from making public appearances at various times. These bans were lifted when and if they 'chose' to perform in 'proper' masculine attire. Müren avoided these bans except for one time, when the

military intervened in 1960. Müren specifically declared that his make-up and costumes were necessary for his stage performance and that he was not impersonating women. Before her SRS, Ersoy performed in a white tux on TV. Although gender ambiguity was tolerated on stage if not expressed freely on a daily basis before the military intervention, after the coup, artistic expression and entertainment were strictly monitored, to the extent that ambiguous areas of tolerance disappeared. The military negatively 'recognized' gender and sexual variance, forcing many queers to choose between leaving the country or accepting a sharply restricted public presence. During period of military rule after 1980, all queer performers were banned from the stage, from public appearances, and from national television channels, whether in drag or performing as transvestites or transsexuals. In other cases, discrimination against queer performers and also artists was made explicit in the form of revoked citizenship and exile. There was no apparent basis for the stage ban or persecution other than the fact of their public presence, but somehow they were aligned with the left-leaning intellectuals, 'the anarchists' in the eyes of the military. After the country returned to civilian rule in 1983, LGBTT politics gradually gained ground for the first time in the cities of Istanbul and Ankara, followed by Bursa, Izmir and Diyarbakır. These movements were at first underground, but then slowly began to emerge despite strong resistance.

A week before the 12th September military coup in 1980, Bülent Ersoy was taken into police custody after exposing her hormonally produced breasts to an audience, but was released on the same day. At the time she was a pre-operation transsexual and performing at various venues, such as the Izmir International Fair. When she later exposed her breasts in public again, she was arrested and jailed, followed by a court order to desist. A black and white newspaper image on the day after this arrest shows Ersoy and her lawyer among five heavily armed military guards. Men on each side surround her as she is taken into custody, dressed in a casual outfit with headscarf and sunglasses. The image was captured as they were walking toward the camera, in a hurry because of the media around them. With armed men on either side of her, the photograph also displays how she was forcefully contained in a male-dominated space, to be taken figuratively as a heteronormative space, and literally as well, as she was taken into the prison ward.

After arrest in 1980, Ersoy was placed in isolation in a room adjacent to the prison's kitchen because the authorities could not decide which ward would be appropriate for her. During this time, the coup leaders published a memorandum, signed by President Kenan Evren, banning stage and public performances of all male singers who impersonated women, clearly targeting Ersoy. She left the country in 1981, spending much of the next 3 years in exile in Europe. While in Britain, Ersoy underwent SRS, which was illegal in Turkey at the time. Ersoy returned to Turkey after her operation, and had her sex registered as female by a gynecologist. However, she was still denied the pink ID card,¹⁸ which would have officially registered her as a woman in the eyes of the state. Her operation received extensive coverage in the Turkish media, ranging from condemnation to messages of support for her decision (Şen 2005, 282). While the public debated her gender and sexuality, she was struggling with the Supreme Court of Appeals, which declined to recognize her identification as a woman, and with the government, which banned her stage appearances. In an interview, Ersoy stated:

I'd like to be a lady. I live in a black world. I've cried for eight months ... I'm a complete woman ... If there were science, intelligence, and reason, no one would claim that I'm a man. One of these reports was obtained from the public registration office and the other is the decision of the court ... I thought this is what society wants me to be ... I'd like to be a lady, a lady, is this a crime? If I'm disgusting, I can find a solution to cleanse myself ... (Şen 2005, 282).

In 1982, Ersoy attempted suicide, and after a short period of rehabilitation left the country again. The reason for her attempt was closely related to the oppressive nature of her circumstances. While the state refused to recognize her 'sex change', she was also experiencing a severe case of internalized transphobia and social stigmatization, and she became convinced that she was repulsive and not worthy to live. As Petra Doan has argued, the 'serious consequence of gender variance is the high level social stigma attached to transgressing norms of gender presentation' (Doan 2007, 61). Doan refers to the 'internalization of this stigma' as a major cause of the suicides and attempted suicides that are alarmingly common among transgendered individuals (*ibid.*).¹⁹ Clearly, suicide among LGBTTT individuals should not be taken lightly, and Ersoy's famous song '*İtirazım Var*' ['I Protest'], a piece she recorded in Germany after her suicide attempt, is a woeful, painful representation of her condition:

I protest against this cruel destiny
 I protest against such endless grief.
 ... This life doesn't make me long for Hell.

The lyrics of the song eloquently describe her different states of being: from anger to frustration, from betrayal to deception, but most importantly, from melancholy to desperation. Before her operation, Ersoy performed as a male lead singer in glamorous nightclubs and as a lead actor in respected Turkish films. Following her stage ban, however, she was no longer offered concert venues and was only cast in B films, where she played the whore or the mistress. Although she was able to record and perform in Germany, she remained quite dissatisfied; she had sacrificed much for nothing and she felt as if her life had become 'hell on earth'.

In search of a queer space between the private and public, Doan utilizes Edward Soja's terms 'thirdspace' and 'Foucauldian heterotopia' in relation to queer spaces as a kind of thirdspace that 'occurs in the margin of society' (Doan 2007, 57).²⁰ According to Doan, thirdspace reifies the problematics of any given space in so far as gendered and sexualized subjects are concerned, such as intercity buses, public restrooms, schools, hospitals and government institutions (*ibid.*). As Ersoy fought for her rights and recognition to access such public spaces as a woman, she said:

If I'd like to go to a Turkish bath, which one should I choose? What about the toilet? Should I go to the men's or the ladies'? Let's say I'll take a plane. Who will search me? A policeman or a policewoman? What about the prison? The women's ward or the men's ward? What will happen to me since I no longer can be a man again? (Şen 2005, 282).

Doan's pursuit of a queer space is also reflected in Ersoy's queries regarding the heteronormative construction of public spaces in Turkey. The heteronormativity of the prison ward as a space and state-run institution resonates in Doan's discussions about the negation of queer subjects in public spaces.

In his 'Ghosts of public sex: Utopian longings, queer memories', José Muñoz looks at 'gay male cultural works' in relation to queer politics and spaces to actualize a space outside of heteronormativity, which he calls 'moments of *queer utopian memory*' (Muñoz 1996, 357). As a space that makes possible sexual exchanges restricted by gender, men's public restrooms in the city, according to Muñoz, are haunted spaces, layered with memories, ghosts (referring to AIDS victims), longing and utopia. Extending his analysis from the sexual spatiality of restrooms to the utopianism of queer politics, he claims:

[Q]ueer politics ... needs a real dose of utopianism. Utopia lets us imagine a space outside of heteronormativity ... More importantly, utopia offers us a critique of the present of what is, by casting a picture of what can and perhaps will be (Muñoz 1996, 357).

While Muñoz positions the importance of utopianism in relation to queer politics, he also emphasizes the necessity of a space to ground this. Any public restroom, as an everyday

space, can be a starting point to consider the ways in which the heteronormative construction of the social works both for, and against, queer identifications. These are spaces where queers are not made to live, but 'carve out a space for actual, living sexual citizenship' (*ibid.* 357).

Muñoz's discourse on queer utopian memory and Doan's use of thirdspace present a viable arena in which the stage functions as a queer/er space by suggesting an anomaly to the straight dichotomy of public and private space. In addition, Muñoz's declaration of spaces in which queers 'carve out a space for actual, living sexual citizens' is echoed by Ersoy's questions about the construction of public spaces. Indeed, Ersoy was still not 'safe' within the construction of public spaces, even after her operation, so she continued fighting for what she claimed was rightfully hers. She stated:

Today, what is forbidden to me could be forbidden to others tomorrow . . . Turkey is not a democratic country, not in all its institutions. There is no space for freedom of thought or debate.²¹

Even 8 years after the military coup, Ersoy was still trying to find a way back onto Turkish stages, including sending letters to various governmental agencies and the newly elected Prime Minister Turgut Özal.²² Finally, in 1988, in accordance with his modernization and globalization project, Özal lifted the stage ban and allowed Ersoy to enter the country again as a woman.

Özal's endorsement and acknowledgement increased Ersoy's fame and social recognition for the wider Turkish public. The text, however, which lifted Ersoy's ban noted '[t]here is nothing wrong in Bülent Ersoy's being a female impersonator' (Şen 2005, 333). Ersoy accepted the text, despite the incorrect wording, which did not acknowledge her female sex. Eventually, the authorities replaced her blue (male) identity card with a pink (female) card, so she has indeed 'carved' a space 'for freedom of thought or debate'. This recognition marked the beginning of a new chapter in her life, and she began to record more positive songs such as '*Sefam Olsun!*' ['Be It My Pleasure!']. This song stands in clear contrast to '*İtirazım Var!*', in both content and context, as well as in musicality and vocal performance. In this song, she takes pride in showing her satisfaction with the fact that she resides in the patriarchal heteronormative social order as a Turkish woman.

Ersoy, as a disclosed queer, is referred to as *abla* [elder sister] by her fans, in a show of affection and support for her sex change. She herself initiated this sisterhood with a well-known line from one of her songs: 'Your sister will sacrifice herself for you!' ['*Ablan kurban olsun sana!*']. Ersoy's sacrificial offering of herself to her audience should be read as a statement to the public at large, rather than just a sweet sentiment from her to the audience. Her acknowledgement of her sacrificial subjecthood is an honest one, since she believes she should perform a sacrifice to be onstage, and repeat her work of sacrifice as boldly as possible each time she performs.

Although Ersoy is much respected for the caliber of her voice and performance, she is one of the most abhorred personalities in the Turkish transsexual community because of her distance and indifference to fellow transsexuals. She pointedly claims that she does not want to be associated with transsexuals, perhaps fearing that this could tarnish her public image and degrade her 'womanhood'. It is true that, because of Ersoy, sex change operations are now legal in contemporary Turkey and that individuals undergoing such surgery can obtain a state registered ID reflecting their gender and can legally marry. However, her indifference to, and distancing from, the LGBTT community has devalued the credit for what she might have carried, however small or insignificant, in relation to the rights and limited acceptability that transsexualism has deservedly won for itself in Turkey today.

However, as much as Ersoy claims heterosexual womanhood, because of her queer performance, particularly her voice with which she became recognized as a performer even prior to her surgery, her SRS has also contributed to her fame. She continues to receive large sums of money for TV appearances which receive remarkably high viewer ratings. Since these ratings derive from both queer and heterosexual TV viewers around the country who are well informed about Ersoy's past and present, these queer displays take on as much significance as her singing. At this point, one not only hears the work of sacrifice in her voice but also encounters 'transsexualism'²³ publicly through her body, which is sacrificial to her desired existence.

Huysuz Virjin: the body on stage as a/sexualized space

In contrast to his private life, which he described as being 'asexual', Seyfi Dursunoğlu's alter ego Huysuz is a sex-positive woman he refers to as a 'dirty old whore' who knows her way around and has worked her way to the top (Atay et al. 2004, 259). Although glimpses of Müren and Ersoy can be caught in her performances, her gift is clearly elsewhere. Huysuz has powerful theatrics and a versatile sense of using the stage as an elastic space for her entertaining comedy performance which is located between a drag queen and a camp queen.

When Huysuz takes the stage, dancing and singing in full drag, she embodies visible and recognizable female types that are denigrated in Turkish society: a promiscuous woman who is not ashamed to use slang or, more significantly, a woman who has no shame in seducing another woman's husband. Embedded in Turkish culture, gender roles entail the despising of women who act outside moral values. For example, a woman should be discreet, and not refer to her sexuality in public. On stage, Huysuz informs her audience that she is a woman who likes having sex, openly explaining how much she likes 'it' (referring to the penis), and even inviting men (either from among her audience or from her guests) to her home to get laid after the shows. She uses any excuse for making scandalous statements on her TV shows, such as referring to her orchestra as 'homosexuals' when she is annoyed by them. She can say almost anything about sexuality, whether referring to a sexual identification or an act. As she performs her typically scandalous, but extremely entertaining show, she receives unabashed encouragement from her audience in the form of cheering and applause. It would appear that the more sexually loaded Huysuz's role becomes, the more entertaining and desirable it is for Turkish audiences. That is, the more Huysuz performs the 'slut', the more applause she receives. The structure in her stage performance brings a key question to the surface: does the stage transform the public's ideas about women and queers or does it merely reinforce stereotypes?

Her main act, which is a transitional performance on stage, is the song and dance '*Katina'nin Elinde Makası*' ('The Scissors in Katina's Hand'). The song tells the story of the daily life of an Armenian woman whose name is Katina. The ethnicity of this woman is quite significant, given the proximity to queerness of Huysuz's performance. As Huysuz is identified with Katina, the ethnicity of this character plays out an intricate role that works in favor of Huysuz's performance. The allusion to Katina's non-Muslim character brings the audience out of the 'normative' of gender performativity and allows their Turkish moral values and norms to remain 'protected', since the song is about a non-Muslim woman performed by a drag queen who has been identified with Katina over the years.

In 2007, Huysuz performed a full round of 'Katina' for the annual New Year's special show on a private TV channel, *Kanal D* [Channel D], as a guest performer, even though RTUK was in the process of issuing a ban against Dursunoğlu's drag show on TV. Hosted by the renowned Turkish performer Okan Bayülgen, the New Year's show also included

many celebrities from the Turkish media and entertainment industry, carefully picked and placed around a circular eye-level platform, which was added to the deck of the stage where the instrumentalists sat. Behind these guests sat an animated audience, whose ages ranged from 16 to 60. As the familiar tune of 'Katina' was heard, a dancing Huysuz emerged to passionate cheers and applause from the audience. Looking glamorous in a sparkling midi dress, high heels, professional make-up and her trademark Marilyn Monroe style blonde wig, Huysuz immediately stepped down to the circular platform and danced around, welcoming her guests.

One of the most predictable parts of her routine is when Huysuz summons a man from the audience and proceeds to slander his manhood. For this New Year's performance, she picked the most macho looking man available, the husband of a well-known singer, and told him that he looked like a 'bullock'. Although this is the kind of flirting that is common to drag performance everywhere, calling a Turkish man a bullock, which literally means a castrated bull, is quite daring; perhaps a Turkish man would not mind being referred to as a bull, as long as that bull was virile. Later, she called another guy from the audience for a 'quick' dance lesson. She instructed him to imitate her gestures and movements. He complied, but she scolded his poor performance on stage, pushing him to the floor before throwing herself on him so that for the next few minutes they rolled together on the stage. When they both finally got up off the ground, the audience burst into laughter and applauded wildly.

Notably, the sexualized space between Huysuz and her audience grants visibility to an otherwise unacceptable role. No woman in Turkish society would be permitted such behavior. Yet, the man from the audience was thrilled and actually thanked Huysuz and kissed her hand before leaving the platform. Her drag on stage is significant in this way partially because, as Steven Valocchi notes, 'drag queens perform cultural critique by highlighting the performativity of sexual and gender identities and the constructed nature of the normative alignments between anatomical sex, gender role, and sexual identity' (Valocchi 2005, 758). The audience often seems willing to accept her anti-narrative and grotesque display as a show, thereby letting their guard down and allowing the queer to offer the possibility of moments that are socially provocative, yet hidden and protected under the guise of entertainment.

In an extended interview about the life and work of Dursunoğlu and Huysuz Virjin, Dursunoğlu was asked: 'You claim that Turkey wouldn't approve of this [queerness]. Then how do they approve of Huysuz Virjin? Your TV program has always been a show viewed by families, including children' (Atay et al. 2004, 259). Dursunoğlu replied:

What I do *is* something else. I perform one of the most traditional specifics of Turkish theatre, the *zenne*. I put a show as a *zenne* on the stage, I'm performing my *kanto* and then a celebrity joins the show as my guest. I ask such questions to this guest that no one ever dares to ask. I am making such jokes with the guest where the audience says, 'Oh, fortunately you said that' which in turn pleases them. And then they forget that I am impersonating a woman. What matters is the dialogue there. Later I bring some audience members to the stage, and I play with them. I only wear women's clothes. Neither my voice nor my gestures are womanly, with the exception of when I do *kanto*.²⁴ My *kanto* moves are [womanly] (Atay et al. 2004, 260).

Dursunoğlu's claim to be performing *zenne* contradicts his claims about employing neither a womanly voice nor gestures for the drag show he performs as Huysuz. *Zenne* is a Farsi word, which literally translates into English as 'drag queen'. In Turkish, *zenne* means (1) woman [*kadın*] and (2) a female shadow puppet in the traditional Ottoman-Turkish shadow theatre, which is mostly vocalized by a male actor impersonating a female voice.

While Dursunoğlu impersonates a woman, he claims to be a *zenne*, whereas in fact, because a significant part of his show involves dancing, his performance is more akin to *köçek*,²⁵ which is the proper term for the male dancer who belly dances in female drag. The role of *köçek* fits more with late Ottoman traditional entertainment, with its stress on (belly) dancing, which Huysuz's performance includes.

Dursunoğlu accurately claims that what he does is something else because, for the most part, it is not he himself performing, but the persona, Huysuz. He states: 'I always do things which the public will like. I mean, people accepted me, not because I impersonate a woman, but because what I do and say is interesting' (Atay et al. 2004, 260). Indeed, not just what he says, but how he says it is interesting. Butler echoes this idea when she says that drag's powerful allegory relates to audiences' 'fantasies that stabilize *gender*' (Butler 1993, 235). The person on stage is Dursunoğlu, as he repeatedly differentiates his persona from Huysuz. Therefore, the notion of *zenne* in Dursunoğlu's performance operates on different levels. Through a late Ottoman cultural tradition that extends into contemporary Turkish performance, Dursunoğlu not only becomes Huysuz, a *zenne*, when he is in drag, but also a *köçek* while dancing on stage. Dursunoğlu claims that as long as Huysuz pleases the audiences the audience tends to forget that the person on the stage is a man impersonating a woman. He deliberately trusts this dialog between himself and the audience. When the forgetting happens, the illusory reality of the sacrifice reveals itself for Dursunoğlu (somewhat unconsciously) through every single act carried out by Huysuz. The existence of Huysuz, however imaginary, presents a sexually active woman on stage, a *zenne*. Therefore, Dursunoğlu's asexuality is festively sacrificed in the very performance he himself conceived. This can be seen in Dursunoğlu's reply to a hate mail that he received ('but this is my livelihood') (Atay et al. 2004, 259), and this is the moment in which Dursunoğlu and Huysuz are embodied as one. As she affirms his livelihood, Huysuz is Dursunoğlu's work of sacrifice. Huysuz is the one who makes life possible for him, hellish or otherwise.

At the end of her New Year's performance, as the applause continued, Huysuz returned to the stage in a black kimono and high heels. She turned her back to the audience, cast off her wig and turned around. As she took her bow, a different figure was revealed, in between Dursunoğlu and Huysuz, showman and harlot, and yet someone definitely queer. The applause continued as she began singing a song in the style of Zeki Müren. The audience at this point was in tears, both from laughter and the impact of her performance. In the name of these entertaining, but transitory moments, the audience participated in her work of sacrifice while sacrificing their own moral values, the very ones which render them Turkish.

Conclusion

On the stage in contemporary Turkey, the state is confronted with the queer elements of these three artists' performances, bodies and voices. Zeki Müren, for instance, kept his act of difference real and displayed how he really felt in order to obtain the maximum reaction from his audiences onstage, while keeping his sexual identity in the closet offstage. He was not performing (just) for 'entertainment', even though he was the most influential figure of his genre. Müren's work of sacrifice is profound and is shared with many queers, since he neither sacrificed his artistic accomplishments nor performed a sacrifice before his audience; instead, he avoided becoming a sacrifice through his creation of a well-rounded illusory world, and perhaps hoped that no one would notice the difference.

Bülent Ersoy's disclaimed transsexualism has served to increase her income at the expense of all other transsexuals. In contrast to her affluence, most transsexuals in Turkey are poor sex workers, with the minor exception of a few transsexuals performing onstage or able to work elsewhere.²⁶ The only transsexuals who are no longer in prostitution are LGBTT activists who work for major non-governmental organizations actively representing and working toward LGBTT visibility and rights in Turkey. The previously described coverage of an abortive 2006 demonstration in Bursa demonstrates the violence which transsexuals face in Turkey everyday. Ersoy, however, continues trying to eliminate the queer from within herself, so as to fit into a heteropatriarchal society and, thanks to her queer existence, failing every so often. Turkish audiences like her nonetheless; after all, she is the sister who would, and did, sacrifice herself for them.

Huysuz is the perfect embodiment of a work of sacrifice in a society in which women and queers are forced to perform before an audience that thinks like a (heterosexual) male, and thus likes to watch dancing females on stage. Dursunoğlu's negation of the significance of the drag component in his show does a great injustice toward the female and queer subjects in contemporary Turkey. He uses an allegorical, whimsical and particularly queer component of drag as a field of fantasy to attract an audience and sustain his livelihood onstage as Huysuz. To be able to remain comfortably within the patriarchal limits of heteronormativity, he sacrifices queers and women in the way he rejects and expresses his dislike of the sexuality they represent.

The stage, then, is a space where sexual ambivalence can be displayed and accepted; a space that generates an opportunity for gender variations that have become desirable for Turkish audiences. This desire is nothing more than a *jouissance* of commodification of what these three performers promise: a display of the queer body on stage. This desire, however, is not only generated by the performers' dexterity but also according to the performers' queerness, which lasts as long as the performance. Yet, this queerness often ceases to continue (offstage) in the daily lives of these performers, and sometimes actually ceases during or immediately after performances. The stage, then, is the place where the real and the represented are united. For the time being, in contemporary Turkey the stage represents the only space where queerness can safely be embodied; nonetheless, this suggests a potential opening up for the recognition of queer subjectivity offstage as well.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my appreciation to Christopher S. Wilson and Mark Wyers for their reviews of multiple drafts of this article, Louis Spence for her encouraging comments, and Gülsüm Baydar, the editor of this themed section and the anonymous reviewers of this journal whose helpful and generous comments contributed to the final form of this article.

Notes

1. Among these spaces, the idea of stage in relation to television relates to how people set up their TVs in the privacy of their own homes. The TV audience's participation in their environment is socio-physical; however, their response to what they view is psychological. This is similar to a cinema hall, only more intimate, as all participating members are a part of group who know each other. A TV set in a common household is staged for a communal or familial view and mostly in the living room. Although people may watch TV communally, they react personally.
2. For a comprehensive examination of Turkish history, see Eric von Zürcher's *Turkey: A Modern History* (Zürcher 2004).

3. The idea of sacrifice is used here as a lens to critically explore the issues of religion, race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality in contemporary Turkey. I utilize the term in multiple senses: as a socio-religious term and as a performance, but more importantly as a performative. The fundamental question that confronts me is the value of sacrifice. What suggests the sacrificiality of a being, especially when the sacrifice becomes the object of one's disgust? What is it about such a ritual that challenges our place in the social world as participants and witnesses?
4. My larger aim in this study is to use the concept of the 'work of sacrifice' which I have been developing in my work on the notion of survival for gendered and sexualized Turkish bodies. Through this context, I extend the idea of the invisibility of work and expand the idea of sacrifice manifested as the regimens of the visible through performances. In this context, I assign sacrifice a performative value, which acts as a link in the object of analysis and subject of discourse. In the resultant work of sacrifice, the work one does to achieve something is a sacrifice that remains invisible until it is recognized (see Selen 2010).
5. In his *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, Muñoz conceptualizes disidentification as 'a mode of performance whereby a toxic identity is remade and infiltrated by subjects who have been hailed by such identity categories but have not been able to own such a label. Disidentification is therefore about the management of an identity that has been "spoiled" in the majoritarian public sphere. This management is a critical negotiation in which a subject who has been hailed by injurious speech, a name or a label, reterritorializes that speech act and the marking that such a speech act produces to a self' (Muñoz 1999, 185).
6. All translations (Turkish to English) are by the author unless noted otherwise.
7. I borrow the tripartite format from Henri Lefebvre's 'representational spaces'. Lefebvre's triad encloses a major structure for social productions of space and spatial reproductions in the social (Lefebvre 1991, 33). All three differentials in relation to space involve a certain 'performative' understanding.
8. By public space, I refer to places where people can gather with or without knowing each other, such as bus stops, restaurants, cafes, bars, shops, public schools, state offices and so on. By private space, I refer to places where a person can choose to gather with others or not. These are the places which require an invite, without which a person becomes an invader, such as in the case of a home.
9. With the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, ethnic Muslim minorities, such as Kurds, Circassians and Bosnians, minority Islamic sects such as Shi'a (*Alevi*) and Sufi's (*Bektaşî*), and non-Muslim minorities such as Armenians, Greeks and Jews were expected to 'be neutralized' and enter the theoretical category of Turkish citizenship, despite its clear affinity with Sunni Islam, and regardless of their native language.
10. For example, two recent public scandals regarding 'queer expression' involved a football referee who lost his job and was barred from the national football federation once he was 'outed' by the press, and Taner Ceylan, a visual artist, who lost his faculty position when he exhibited his painting 'Taner Taner' (2003) explicitly depicted the artist sodomizing himself. Both controversies were widely discussed in the Turkish press. For Halil İbrahim Dinçdağ's case, see http://www.sabah.com.tr/SabahSpor/Spor/2011/03/02/escinsel_hakemin_isyani. 4 April 2011. For Taner Ceylan's case, see Hasan Bülent Kahraman's article in *Radikal* – daily Turkish newspaper: www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=70886. 24 August 2009.
11. Four days later, on 10 August 2006, in Istanbul, the LGBTTT Association, Lambdaistanbul and another gathering of activists from across Turkey met to protest the violence in Bursa. Instead of a march, however, the groups released thousands of colorful balloons that spread throughout the city.
12. <http://kaosgl.org/content/escinsellerle-ahbaplik-kuramadim>. 17 September 2009.
13. From a personal interview with Hasan Bülent Kahraman on 28 November 2005, Princeton University, New Jersey, USA.
14. In her attempt to address the significant question, 'does the voice have a gender?' Joke Dame says: 'One is inclined to say that it does. After all, in most cases we do hear correctly whether a voice comes from a female or a male body. . . . Equally, in Western art music and non-Western music there are examples that might give rise to doubts as to the 'genderedness' of the voice' (Dame 1994, 140).
15. Drawing from Susan Sontag's 'Notes on Camp', Judith Perino, in her 'Queer Ears and Icons', refers to camp as 'a sensibility or behavioral strategy characteristic of homosexual men'.

- She characterizes camp as ‘deliberately self-conscious performance, theatrical and artificial, in a context that is otherwise serious, natural, or even banal’ (Perino 2005, 122–23).
16. Müren recreated his life with his fascination for the stage. Even his death took place on stage. On 24 September 1996, he was called for an honorary ceremony by the state broadcaster, Turkish Radio and Television (TRT), where he was presented with the microphone with which he first sang on the radio. Five minutes after this ceremony, while the live broadcast continued, he suffered his third heart attack and died on stage. His body was carried to the grave with prayers, mourned by crowds of fans shouting slogans of love and affection.
 17. In ‘Melancholy Gender’, Butler calls the whole notion of melancholy into question, especially as it has simultaneous benefits and drawbacks, as a genuine basis not only for gay and lesbian but also heterosexuals. As she notes, ‘melancholy is both refusal of grief and the incorporation of loss, a miming of death it cannot mourn’ (Butler 1997, 142).
 18. A post-1980s child is performatively gendered and religioed at birth, constituted as male or female and Sunni Muslim, since the Turkish nation-state officially supports Sunni Islam as the major Islamic sect, and as the most populous sect, as an integral part of Turkish national culture and identity. In order to impose this dual alignment, the state issues identity cards, pink if the child is female and blue if male, which state the individual’s religion. Without this card, the child does not exist as a citizen within the Turkish state.
 19. Doan importantly notes that ‘[s]tatistics on the incidence of suicide within this population are not definitive because of the tendency not to report transgender status as a cause, or to report transgendered individuals in the same category as gay or lesbian. However, studies of transgendered individuals suggest that the suicidal ideation rate is as high as 35% and as many as 30% have actually attempted suicide. These health-related problems may cause trans men and women to feel uncared and less welcome in the cities’ (Doan 2007, 61).
 20. In *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other real and imagined spaces*, Edward Soja contextualizes ‘thirdspace’ to rethink ideas of space and explore ‘social spatiality’. According to him, ‘thirdspace’ is ‘a purposefully tentative term that attempts to capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meanings’ (Soja 1996, 2).
 21. Quoted in Kiliç, Ecevit. ‘*İlginç bir muhalif: Bülent Ersoy*’ ‘A strange opponent: Bülent Ersoy’ http://www.rotahaber.com/ilginc-bir-muhalik-bulent-ersoy_27613.html. 24 August 2009.
 22. The election of ANAP (the Motherland Party) in 1984, led by Turgut Özal (1927–1993), ushered in the first civil government following the military intervention of 1980, and also introduced a neoliberal phase in Turkish politics. After its intervention, the military regime regulated Turkey’s political atmosphere as well as its political strategy.
 23. Here, I use ‘transsexualism’ in Jean Baudrillard’s use of the term. ‘We are all transsexuals, just as we are biological mutans in *potentia*’ (Baudrillard 1999, 21) he states, which suggests an opportunity to rethink the notion of trans-sexualism, as a compound refers to acrossing, transcending, raising above all sexuality.
 24. *Kanto* is a semi-structured stage event. The lead performer sings and dances throughout the duration of the show while hosting guests on the stage with conversation, singing and dancing. Although most of the tunes are based on the modes of Eastern musical traditions, they can be performed with Western instruments.
 25. While not all male belly dancers or female impersonators are homosexuals, Stephen Murray, in his book *Islamic Homosexualities*, claims that *köçek* ‘used to denote “a young dancer dressed like a woman”, but now [in contemporary Turkey] covers both transvestites and transsexuals’ (Murray 1997, 31).
 26. For instance, 9 out of 10 transsexual interviewees in Selin Berghan’s study, *Labunya*, state they have been, or still are, involved in sex work to support themselves. Only one of these transsexuals in Berghan’s study, Derya, a female-to-male transsexual, claims that, even though it is extremely difficult for him to maintain a job, he has never been a sex worker (Berghan 2007, 52).

Notes on contributor

Eser Selen received her Bachelors (1997) and Masters degree in Fine Arts at Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey (1999) and another Masters degree in Performance Studies at New York University (2002). She completed her PhD in Performance Studies at New York University (2010) with her dissertation ‘The Work of Sacrifice: Gender Performativity, Modernity, and Islam in Turkish Contemporary Performance’. Her research interests include feminisms, performance studies, gender

and sexuality and contemporary art and design. In addition to presentations given at national and international conferences, her work has appeared in journals such as *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, and *International Journal of the Humanities*. She is also a visual artist whose work encompasses performance art, installation and video. She has exhibited and performed nationally and internationally and is currently an Assistant Professor at the Department of Communication Design at Kadir Has University in Istanbul, Turkey.

References

- Atay, Korhan, Figen Kumru Akşit, and Seyfi Dursunoğlu/Huysuz Virjin. 2004. *Katina'nin elinde makası: Huysuz ile Seyfi'nin 35 yıllık sevdâ masalı (Katina's scissors: The 35 year love story of Huysuz and Seyfi)*. Istanbul: Alfa Yayınları.
- Atasoy, Aykut, and Boysan Yakar Dir. 2006. *Yürüyoruz (We are marching)*. Istanbul: Self published DVD (Atasoy and Yakar Productions).
- Baudrillard, Jean. 1999. *The transparency of evil: Essays on extreme phenomena*. New York: Verso.
- Bell, David, and Gill Valentine. 1995. *Introduction: Orientations. In Mapping desire*. New York: Routledge.
- Berghan, Selin. 2007. *Labunya: Transseksüel, kimlik ve beden (Queer: Transexual, identity and body)*. Istanbul: Siyah Beyaz.
- Berlant, Lauren, and Michael Warner. 2002. Sex in public. In *Publics and counterpublics*, ed. Michael Warner, 187–208. New York: Zone Books.
- Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of 'sex'*. New York: Routledge.
- . 1997. *The psychic life of power: Theories in subjection*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Dame, Joke. 1994. Unveiled voices: Sexual difference and the castrato. In *Queering the pitch*, ed. Brett Philip, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary Thomas, 139–54. New York: Routledge.
- Doan, Petra L. 2007. Queers in the American city: Transgendered perceptions of urban space. *Gender, Place and Culture* 14, no. 1: 57–74.
- Jakobsen, Janet R, Ann, Pellegrini. 2008. *Secularisms, Social Text Books*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Kahraman, HasanBülent. 2003. *Kitle kültürü kitlelerin afyonu (Mass culture: Opium of the masses)*. Istanbul: Agora Kitaplığı.
- Lacan, Jacques. 1977. *Ecrits: A selection. Trans. Bruce Fink*. New York: Norton, 2002.
- Lefebvre, Henri. 1991. *The production of space*. Oxford; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. 1999. *Disidentifications: Queers of color and the performance of politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Murray, Stephen O. Will Roscoe. 1997. *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature*. New York: New York University Press.
- . 1996. Ghosts of public sex: Utopian longings, queer memories. In *Policing public sex*, ed. Dangerous Bedfellows, 355–72. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- Perino, JudithA. 2005. Queer ears and icons. In *Listening to the sirens: Musical technologies of queer identity from Homer to Hedwig*, 110–58. Erving, NJ: University of California Press.
- Seçkin, Nalan. 1998. Zeki Müren. Istanbul: Bilgi Yayınevi.
- Selen, Eser. 2010. *The work of sacrifice: Gender performativity, modernity and Islam in contemporary Turkish performance (1980s–2000s)*. New York: New York University.
- Şen, Figen Ünal. 2005. *Kuzey yanın ayazım (My frosty north side)*. Istanbul: Epsilon Press.
- Stokes, Martin. 1992. 'Alaturka Fantasies': Deceit, the voice and the Arabesk stage in Turkey. In *New formations: A journal of culture/theory/politics*, ed. Simon Frith. vol. 27, 42–58. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Soja, Edward. 1996. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other real and imagined spaces*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Türker, Yıldırım. 1998. *Türkiye sizinle gurur duyuyor: Türk siyasi kültüründen portreler (Turkey is proud of you: Portraits from Turkish political culture)*. Istanbul: Siyah Beyaz; Metis Güncel.
- Valocchi, Stephen. 2005. Not yet queer enough: The lessons of queer theory for the sociology of gender and sexuality. *Gender and Society* 19: 750–70.
- Williams, Raymond. 1977. *Marxism and literature, Marxist introductions*. Oxford [Eng.]: Oxford University Press.
- Zürcher, Erik Jan. 2004. *Turkey: A modern history*. 3rd ed. London, New York: I.B. Tauris.

ABSTRACT TRANSLATIONS

El escenario: un espacio para la subjetivación *queer* en la Turquía contemporánea

Este artículo se centra en el rol del escenario en modos complejos de performatividad de género en el trabajo de tres intérpretes turcas: Zeki Müren (1931–1996), Bülent Ersoy (nacida en 1952), y Seyfi Dursunoğlu (nacido en 1932) también conocido como Huysuz Virjin (Virgen Malhumorada). Sugiero que estas tres figuras son las pioneras de la interpretación *queer* turca. Sus actuaciones, tanto sobre el escenario como fuera de él, son validadas por medio de una reiterativa ausencia de la “*queeredad*” en sus vidas cotidianas y se ubican en medio de varias negociaciones entre las personas *queer* y el estado nacional secular islámico en Turquía. En las obras de Müren, Ersoy y Huysuz, el escenario es sugestivo de un espacio donde la *queeredad* puede ser administrada. Es un espacio en disputa que al menos permite la comunicación de las ideas *queer* a una audiencia más amplia. Analizo los trabajos de estos tres intérpretes como tres variantes de la “*queeredad*” en Turquía en relación a las diferentes eras y climas políticos que están directamente relacionadas con el deseo del estado nación de actuar la modernidad. Al explicar los complicados modos de performatividad de género, considero al escenario como un espacio primario para la existencia del/de un cuerpo *queer*. A través de esta discusión, apunto a activar debates tanto dentro del contexto del Islam secular como en contra de éste, sobre el espacio político generizado, y sobre aquellos espacios sexualizados pasados por alto en los que el estado nación produce poderosos (aunque inestables) valores para manejar la subjetividad *queer* en la Turquía contemporánea.

Palabras claves: escenario; espacio; *queer*; performatividad de género; Turquía contemporánea

舞台：当代土耳其的酷儿主体化空间

本文聚焦三位土耳其表演者——载吉米伦 (Zeki Müren, 1931至1996年)、比伦特艾尔索伊 (Bülent Ersoy, 1952年生) 以及赛飞杜孙奥卢 (Seyfi Dursunoğlu , 1932年生, 又称为“古怪处女”(Cranky Virgin)) 复杂的性别展演模式中, “舞台” 所扮演的角色。我认为以上三位是当代土耳其酷儿展演的先锋。他们每日生活中不论是台上或台下的 展演, 透过反复重申“酷儿性”的缺席而受到认可, 并处于酷儿和现世伊斯兰国族国家土耳其之间的多重协商之中。在米伦、艾尔索伊和杜孙奥卢的作品中, 舞台做为运用酷儿性的指涉空间。它是竞争的空间, 并且至少是个得以与广大听众沟通酷儿概念的空间。我将探讨这三位表演者所展现的三类酷儿性, 及其分别连结土耳其在不同时期的殊异政治氛围下, 国族国家展现现代性之欲望。当解释复杂的性别展演模式时, 我将舞台视为酷儿身体存在的主要空间。我将透过此一讨论, 在现世伊斯兰世界内部及其反对势力中, 激发针对性别化政治空间、以及忽略情感化空间中国族国家所生产的强大却不稳固的价值体系以管理酷儿主体性之辩论。

关键词: 舞台、空间、酷儿、性别展演性、当代土耳其