

## **Queering the Whitespace: Beyond assimilation and multiculturalism<sup>1 2</sup>**

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Presented to the panel on Identity and Multiculturalism at

The First European Conference on Gender and Politics

Queen's University, Belfast

January 21-23, 2009

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<sup>2</sup> I owe deep gratitude to my thesis advisors, Katrin Sieg (CGES, Georgetown University) and Abraham Newman (CGES, Georgetown University), for their patience, wisdom, and unwavering belief in my project. I also extend my appreciation to the Center for German and European Studies at Georgetown University for their financial support of this project, as well as to everyone who attended the Master's Thesis Colloquium. Their criticisms and input remain invaluable to the project's development. Finally, I thank UCLA's Center for European and Eurasian Studies (CEES) for their financial support, without which I could not attend this conference.

## Introduction

At the beginning of 2006, the German state (*Land*) of Baden-Württemberg introduced a new citizenship test for would-be German citizens originating from 57 countries all of which are characterized by Islamic tradition. Because of the test's expressed bias against Muslims, the media dubbed it the Muslim Test. The test consisted of thirty questions from which the authorities could pick and choose at the time of the interview with the applicant. One question, however, garnered mass media attention. The test asked the respondent how he or she would feel if their son told them he was living with a man with whom he was intimate. If the respondent expressed rejection of their hypothetically homosexual son, he or she would be presumed unfit for German citizenship. Although the question was eventually dropped from the test, the authorities in Baden-Württemberg defended the question's relevancy by arguing that the answer would reveal how well aligned the respondent is with German cultural norms and values, thereby equating an acceptance of homosexuality with German identity and the rejection of homosexuality with a Muslim, or at least 'non-German,' one.

Against the background of the immigrant integration discourse in Germany, the Muslim Test demonstrates how the nation-state constructs itself as an exclusive ethnicized and sexualized space for those who fail to approximate Germany's cultural sensibilities. Joane Nagel has conceptualized this intersection of national, ethnic, and sexual identity as the 'ethnosexual frontier,' which "form[s] a barrier to hold some people in and keep others out" and "fashion[s] feelings of sexual desire and notions of sexual desirability" (Nagel 2000: 545). The Muslim Test is but one example of how the ethnosexual frontier is invoked in national discourse in Germany. The debate about the headscarf and the formation of *Frauenintegrationskurse* (women's integration courses), which offers female immigrants and non-German citizens the option to attend 'female-only' German language and cultural classes out of respect for cultural or religious sensibilities (Leise 2007), are other instances in which the German state draws the boundaries of belonging around ethnic and sexual (as well as gendered) identities.

This paper exemplifies how the intersection of ethnic and sexual identities occurs in negotiations of belonging and serves as a locus of social change. With a focus on gays and lesbians with immigrant backgrounds living in and around Berlin, Germany, I argue that a more fruitful discussion about the experiences of those on the 'margins' (as immigrants may or may

not be) should take us beyond conceptualizing the immigrant experience in terms of assimilation and multiculturalism. I suggest one alternative can be found in queer theory. This might strike some readers as an odd body of knowledge to tap into when discussing issues of immigrants and social incorporation. I contend that queer theory's normative interest in inclusivity and problematization of the taken-for-granted heteronormativity undergirding most, if not all, social norms in western societies offers unique insight into how we might re-think discussions about 'immigrant integration' and, as an effect, move beyond discourses of assimilation and multiculturalism.

From the point of view of community organizations in Berlin, namely the *Lesben- und Schwulenverband in Deutschland* (LSVD) and *Gays und Lesbians aus der Türkei* (GLADT), we will see that for the people involved in these organizations the process of negotiating belonging as a non-German, and more specifically a non-white, gay or lesbian is a project in ambiguity. Those people whom we classify as gay, lesbian, transgender, or non-heterosexual and as non-white/non-German are often not un-assimilated, un-integrated, or otherwise marginalized. This is not to say they do not face racism, prejudice, homophobia or some other form of social exclusion. But, it is the experience of being stereotyped and treated as an 'outsider' which motivates their action and gives them impetus to take an active part in society. It is, therefore, my argument that far from being marginal actors in German society (or at least in Berlin), community organizations and the members involved in them work to re-frame and re-form the social norms and values that define boundaries of belonging.

I contend, further, that models of assimilation and multiculturalism cannot fully capture or explain the process through which the people involved in these organizations re-shape social norms and values. Many scholars have already offered critical assessments of assimilation and multiculturalism (for an example and fuller discussion see, Brubaker 2001), but I am concerned with offering empirical evidence about why multiculturalism in particular has failed to provoke a fuller embrace of social, ethnic, and cultural pluralism in Germany. Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) has argued against multiculturalism for its 'cultural relativism' which promotes tolerance instead of full acceptance of cultural pluralism, while others have critiqued multiculturalism for its 'additive' approach to accommodating cultural diversity (Borneman 2002: 94; Frei 2003: 88-109; Harper, White and Cerullo 1992; von Dirke 1994: 515-516). An illustrative example is John Borneman's description of his impression of the Carnival of Cultures:

“But what surprised me above all [at the parade] was the absence of Turks. There were a few Turkish floats, but I mean the absence of Turkish spectators (...) But, on second thought, they probably wouldn’t come [even it was not a Sunday], because they couldn’t get into this kind of demonstration, which is so very German, and so very Berlin (...) Many German men and women just put a feather in their hair, or smudged their faces with black chalk, in order to identify and show their solidarity with ‘another culture’” (2002: 102).

The Carnival of Cultures celebrates diversity but this diversity is celebrated primarily by and for Germans and, most importantly, within the context of Germany’s existent national culture. Multiculturalism provided a way for Germany to add new cultural facets to its urban landscape without re-negotiating its own cultural heritage. It recognized the monolithic German culture and sought to reform it by adding ‘other’ cultures to its national repertoire. The celebration of diversity also did not lead marginalized communities, especially immigrants, to a more equal footing in German society. In fact, it did the opposite by subjugating minority groups to their cultural identities, which became fixed along established ethnic lines that divided Germans and non-Germans.

I will now turn first to a discussion about the proposed queer alternative to assimilation and multiculturalism. I will then offer a critical assessment of LSVD by demonstrating the shortcomings of their ‘multicultural’ approach to community organizing, which will be followed by the paper’s third part where I present evidence of how the process of queering the Whitespace occurs by raising GLADT as an empirical test case.

### **I. A Queer Alternative to Assimilation and Multiculturalism**

The most pressing question left unanswered by models of assimilation and multiculturalism is how people overcome ethnic divisions in a plural society. I suggest one focal point for understanding this process can be the ethnicity-sexuality nexus, or the ethnosexual frontier (Nagel 2006: 113). To get so far as understanding how ethnicity and sexuality might combine as a juggernaut of change it is important to consider queer theory’s role in creating ideas about how non-white gays, lesbians, transgenders and others harness their power against the dominant white and gay cultures. One should note from the outset that in queer theory there is an ambiguous distinction between white, White, and whiteness. Often times scholars of queer

theory are not sensitive to the way these terms are understood outside their field. For the sake of clarity, I understand white to designate an ethnic label based on phenotype, and White and whiteness as interchangeable representations of a mainstream culture which is oriented around Western ideologies like democracy and capitalism and Enlightenment philosophy such as individualism and rationalism. Unlike the term white, White and whiteness can include non-white people who orientate themselves around the mainstream.

The ethnicity-sexuality discussion in this literature occurs traditionally within the essentialist versus constructionist, or the ‘nature versus nurture’ debate (Epstein 1987: 13). The question is if one way ethnic identities are constructed and performed is through processes of nation-making (Anderson 1983), then how is sexuality constructed, and do the two identities relate? Possible answers to this question inform, for instance, how the radical sexual liberation movement of the 1960s in which ‘everything goes’ gave way to the exclusive and predominantly white gay identity of the 1980s (Epstein 1987: 17-23; Browning 1996; Harper et al 1992). Whereas the sexual liberation movement understood sexuality as a constructed social category thereby disrupting the heterosexual-homosexual binary, the gay community of the 1970s and 1980s developed and institutionalized itself around an essentialist claim of being “born gay” (Epstein 1987: 19). Because people were born gay, they deserved a set of rights equal to those who were “born straight.” The gay community’s political claims contradicted the sub-culture of alternative sexualities of the 1960s from which it drew lineage by essentializing (homo)sexuality. But, the community’s ability to carve out an increasingly public identity for itself and its rights-based lobbying efforts also derived from the group’s power as a movement of middle-class white men (Browning 1996; for a critical discussion about how this movement proliferated globally, see Massad 2007). The ethnosexual frontier between mainstream heterosexual America and the homosexual underclass was overcome by merging a white ethnic identity with a public homosexual identity. At the same time, this move fortified the ethnosexual frontier between white Americans and gays and lesbians with non-white ethnic identities. The ethnosexual frontier functioned in this context as the political space where marginalized groups faced off with White, heterosexual America to tip the scales of power in favor of minorities. But, throughout most of the West a repressive divide between white gay males and non-white gays and lesbians, transgenders and other sexualities still remains.

The repressiveness of this divide can be mitigated if one relinquishes a will to enter the mainstream and capitalizes on their position at society's margins. Recent queer theorists have argued, for instance, by re-orientating one's self away from the mainstream and toward the margins the queer subject discovers new opportunities to harness power (Ahmed 2006). Sarah Ahmed explains that those who do not identify with being White have more power to make choices about their life because they are freed from the constraints of belonging to the mainstream (Ahmed 2006). For instance, from her perspective as a Pakistani-British woman, she believes mixed-raced people, whom she considers to be queer because of their deviation from whiteness, can create unique identities for themselves that allow them to 'travel' between cultures and ethnic identities without being confined by either. This sets the mix-raced person apart from the mainstream and empowers them with the ability to choose where they belong.

The assumption in such a theory, however, is that those who are White lack the same freedom of choice and likewise, that those who are not White are insulated from the social, political, or economic pressures to become part of the mainstream. The case of immigrant integration policies is one example of such pressures to become part of the mainstream. And, even though Ahmed's theory purports to be radical in that she attempts to create an alternative space for queers other than the one created by the white, gay culture of the West, to assume that those with a queer identity should feel empowered by existing on the margins risks repeating the multicultural mistake of relegating the non-heterosexual and non-white citizen to secondary status. At the least, her theory perceives of queerness as being exclusive by cutting it off from the mainstream and privileging it as the passage to emancipation.

Nevertheless, her theory of queerness adds value to the relationship between ethnicity and sexuality because it allows us to account for how a combination of one's non-White ethnic and sexual identity can be a powerful tool for traversing the ethnosexual frontier. Only, instead of viewing it as a tool of self-empowerment, I would extrapolate from her theory that this self-empowerment creates a center of power around which people can organize and transform the space of whiteness, or the Whitespace. So instead of queers being co-opted by the mainstream, which Ahmed wants to avoid, queers can actually co-opt it.

It is this process of co-opting the mainstream that I call queering the Whitespace. In the model, the term Whitespace is used interchangeably with mainstream, which I equate with dominant White culture. The concept of queering the Whitespace departs from much of the

current scholarship on queer theory by avoiding the exclusivity associated with being part of a queer community. Inclusivity is achieved in the process of queering the Whitespace through the process of creating an ever wider queer community, which would include anyone who resides outside the mainstream. At the same time, such a community would not be closed off to the mainstream, since in order to co-opt it the queer community must navigate through the mainstream. To avoid a contradiction in terms, which is to avoid realizing inclusion by creating an exclusive community, queers would have to be open to everyone, even to those with hostile sentiments toward them. This encourages free communication across the social stratum, which works to break down social hierarchy and to build up social partnership (Bandarage 1997). From its inception, then, the process of queering the Whitespace begins with those identifying as queer opening the lines of communication between people residing within and outside of the Whitespace.

Through the process of communication the community develops. Benedict Anderson (1983) used this assumption to explain how the printing press opened new lines of mass communication and contributed to forming an “imagined community.” While a theory of queering the Whitespace is not concerned with mass communication or with creating a new imagined community, the basic assumption that communication begets community can be used here. In his model of [gay rights] activism from the closet, Hassan El Menyawi proposes that in the face of adversity, a marginalized or repressed group is better positioned to develop a community by starting out in a closeted space, then expanding the closet as the community grows and gains self-awareness (2006: 44). For him, the closet community is not about being hidden or exclusive. It functions to provide a protective space. The process of expanding the space of the closet, he explains, occurs by “Allowing the closet to include increasing numbers of people,” which results in self-expression and community development (El Menyawi 2006: 44-45). The bridge between what begins as a closet and ends with a community, however, is communication. As communication intensifies and the community develops, the process of opening the community advances by people spreading the word, founding a formal organization, and reaching out to a broader audience.

At this stage, however, the queer community remains a marginal one and probably consisting only of like-minded people. The next step is when queers begin queering. Once there is a semblance of community, the community begins queering the Whitespace by expressing

itself politically. This is a critical point in the model, because, as we saw in the example of the radical sexual liberation movement, expressing political interests is when groups tend to become exclusive and risk being subsumed into the Whitespace. It is at the point of articulating its interests that a queer community would rely on principles of open communication across the social stratum. And, since the process of queering the Whitespace is concerned with transforming rather than reforming the mainstream, its political interests would be less concerned with rights, laws, and policies, and more concerned with exposing and problematizing the fundamental philosophies behind them. In this regard, one could imagine that a queer community would challenge the way mainstream society constructs its self-understanding.

If the point is to expose and problematize the foundations of society's self-understanding, then the queer community is bound only to include like-minded radicals and to become confrontational. But, in the process of queering the Whitespace, the challenge comes in the form of turning attention away from queerness and toward the Whitespace. In expressing itself politically, one way the community can execute this maneuver is by operating outside typical political avenues. Instead of going to parliament, marching on the streets, or campaigning on behalf of political figures, the community might use jamming as a political tool. Jamming rearranges popular culture to expose hypocrisy or the subtly absurd aspects of mainstream society (Klein 2000).<sup>3</sup> Within a queer context, jamming would require a deeper investigation into where non-white ethnic groups and non-heterosexuals fit into the Whitespace, which it might accomplish through dispelling stereotypes about minorities by reframing the stereotype as a question to the mainstream. A political expression in the process of queering the Whitespace might ask, for example, why all European men do not hold hands thereby turning focus away from men who do hold hands and toward those who do not to redirect dialogue within the mainstream to be about itself, rather than about those outside of it.

What becomes of queering the Whitespace is a new concept of incorporation that transforms society. Through a process of communication, community development, and political expression, the organization of society becomes based on communication and partnership instead of division and hierarchy. The outcome is utopian and should only be taken as a theoretical

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<sup>3</sup> In the United States we see example of jamming in satirical newspapers and magazines like *The Onion* and *Adbusters* and in faux news programs like the *Daily Show*. In Europe, there are groups like Germany's *Kanak Attack* and organizations like the Netherland's *Strange Fruit*.

archetype, however the basic parameters of the model offer a new way for us to conceive how marginalized groups can express their agency as they burn a pathway out of the margins. Instead of dwelling on the difficulty of overcoming ethnic division, the model of queering the Whitespace re-discovers the transformative power of incorporating the social and cultural diversity delivered to us through immigration by accounting for multifocal identities.

## II. LSVD-Berlin<sup>4</sup>

Implicit to LSVD's program is an understanding that homosexuals in minority communities, with special emphasis given to homosexual Turks, are repressed and unable to fully realize their sexual identity unless they become part of Germany's mainstream gay communities. The organization maintains the necessity for these people to be "integrated" into mainstream German society since this will fulfill their right to "sexual emancipation." In this context, the ethnosexual frontier extends between the emancipated German homosexuals and the repressed non-German homosexuals, between those who belong to the national space and those who do not.

In the same spirit of an "additive" multiculturalism, *Schwulenverband Deutschlands* (Gay Union of Germany, SVD) added the lesbian cause to its program at the same time it transformed itself into an organization cognizant of and sensitive to the cultural and ethnic diversity of Germany's gay and lesbian communities. In 1999, SVD became LSVD when it added specific concerns of lesbians (Lesben) to its organizational goals and outreach program. At the same time, SVD, now called LSVD, also decided to use "in Germany" (*in Deutschland*) rather than "of Germany" (*Deutschlands*) in its title to recognize Germany's culturally and ethnically diverse gay and lesbian communities.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the information provided in this section is based on the interview I conducted with two representatives from the *Lesben- und Schwulenverband in Deutschland, Berlin* at their office in Berlin on November 20, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> "Der LSVD hat bewusst den Namen Lesben- und Schwulenverband *in* Deutschland gewählt. Damit wird zum Ausdruck gebracht: In Deutschland leben nicht nur Deutsche. Unsere Gesellschaft entwickelt sich interkulturell. Im LSVD engagieren sich Schwule und Lesben aus vielen Kulturen, vielen Ländern und unterschiedlicher ethnischer Herkunft" (LSVD website, <http://www.lsvd.de/88.0.html>)

As SVD metamorphosed into LSVD, the organization's regional office in Berlin began contemplating a new program to reach out to gays and lesbians from immigrant communities living in and around Berlin. The reason for this new outreach program was the increasing violence in the city during 1998 and 1999 against gays, lesbians and transgenders, especially those with immigrant backgrounds. One of the organization's representatives reported that of the recorded crimes in Berlin against gays, lesbians and transgenders, one-third of them were directed specifically at non-Germans. According to this representative, one reason for the spike in crimes against homosexuals and queers from immigrant communities was the emerging tension between mainstream German society and the Muslim underclass ("eine Spannung zwischen Religiosität"). From where exactly this tension arose and why it was necessarily related to differences in religion, however, was not clear. Nevertheless, because of the attention being paid by the organization to rising crime against these immigrants, the new outreach program started out with an eye on the religious differences between Germans and Muslims, and especially the Turks. The turn away from cultural toward religious difference simply restates the existent ethnic divide between Germans and Turks.

One of my interviewees contextualized the emphasis on a Turk's Muslim identity in terms of Islam's repression of homosexuality on which he based his assumption that integration into German society would allow a gay Turk to discover and express his homosexuality. This suggests that in their outreach efforts, LVSD depends on a monolithic understanding of gay Turks as being sexually repressed Muslims and in need of liberation. This also explains why LSVD emphasizes the need for gay Turks to "come out," which they view as a normal process of sexual emancipation. As scholars have noted this "coming out" process embodies a westernized understanding of the individual self in which establishing a public (homo)sexual identity plays central importance (El Menyawi 2006; Browning 1996). LSVD's reliance on the stereotype of a repressed gay Turk overlooks the possibility for transforming the way gays and lesbians already in the mainstream relate to their counterparts on the margins. Instead, the sexual relationship remains one about the Germans and the Turks, or as my informants often said, the Muslims.

On the same topic, the other representative explained the gay Turk's struggle to find their space in German society in terms of gay Germans' fight for their place in society during the 1960s and 1970s. This implies that gay, white Germans today are accepted as part of the

mainstream, while gay Turks are not. And while this may be true,<sup>6</sup> the difference between the situations is that the German's struggle was about sexuality while the Turk's is about being a Turk in Germany. To convolute this struggle as one about a gay Turk's struggle with Islam and its supposed rejection of homosexuality glosses over the tensions between Germans and members of ethnic minority communities and takes for granted the way mainstream German society views non-western and non-Christian religious and cultural sensibilities.

One of the representatives reflected this when he described the way gay Germans and non-white, non-German gays interact in Berlin nightclubs. He told me that in his experience only a German would ever approach a Turk, not the other way around, and that this interaction would only be based on "fucking" (*ficken*). This description exposes the ethnically derived power implicit to the sexual relationship. In the same discussion, the other representative argued that gay Turks, and other gays belonging to minority communities, need to integrate into German society by learning German and embracing a secular and modern sense of self. The need to integrate, as described by LSVD, is tied into the asymmetric power relationship, which finds expression in the sexual interactions between white, gay Germans and their non-white, non-German counterparts.

When the outreach program was formalized in 2001 as the *Zentrum für Migranten, Lesben, und Schwulen* (Center for Migrants, Lesbians, and Gays, MILES), three groups were formed including TurkGay, Ermis, and Südostasien. The first group was designed for gay Turks, the second for gay Greeks, and the last for gay men from Southeast Asia. Of the three groups, TurkGay and Ermis have survived until today, while a group for gay Polish men has been added to the program. Representatives of LSVD told me groups for Russian-speaking gays and Spanish-speaking gays are being planned. Noticeably missing from these groups are lesbians, transgenders, and other members of broader 'gay and lesbian' communities.

Both representatives explained that they developed MILES based on the idea of contact theory, which describes the interaction between different groups of people for the purpose of

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<sup>6</sup> One should not overlook the fact that same-sex marriages are still not recognized in Germany, which leaves many long-term gay, lesbian and queer couples in precarious legal situations. For instance, if a partner dies, the surviving partner's right to pension, property, insurance, etc. remain questionable. Additionally, a broad acceptance of homosexuals in Germany, including outside of the urban environment, is questionable. Considering the way some culture representations of homosexual interactions, such as in the film *Lola + Bilidikid* (Ataman 1999), as taking place in dark parks and dirty toilet stalls, one might believe that homosexuals still occupy a deviant identity in German society.

achieving cross-cultural understanding. Contrary to their description of contact theory, the representatives reported that the different ethnic groups associated with MILES neither meet with each other nor interact formally with other LSVD members. Typically, the groups meet on an ad hoc basis in a Turkish restaurant (for TurkGay members) or Greek restaurant (for Ermis) “somewhere in Kreuzberg.”<sup>7</sup> By encouraging contact only between members of the same group, MILES reinforces ethnic groupings and fails to provide a means for synthesizing new relationships between the groups and LSVD’s wider membership base. The object of MILES thereby becomes a tool with which LSVD can add different ethnic groups to its program to reflect the organization’s sensitivity to cultural plurality among gays and lesbians in Germany.

The discussion here has evidenced how LSVD understands the repression of marginalized gays and lesbians in terms of their ethnic identities. Rather than casting the ‘integration’ struggle as one between Berlin’s gay and lesbian communities and mainstream society, LSVD understands it as one about ethnic differences between immigrant groups and Germans. This is particularly evident in the case of gay Turks who are understood in terms of an ascribed Muslim identity, which is believed to stifle their sexual emancipation. But, by stressing the need for integration, LSVD places the onus of emancipation onto the gays and, to a lesser extent, the lesbians to whom they reach out.

#### **IV. Applying the Model: GLADT<sup>8</sup>**

There is little doubt that societies respond to new political, economic and social environments, however, as suggested earlier in this paper, theories of assimilation and multiculturalism stifle prospects for fundamental social transformation because of each model’s focus on the desirable outcome of ‘integration,’ which to a great degree reinforces the status quo. Through a process of communication, community development and alternative political expression, *Gays und Lesbians aus der Türkei* (GLADT) provides us with the means to account

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<sup>7</sup> Kreuzberg is a borough in Berlin with a historically large Turkish population. Today, the borough serves as a sort of counter-culture haven and as the mixing bowl for all facets of alternative lifestyles in Berlin. Because of its famed reputation, however, one might believe the area is becoming somewhat of a multicultural cliché.

<sup>8</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the information provided in this section is based on the interview I conducted with two representatives from the *Gays und Lesbians aus der Türkei* at their office in Berlin on November 21, 2007.

for how supposedly marginalized communities organize themselves and take part in social reformation. GLADT provides a different outlet for transforming society into one that embraces Berlin's immigrant communities as well as gays and lesbians who do not find themselves part of the mainstream. By providing this space, GLADT demonstrates that marginalized communities in Germany are able to negotiate how and where they belong. The members of GLADT thereby traverse the ethnosexual frontier and in the process of doing so show signs that social transformation is possible when marginalized social groups are able to harness their collective power.

This harnessing of collective power is the basis on which GLADT's founders formed the organization. The organization took shape in the late 1990s at the same time LSVD contemplated the establishment of MILES. One representative of GLADT explained to me that he initially joined LSVD's TurkGay group in an effort to seek out other young, Turkish gay men like himself. He became disillusioned with LSVD's project as he realized that the small TurkGay group was isolated from LSVD's broader organizational activities and membership base. He explained that he felt a racial tension between the Turkish and German members in LSVD, similar to the ones he experienced in Berlin's gay nightclubs. Repeating what LSVD's representatives told me, this member of GLADT said he did not go to gay nightclubs with a predominantly white German clientele because he felt the interaction between Germans and Turks was based only on "fucking." From this informant's perspective, the ethnosexual frontier as constructed through LSVD and the White gay community in Berlin remained a space of exclusion and repression. However exclusive and repressive this divide may have been, it did not prevent him from searching for ways around it.

It is at this point that communication with other gay and lesbian Turks who felt similar to my informant became an important tool for discovering a way to traverse the ethnosexual frontier. My second interviewee from GLADT explained that she experienced a similar process as my first informant. In the late 1990s she began searching for a community that allowed space for gay, lesbian or transgendered Turks and other non-Germans to express themselves without expectations to reenact a mainstream homosexual identity, which she felt isolated her as a young lesbian Turk. These two people met through a nascent queer outreach program, Kombi, in Berlin out of which GLADT would eventually form when it became a formal organization (*eingetragter Verein, e.V.*) in 2003. The initial stage of forming GLADT, thus, depended on a group of gay and

lesbian Turks who were associated through a small outreach effort communicating with each other about their shared experience. While this may not differ from most processes for founding a new organization, the example demonstrates that through communication with each other, marginalized groups are able to realize their collective power in hopes of altering their status in society vis-à-vis the mainstream. We also notice that people associated with immigrant communities in Berlin are not composed of passive subjects controlled by a dominant German society.

Once formed, GLADT defined itself broadly as an organization for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgenders, transsexuals, and others who do not identify with mainstream heterosexuality and with white German society. Despite its 'ethnic' label as a Turkish organization, GLADT attempts to undermine ethnic stereotypes within its structure and outreach activities. Today its membership of more than ninety people includes people from Western and Eastern Europe, North America (USA and Canada), North and Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and parts of Asia. In an attempt to subvert ethnic labels, GLADT never attaches flags next to their multi-lingual publications (e.g. using a French flag to indicate the use of French). One of my interviewees explained the importance of this approach in terms of colonialism. Attaching a French flag to a French-language publication, he said, could potentially isolate someone from Algeria since such symbols conjure up memories of the French-Algerian colonial encounter. GLADT, therefore, communicates its openness and seeks to achieve an inclusive community by removing ethnic labels from its organizational operation and broadening the definition of 'gay and lesbian.'

GLADT's commitment to maintaining an open community can sometimes be ambiguous, however. In our discussion, one of the representatives suggested that the organization remains closed to those who assert opinions hostile to GLADT's mission of creating a welcoming space for queers and other people from marginalized communities. In one example, my informant described a situation when a gay German man visited an open forum about alternative queer communities in Berlin hosted by GLADT. The German man interrupted the discussion by announcing that it was antithetical to be gay and Turkish because of the Turks' Muslim heritage. The representative of GLADT interpreted this opinion as racist, inflammatory, and hostile toward GLADT's members. The exchange between the members and the German man turned into a heated debate that ended when the members asked him to leave the forum and

not to attend any future events sponsored by GLADT. In response to this story, I asked if denying this person access to GLADT and its community was contradictory to the organization's identity as an open space, but both representatives denied that it was by explaining their rejection of such people in terms of the organization's limited resources. It would be a drain on the organization's time and efforts, so it was explained, to attempt changing this man's mind about Turks, Islam, and homosexuality.

Without overlooking the obviousness of the contradiction between GLADT's profession of creating an open, inclusive community and its exclusion of people unlike themselves, such behavior is indicative of how the organization expresses itself politically by turning mainstream assumptions about immigrants inside out. By calling the German man a racist and equating his views with those of the mainstream, GLADT was able to project their experience of being alienated by the mainstream onto this man. Instead of entertaining the question about the incomprehensibility of a gay Turk, GLADT turned the question back to him so as to entice him to reconsider his beliefs and, more importantly, to contemplate the experience of exclusion as he experienced it. Whether or not this particular gay German responded in such a manner can only be speculated, but the more important point is that by refusing to play back into the hands of the mainstream and the stereotypes it embodies, GLADT attempted to rearrange the power dynamic between minority and majority communities. They are practicing exclusion not to exclude *per se*, but rather to exhibit their community's power to do so. And since politics is about power, one can see such a maneuver as part of GLADT's political expression.

GLADT's performance of exclusionary power occurs within the Turkish community in Berlin as well. In our discussion, the representatives from GLADT recounted an encounter they had with the *Türkischer Bund in Berlin-Brandenburg* (Turkish Federation in Berlin-Brandenburg, TBB), an umbrella organization serving Turkish organizations in and around Berlin. Early in GLADT's history, a board member from TBB approached the organization with an invitation to become part of TBB's organizational umbrella, but GLADT denied the invitation. The decision was explained to me in terms of GLADT's desire to disassociate itself from TBB, which it viewed as a hegemonic Turkish association with political goals based on advancing a specifically "Turkish" agenda. GLADT believed that TBB was perpetuating stereotypes about Turks living Berlin, particularly ones related to Islamic cultural "traditions"

and youth criminality.<sup>9</sup> While it may be a less subtle example of the way in which GLADT excludes certain actors they consider too close to the mainstream, their de-identification with an organization like TBB is indicative of how the Turkish communities negotiate their status in German society amongst themselves. It also supports the idea that GLADT's political identity is to some degree founded on its ability to choose who will be included and excluded from the organization.

We cannot limit our understanding of GLADT's politics to its power to include and exclude whomever it wishes since the ability and the desire to do so reside within the organization's non-conformist identity. It is from this identity that GLADT employs alternative means of political expression to stage attempts at transforming the Whitespace. At a Christopher Street Day (CSD) parade in Berlin, GLADT constructed a large wooden "box" painted as a German flag. It was big enough for people to enter and walk around. Cut into the side of the box were two doors, one marked *Ausländer* (foreigners) and the other *Deutschen* (Germans), but one could only enter through the door marked for Germans. Behind the door marked for "foreigners" was a veil-like prop, which you could see from the space where "Germans" entered. The idea was that everyone, German or otherwise, would enter the door to see what was inside. While inside, the participants would realize that people with different skin tones, hair, language, clothing, make-up, etc., were mingling in the space marked for Germans, all the while ogling the veil-like prop next door. By forcing everyone into the same space, GLADT communicated that everyone belongs together in Germany, that they all live together in the same country. In this performance of its political identity, GLADT posed the question of who is and is not included in the definition of German and incited the audience to think about on what grounds this definition is constructed. The "German" door asked the former question, while the veil-like prop posed the latter one. The box provides reason to believe that when communities like GLADT may be able to transform the divide between the margin and the mainstream into something less determined and more fluid.

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<sup>9</sup> TBB advocates for Turkish women's rights by condemning the veil as a divisive political symbol and emblematic of a repressive Islamic practice and works closely with the CDU faction in Berlin's local government to combat youth criminality in areas of the city heavily populated by Turks, namely in Kreuzberg and Neukölln.

## Conclusion

I have argued that the multicultural approach to community organization, particularly in Berlin's LGBTQ communities, does not provide a space for gays and lesbians with immigrant backgrounds to negotiate belonging in the community. This is not to say the work and activity of LSVD is devoid of purpose, but in this instance, the ethnosexual frontier, where ethnicity and sexuality overlap as an outcome of identity contestations and negotiations, is invoked to divide the German community from the non-German one. The analysis of LSVD suggests that one reason multiculturalism fails to break down this divide is because it is an imposed institutional framework intended to 'integrate' those on the margins into the 'mainstream.' GLADT exemplifies, by contrast, that when those on the margin define and act on their own interests they are able to contest the establishment, represented here by LSVD. In doing so, organizations like GLADT challenge stereotypes and participate in the transformation of social norms and values that determine boundaries of belonging. This is the process I have defined as queering the Whitespace.

My argument raises several practical and theoretical questions requiring further interrogation. First, it remains to be determined under what circumstances organizations like GLADT emerge and attain relevancy. What social factors contribute to the rise of anti-establishment or anti-mainstream organizations? Does this mode of organization depend on macro-level institutional design, that is, on how organizations are structured in a given society, or, at the micro-level of everyday interaction which determines patterns of self-representation and performances of ethnicity and sexuality? As regards matters of 'immigrant integration,' one can use this analysis and argument to further pursue questions about why assimilation and, especially, multiculturalism do not empower marginalized communities to define and act on their interests, in most instances leaving the state in a position to determine who will be incorporated and by what means. Finding answers to these questions will further our understanding about the processes and patterns of social change and identity formation and contestations in pluri-ethnic societies.

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