Lubunya Assemblages

Queer Networked Resistances in Turkey

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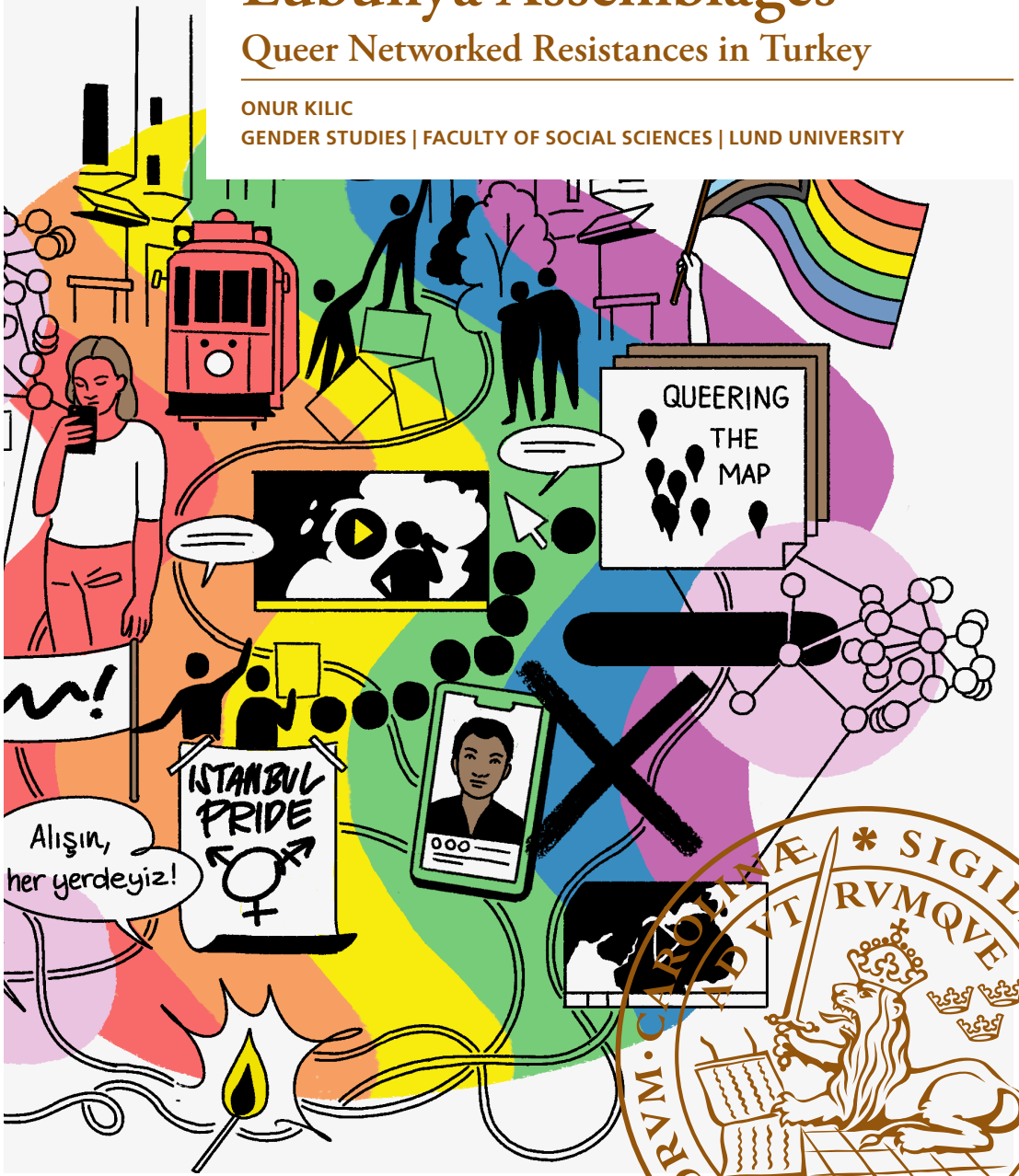

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Queer Networked Resistances in Turkey

Onur Kilic

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UNIVERSITY

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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Abstract:

From a multi-sited ethnographic perspective, I analyse the impacts of digital technologies on queer activism in contemporary Turkey with a focus on networked resistance practices such as Pride activism and queer knowledge production at the digital level. By so doing, I aim to explore how queer spaces of resistance and practices of sexual citizenship are (re)articulated within a context of heteropatriarchal oppression. Turkey forms one of the major spaces for queer activism and public protest, where the community since the 1980s has been claiming their right to public assembly through civil society actions and street protests. The queer movement in Turkey has a strong culture of spatial resistance, their struggles for supporting the existence and growth of queer spaces and neighbourhoods in major cities including Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir being particularly visible. Today, the AKP government and their right-wing populist coalition in Turkey are depoliticising public spaces and targeting the queer community by policing the streets or producing hate speech on social media, and has taken even a legislation focused action by withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention. Under these circumstances, the understanding of spatial and political contestation on the queer movement and emerging resistance cultures in Turkey becomes increasingly important. My methodology for exploring queer resistance in this highly volatile, turbulent context challenges the ontological hierarchies between online and offline with an investigation of their entanglements. With an assemblage thinking, I look at how subjects, spaces and affects interact in forming and sustaining queer resistance against political and epistemic violences.

Key words: networked resistance; queer movement; digital activism; assemblages; sexual citizenship

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For my lubunya friends and all resisting queers in Palestine.

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Acknowledgements

While writing a dissertation may appear to be a lonely process to the onlooker, it is incredible how many wonderful people I have met and worked with over the past five years. It has made this journey far from lonely; indeed, it has been a very collective and solidaristic time. Today, when I am concluding this thesis, I know that doing this research and writing this dissertation has been possible only because of the great contribution of the research participants, colleagues and/or friends, those I already knew before, and those I met along the way. A big thank you to you all!

I would like to start by saying how grateful I am to my research participants, whose trajectories of activism and continuous struggles inspired me and made this research possible. I cannot thank you enough for generously giving your time to our long conversations, sharing your life stories, for thinking together on queer politics and resistance, jointly participating in various events, and meeting both onscreen and in person. I feel very lucky to have met each one of you.

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Malmö
October 2024

Sammanfattning

Den här avhandlingen undersöker hur digital teknik påverkar queeraktivism och rum för motstånd i dagens Turkiet. Genom att studera nätverksbaserade motståndspraktiker som sträcker sig över tid och som finns både online och offline, syftar avhandlingen till att utforska hur digital teknologi har präglat queera motståndskulturer. Målsättningen är att bidra till akademiska debatter om ontologiska och epistemologiska dimensioner av queert motstånd. Avhandlingen placerar Turkiets queerrörelse inom ramen för en transnationell kamp med rötter i det Globala Syd och belyser hur queeraktivister kämpar mot både globala krafter – som kolonialism, nyliberal kapitalism och antigenderism – och lokala erfarenheter av auktoritärt styre. Utifrån detta transnationella ramverk närmar sig avhandlingen begreppet lubunya som situerad term, med dess referenser till queerrörelsen och dess (sub)kulturer. Avhandlingen använder både termerna lubunya och queer och strävar även efter att gå bortom de binära termerna global/lokal och universalism/partikularism i förståelsen av queerkampen. Studien belyser även de komplexa makthierarkier och intersektionella identitetspositioner baserade på kön, klass, etnicitet och religion som finns inom rörelsen, samt deras relation till andra sociala kamper. Avhandlingen kastar ljus över de rumsligt förankrade aspekterna av lubunya-rörelsen både som ett nätverk, såsom till exempel genom lokala former för transmotstånd, motstånd i Gezi-parken och Pride-evenemang. Avhandlingen visar också hur statligt förtryck och våld mot queerrörelsen tar sig både epistemiska och politiska former, som en följd av den ökade auktoritära nyliberalismen i Turkiet och den globala antigenuspolitiken.

I avhandlingen presenteras teoretiska och metodologiska ramverk för att undersöka den skiftande rumsliga dynamiken bland queera motståndspraktiker i Turkiet. *Assemblage* används som teoretisk ram för att utforska hur queera subjekt, rum och affekter samverkar i motståndspraktiker samt i relationerna dem emellan. Här undersöks till att börja med lubunya-subjektens handlingar som sexuella medborgare. Begreppet sexuellt medborgarskap används bortom medborgarskapets rättsliga ramar för att förstå hur lubunya-subjekt förhåller sig till statliga och globala maktstrukturer. Vidare teoretiseras motståndets plats inte bara som en geografisk eller teknologisk yta, utan som ett dynamiskt utrymme som kännetecknas av rumsliga symboler, förkroppsligad närvaro och digitala möjligheter. Slutligen blir även affekter centrala i studien genom analys av hur minnen och känslor ekar och cirkulerar kring lubunya-subjekt och i lununya-utrymmen. Metodologiskt använder avhandlingen multisituerad digital etnografi av både Istanbuls urbana rum och digitala plattformar som Twitter, Zoom, Instagram och YouTube. Analysen tar sin utgångpunkt i en

undersökning av ”var” och ”hur” lubunya genererar kunskap och gör motstånd mot politiska och epistemiska orättvisor, genom nätverksbaserad kamp. Centralt för denna metod är fokus på flödena mellan till synes isolerade områden: mellan kropp och teknik, mellan offline- och onlinerum, mellan synlighet och osynlighet, och på den ständiga rörelsen mellan dessa gränser. De fyra empiriska artiklarna fokuserar på lububya-motståndspraktiker: hur Twitter möjliggör gatuaktivism; hur digitala Pride-evenemang, som Istanbul Pride, hämtar kraft från offline-symboler och interaktioner; eller deltagares aktivistresor som fragmenterade men ändå sammankopplade upplevelser inom lubunya-motståndets nätverksutrymmen.

Avhandlingen visar att i dagens digitala nätverksbaserade samhällen är queert motstånd rotat i både lokal gräsrotspolitik och digitala nätverk, där blandningen av online- och offlineaktivism ger upphov till nya former av motstånd. Dessa nya former av motstånd överskrider konventionella binära kategorier som till exempel kontroversiella/konventionella eller kollektiva/individuella handlingar. Vikten av att utmana det synlighetsparadigm som idag omgärdar queera motståndskulturer är ett annat resultat av denna studie. Med den ökande globala antigenderismen och högerpopulistiska regeringar över hela världen, visar avhandlingen att det inte nödvändigtvis är önskvärt för queergemenskaper att vara helt synliga. Faran med oönskad synlighet hänger ihop med de risker som är förknippade med att använda digital teknologi. Detta pekar på att det digitala är långt ifrån ett säkrare utrymme för aktivism, snarare är det digitala ett omtvistat rum som ofta innefattar förtryckande mekanismer såsom statlig övervakning, hatpropaganda och juridisk förföljelse.

List of articles

Article I

Kilic, O. (2023) “Every parade of ours is a pride parade”: Exploring LGBTI+ digital activism in Turkey. *Sexualities*, 26(7), 731-747. (Journal Article)

Article II

Kilic, O. (2024). Digitalizing sexual citizenship: LGBTI+ resistance at digital spaces in pandemic times. *Feminist Media Studies*, 24(1), 1004-1022. (Journal Article)

Article III

Kilic, O. (forthcoming in 2025). Transforming queer spaces in changing paradigms of in/visibility. In M. Liinason, S. Koshravi Ooryad & L. Selander (Eds.), *Spaces – Bodies – Revolts. Emerging Digital Cultures, Feminist Struggles, and Global Change.* Punctum Books. (Book Chapter)

Article IV

Kilic, O. (forthcoming in 2025). Lubunya counter-archival practices and radical hope. In M. Liinason, O. Kilic, S. Koshravi Ooryad. (Eds.) *Feminist and Queer Imaginaries of Hope in a Turbulent Era.* Edward Elgar Publishing. (Book Chapter)

All the journal articles and book chapters above were written by Onur Kilic, the sole author, in English.

Author’s note on translation

Unless indicated otherwise, all translations from Turkish to English in this thesis are mine.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

It is June 28th in 2020, the last Sunday of the month. Every year around this time, since 2003, Istanbul's Pride march has taken place in Beyoğlu district's Istiklal Street and its surroundings. It is the largest street activism for queer people in Turkey. Since 2015, it has been challenged by governmental bans, police violence and arrests; a stark reminder that Pride is still a protest. But this year feels different. This time the streets are rather empty. No physical gatherings, no waving of Pride flags, no presence of queer bodies queering the streets, and even no police. For the first time in its history, the Pride march is to take place digitally. All the queers I meet in this week full of events have been behind their screens, sitting in their not-so-safe homes, waiting for this pandemic to be over. As the participants in Istanbul Pride, we had been informed the day before by organisers that there would be a surprise event revealed for today: it turns out that we are to have a Pride march after all. With excitement, I log onto the website prepared by the Istanbul Pride Week Committee, *neredesinlubunya.com* (Where are You, Lubunya?). There is a map that opens in Istanbul, but then, with the cursor, you can move it all around the world. First, I use the cursor to go all the way to Gothenburg, Sweden, where I am located now. I am about to pin myself there, as we can pin ourselves to a certain location, by choosing a Pride flag, banner or slogan. But then I decide that is not where I would like to be. This place, where I was about to pin my location, is far from where my body desires to be. I would like to be on the streets of Beyoğlu. I control the cursor again, return all the way to Istanbul, pin myself right in Istiklal Street, pick a progressive rainbow flag as my pin, and then I leave a text bubble: "HERE I AM!"

The above vignette is a moment from Istanbul Pride Week in 2020, where amid the Covid-19 pandemic the first-ever digital Pride events took place across Turkey. This time, instead of on busy city streets, they were moved to platforms such as Zoom, YouTube and Instagram. Many solidarity gatherings emerged, from online parties to workshops and digital Pride events in cities including Istanbul, Izmir, Mersin and Antalya. The emergent conditions of the pandemic drastically impacted the ways in which Pride activism took place,

given that Pride events are known for their function of "queering the space" (Doderer, 2011), temporarily redefining the presumably cis-heteronormative public sphere. This time, the corporeal presence of queer bodies in the city was absent, with the main theme of Istanbul Pride declaring "Where am I?" (#benneredeyim). At the beginning of this nearly five-year ethnographic study that I will present in the following chapters, this question also resonated with me: I wanted to address the question of "where" the queer community is in relation to "how" queer resistance takes place. To be more precise, I wanted to understand how did queer resistance move to digital spaces, and what happened to embodied and situated perspectives of the queer movement from Turkey in this process? I also wanted to explore how we need to rethink the notion of spatiality and visibility when even the most street-based form of activism moves towards the screens of our computers and mobile phones.

"Emergent" digital spaces?

While the times of pandemic made the question of digital spaces' role in queer resistance increasingly urgent, digital technologies have been an integral part of queer socialisation and community-building for a long time, both in Turkey and transnationally. Since the late 1990s, the queer community had already started using digital spaces through online discussion forums, blog pages and email lists to socialise with each other and initiate activism (Gorkemli, 2012). Listening to the queer activism trajectories of the participants of this study, it was reiterated that digital spaces had played a central role for many, long before the surge of social media platforms. For instance, when Idil[2] (she/her) was telling me about how she first met with activism, she described:

> I first met with activism around the end of 2004, during my early university years. It was through the blog pages of LambdaIstanbul that I made this discovery. At the time, I was living in a student dormitory and, while doing some research in the internet café there, I stumbled upon LambdaIstanbul for the first time. (Idil, she/her, 2020)

Today, digital technologies are increasingly present in queer activism, not only for the purpose of contentious political manifestations, but also as part of everyday life that goes beyond public/private or individual/collective boundaries in showing resistance. When I was framing the focus of this

[2] All participant names mentioned in this study are pseudonyms selected by the participant or by the author to protect confidentiality. For a detailed discussion on the integrity of research participants, see Chapter 4.

research, I became particularly interested in understanding those moments when online and offline spaces of resistance collide. As I show in the above vignette, for instance, why do queer activists see the need for locating their struggle, even in a context when their experience becomes entirely digital? Also, I was thinking the other way around: how do digital technologies transform the political experience of physical spaces? Do the entanglements of online and offline spaces create novel forms of resistance? These are important questions that made this research grow into a PhD thesis work. One key aspect to highlight is the legacy of the Gezi Park Resistance, which took place in 2013 all over Turkey. Emerging from a spatial resistance of protecting a public park in the heart of Istanbul, which was historically a queer cruising spot, Gezi Park became an experience of a networked public sphere (Tufekci, 2017) where the roles of digital and physical spaces collided. The symbolism and lasting impacts of Gezi on the queer resistance cultures and political subjectivities in Turkey are still strongly felt in activistic circles. This presence of online-offline entanglements is evident in novel ways in this ethnographic study, which brings together a set of events and experiences of queer activists from Turkey between 2019 and 2024, such as Istanbul Pride and Boğaziçi University resistance.[3]

About the study

Building on a long trajectory of activism that bridges online and offline spaces, this thesis has an ambition to contribute to scholarly discussions on the onto-epistemologies of queer resistance practices. I investigate how digital technologies have transformed queer resistance cultures, and propose theoretical and methodological approaches for analysing the changing spatiality of queer resistance in Turkey. In so doing, I approach Turkey's queer movement as part of a transnational struggle from the Global South, where queer activists are challenged by the forces of global(ised) coloniality, neoliberal capitalism, anti-genderism and situated experiences of authoritarianism. I relate queer resistance practices to acts of citizenship beyond the legal framework, exploring activist practices from a digital ethnographic perspective. I approach the notion of resistance practice as a

[3] Boğaziçi University is one of the oldest and most prestigious higher education institutions in Istanbul, and has witnessed a student resistance due to the undemocratic and top-down appointment of Melih Bulu as Rector by the President of Turkey (see Özbay, 2022).

political contestation using the assemblage theory to examine how queer bodies, technologies and spaces interact in such practices.

I do this via empirical analyses of Pride events, hashtag campaigns, queer counter-archival practices and activist trajectories based on queer epistemologies of resistance. My field sites are the urban spatiality of Istanbul and the digital spaces focusing on the queer movement in Turkey. More specifically, these consist of the #HerYürüyüşümüzOnurYürüyüşü (Every Parade of Ours is a Pride Parade) hashtag campaign and ensuing street resistance by queer activists during Istanbul Pride 2019; the first-ever digital Pride events of Istanbul Pride in 2020; networked activism that took place during Pride 2023; and queer counter-archival practices in digital spaces by activists from Turkey. I collected my material through a digital ethnography on social media platforms and Pride events, ethnographic fieldwork in Istanbul, and in-depth interviews with queer activists. I have chosen to focus on these events because—based on my observations through four years of multi-sited ethnography—they can be considered important moments of resistance in queer activism in (or about) Turkey.

Turkey is an interesting case to study as it instantiates how activism has been transforming over the past decade in the aftermath of the Gezi Park Resistance and in response to the authoritarian turn. For me the choice was also dictated by my own affiliation with the movement's history as a queer person from Turkey, and informed by my long-term engagements. Nevertheless, Turkey is not an exceptional context where the queer movement is challenged by state homophobia and anti-genderism; rather, it is part of a transnational struggle that reflects the queer resistance against global heteropatriarchy, especially in contexts where right-wing populist regimes are on the rise.

Research aim and questions

In relation to the above background, this thesis explores the impacts of digital technologies on resistance practices by the queer community in Turkey. I bring the situated knowledges of the queer movement to the epistemological centre of this research. I aim to provide new insights on transnational queer theory from the Global South by analysing the transformations of spaces of resistance and queer politics. In rethinking queer politics, I see *sexual citizenship* as a useful concept to unpack, where I aim to examine the restrictions to queer lives, spaces and knowledges with the regulatory framework of both the Turkish nation-state and the global neoliberal subjugation of the citizen/subject. I seek alternatives to rethinking sexual citizenship from the perspective of grassroots political imaginaries of queer subjects and in relation to spatiality rather than

a fixed legal framework of the nation-state. I have the ambition to expand the transnational knowledge of queer resistance through ethnographic insights from Turkey's queer movement. In pursuing these aims, the main research question is:

- How do the emergent digital spaces transform queer resistance practices in Turkey?

This is followed by the sub-questions explored in four articles that supplement this study:

1. How do networked resistance practices transform Pride activism in Turkey, and what are the challenges to doing Pride?
2. How does the queer community in Turkey navigate the challenges and opportunities offered by digital technologies in pandemic times, and what are the impacts on their acts of sexual citizenship?
3. How does the queer community of Turkey challenge changing paradigms of visibility in their networked resistance in times of anti-gender authoritarianism?
4. How do queer memories emerge and be kept alive under the authoritarian here and now? What is the role of queer memories in hoping for and doing queer futures within and beyond the authoritarian temporality?

These sub-questions touch upon different angles of the relationship between queer resistance practices and space to inform the main research question of this thesis. Each question corresponds to one empirical study that resulted in the production of four separate yet interrelated articles. The first sub-question focuses on *networked resistance* to understand the implications of online-offline entanglements in resistance cultures on Pride activism in Turkey. It also highlights the potential challenges that are brought by the increased role of digital technologies.

I asked the second sub-question to facilitate the discussions on sexual citizenship and to refer to the resistance practices as acts of citizenship. By asking this, I investigate citizenship as an unstable concept contested by a reductionist legal framework and hegemonic politics, and rethinking citizenship through its queer responses. In the same question, I also raise the Covid-19 pandemic as a crucial experience impacting resistance cultures and citizenship practices.

The third sub-question highlights the need to understand the impacts of the AKP government's right-wing authoritarianism and anti-gender politics in

Turkey. The question aims to open discussions on specific resistance tactics against this oppression with a discussion on paradigms of visibility. Furthermore, the article is itself an act of making such resistance visible, which can encourage other research in similar contexts amid the growing popularity of right-wing authoritarianism worldwide.

The last sub-question recognises the epistemic significance of memories and affects in exploring queer resistance practices. While it brings the question of time and space to the forefront, it examines whether and, if so, how the practice of keeping queer memories is interrelated with the anticipation of queer futures.

Moments in the field: The author's guide for the reader

It is no secret that in an ethnography the vignettes from fieldwork, notes by the ethnographer or quotes from research participants are used as part of the narration in the text. In this section, I briefly explain how I present my material in particular ways that cause no disturbance to the flow of the text but, rather, contribute to the integrity of the thesis.

During four years of conducting this research, I used several digital and analogue notebooks to keep my memories fresh, to record, to facilitate my thinking, or to keep some private notes for myself. These form my field diaries. However, I also felt a need to share some of these with the readers of this thesis, in addition to the material already presented in the empirical articles. My own solution to presenting my thoughts or impressions that are not necessarily integral to the text, or quotes from my interviewees, which because of space restrictions could not be included fully, was to use text boxes at various points throughout this thesis. For me, these boxes have a methodological function as they will reflect the affective moments I had during fieldwork, oftentimes making an unexpected intervention in my acts of listening to people, watching performances, scrolling the screen or moving around Istanbul. I wanted these boxes to reflect those moments, so I decided to call them "moments". As these thoughts or impressions came to me often quite unexpectedly, I also decided that they should appear in the text without integrating them into the main flow of the manuscript. My aim was that the moments also reflect the methodology of this thesis, which is framed by an assemblage of subjects, spaces and affects. These moments contribute to the affective mode of the assemblage, like those feelings that come and go unpredictably. Therefore, as a reader of this thesis, when you encounter these moments, please do not hesitate to take a moment to read them.

Situating the thesis

> The North-South division dominates any other form of spatialization. Every society designates a South, a place where extraction will be organized and where rubbish will be dumped. The South is the mine and the cesspool. Heart and anus. The South is also the place feared by the North as reserve of revolutionary power, and that's why it's there that control and vigilance are intensified. The South is the terrain of war and prison, the place of the bomb and nuclear waste. (Preciado, 2020, p. 244)

In this section, I provide an overview of previous groundwork in the research areas of this thesis and identify gaps in the literature which this thesis aims to help fill by way of contributing transnational perspectives on queer resistance, building assemblage epistemologies, and queer knowledge production. This interdisciplinary thesis contributes to an expanding field within Gender Studies of queer research from the Global South. In this multi-sited ethnographic study centred on the online-offline entanglements of queer spaces of resistance, I examine how new resistance practices emerge and how cultures of resistance are sustained amid the rise of authoritarian neoliberalism in Turkey. This work adds to transnational queer literature, particularly to the ongoing discussions on queer resistance and the concept of *sexual citizenship*, by emphasising the agential role of digital affordances in reimagining citizenship as an active, practice-based concept. My analysis is driven by a desire to investigate how digital technologies have reshaped and influenced resistance cultures, especially in Turkey, where the 2013 Gezi Park Resistance marked a pivotal transformation in queer activism, leading to intensified state repression in the public sphere. Additionally, I explore how queer resistance is rooted in local activist trajectories, considering the historical development of the movement in Turkey, while also engaging with the transnational dimensions of the broader queer movement.

I expand my analysis of the concept of sexual citizenship with the consideration of the deepening authoritarianism and anti-gender discourse within the Turkish state in post-Gezi times, seeing not only neoliberal interventions in the public but also (electoral) authoritarianism by the AKP government as an emergent oppressive force. My analysis delves into an authoritarian temporality in Turkey, where feminist and queer movements are systematically targeted.

There are several scholars who have focused on discussions on sexual citizenship in Turkey, one of whom is Hakan Ataman (2011), who used the

concept referring to the legal status and civic freedoms of LGBTI+ subjects.[4] In this thesis, as part of my assemblage methodology, I examine sexual citizenship as an act of queer transformative politics rather than a fixed legal status. Alp Biricik's interdisciplinary dissertation *A Walk on Istiklal Street* (2014) offers an ethnography of the dissident urban geography of Istanbul, focusing on sexual politics and citizenship practices by gay men and trans women. Biricik's analysis of sexual communities in urban Istanbul contributes to the scholarly discussions on queer processes of place-making and subversions of heteronormativity in the city. By focusing not only on Istanbul's urban centres but also online sexual geographies, he explores sexual networked spaces. His research places the discussions on sexual politics under the concept of sexual citizenship to grasp the role of a heteronormative nation-state in categorising its "good" and "bad" citizens. However, his contribution consists mostly of a scrutiny of the power of disciplining sexual citizenship by the neoliberal nation-state before the 2013 Gezi Park Resistance. This had been a time of considerable freedom for the queer movement in organising street resistance, when it had neither been as systematically targeted by state homophobia, nor used social media platforms as extensively. Biricik's analysis is also focused on sexual encounters by gay men and trans women, while mine focuses more holistically on the queer community with its ongoing tensions and wider alliances. My aim is to expand the discussions on sexual citizenship at a time of anti-genderism and authoritarianism in Turkey, in which participatory politics for queer (non-)citizens has become extremely challenging.

My analysis focuses on queer resistance as a networked practice, where online and offline spaces of resistance are in entanglements rather than in competition with or separated from today's queer activism. I argue that the increased pressure on street activism in the aftermath of the Gezi Park Resistance in 2013 as well as the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic since 2020 have pushed queer activists to use novel forms of resistance in digital spaces. I do not argue that these spaces turned activism away from corporeality. On the contrary, I see that bodies, spaces and technologies work in alliance in resistance cultures more than ever before. In this thesis, novel queer resistance practices are at the centre of my approach, where I seek to go beyond a liberation/oppression nexus of conventional analyses of social movements. In

[4] LGBTI+ refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and other gender-variant and sexually diverse identities. While there are various forms of this abbreviation used in gender and sexual rights struggles, in this thesis I use the abbreviation "LGBTI+" most-used by activists in Turkey. When I refer to other scholars' works or activists' statements, I use their preferred abbreviations.

a dossier on Turkey's queer times, Cenk Özbay and Kerem Öktem (2021) point out an urgent need to shift analyses of Turkey's queer resistance from a simplistic US-centric framework to new conceptual tools to understand the complexity of Turkey's challenging "queer times". They raise concerns about the global development rhetoric that suggests a deterritorialised linear progress of queer visibilities and rights. They stress the value of grassroots queer resistances beyond the dichotomy of failure and success. In another recent study, *Queer in Translation* (2021), Evren Savcı conducts participant observation and interviews with queer and trans grassroots organisations, as well as with the LGBT Bloc during the Gezi Park Resistance in 2013, and offers extensive analyses of queer resistance in Turkey amid the rise of neoliberal Islam. Savcı employs translation as a methodology, highlighting the power of vernaculars in understanding how resisting collectives, such as "the commons", create their own vocabularies. In my analysis, I add to this understanding of resistance as a complex practice by exploring how it is composed by not only the queer subjects and their discourses, but also the affordances of digital technologies and networked spaces.

Building on the growing literature on queer resistance and sexual citizenship in Turkey, I situate my thesis within three research fields: transnational queer resistance, assemblage epistemologies and queer knowledge production. I choose these as they have been central to my thinking about theoretical, epistemological and methodological contributions in this thesis. In the following parts of this section, I delve into my dialogue with the earlier research in the interdisciplinary field of Gender Studies under these themes.

From global gay to transnational lubunya

In this thesis, I join with the efforts of scholars from the Global South to transnationalise queer studies, by contributing with an empirical study of Turkey's queer movement. I argue that Turkey's queer resistance reveals an ambiguity of epistemic divisions between East and West; I do not showcase the instances of resistance as authentic practices of a non-Western context, but as a situated transnational queer struggle. In an empirical study on queer resistance from Turkey, *Queers In Between: Globalising Sexualities and Local Resistances* (2016), Abdulhamit Arvas also argues that Turkey's "in-betweenness" in terms of the geographic divisions between East and West or epistemic divisions between coloniser and colonised creates a hybrid space where queerness becomes a site of resistance to forced binarisms (p. 99)(see also Cakirlar & Delice, 2012). A case in point is my analysis of Istanbul Pride and experiences of Pride activists; Istanbul Pride is a well-known Pride event

in both Europe and the Middle East, with its strong resistance culture informing other Pride events in different geographies. In this regard, Istanbul as a queer space disturbs the (neo)colonial binarisms where the West is seen as the epistemic centre of queer resistance.

Whilst I aim for no clear-cut definition of "queer", I contribute to the transnational queer theory in understanding queer as an act of resistance and as a worldmaking for a radical transformation in politics. The point here is to recognise that *queer* is not an individualised subject of rights, nor a cultural phenomenon whose struggle is reduced to identity politics of neoliberal universalism. My aim is not to contribute to the bordering practices of queerness as if queer in Turkey (or "lubunya", as I argue later) is a melancholic subject position to be rescued from a chronically illiberal government. It is also not to draw a rainbow map of (neo)colonial comparisons between the so-called "sexual yet individualised freedoms" of liberal democracies. It would be reductionist and even contradictory to my argument of what queer is about.

In pursuing a transnational queer resistance episteme, my study is critical to the dominance of a "global gay" discourse that reproduces a regime of visibility for white and cisgendered gay subjectivities and a reductionist legal paradigm of queer liberation which does not transnationally entail the intersectional power hierarchies based on colonial, racist and ableist knowledge regimes. Earlier scholars in queer studies have investigated this topic through the discussions on homonormativity and homonationalism to conceptualise the discrimination against Eastern/Southern "others" located in Western liberal democracies. They have highlighted how Western nation-states employ nationalist, neoliberal and colonialist sexual rights discourses to discipline non-Western subjects (Duggan, 2002; Puar, 2017; Sabsay, 2015). They have presented "queer" as a contested term, whose identities are challenged by nationalist-colonialist projects to reproduce racial hierarchies and ensure the dominance of a global gay discourse that overrepresents white, cisgender and male subjectivity. For instance, Jasbir Puar's seminal work *Terrorist Assemblages* (2017) and its concept of homonationalism has been particularly crucial in describing queer temporalities after the 9/11 attacks and the declaration of a "War on Terror" by the United States and its Western allies, portraying Islam as a threat to the project of Western civilisation and sexual rights as a facet of modernity (Puar, 2013, p. 337). Puar's critique is significant for my thesis in understanding globalised Islamophobia as a reduction of Islam to an uncivilised and inherently homophobic religion by a (pseudo-)secular West. In this process, Islam becomes an overdetermined culture, or even an ethnicity, with a fixed meaning. These Islamophobic narratives complicate the queer subjectivities and Muslim identities in the West. However, Puar's

research shows a colonisation of queer in the West, yet it does not grasp how queer sexualities are lived, challenged and (re)negotiated in contexts where Islam is a majoritarian and disciplinary component of the nation-state (Savcı, 2021). In this regard, studying queer resistance in Turkey is important, not only to understand the Western colonial gaze on the queer movement, but also the contexts where Westernised neoliberalism and authoritarian political Islam are entangled.

In this thesis, I do not suggest leaving "LGBTI+" identities or "queer" to Western epistemic hegemony, nor do I say these terms fully belong to the East or West. On the contrary, I argue that such dichotomies are (neo)colonial impositions on the queer movement and disregard the situated grassroots struggles in cross-border settings. This is one of the main reasons why I insist on using "transnational" over "global", as globality tends to refer to a Western hegemony on queer knowledges, while transnationality embraces the complexity of queerness. That complexity refers to queer not as a stable identity but a political subject on the move, in diaspora, in rural or urban settings, in the flesh, and onscreen. From a West Asian or Middle-Eastern perspective, the Egyptian queer scholar Joseph Massad provides a critique of Eurocentrism and NGO-isation of the LGBTI+ rights discourse in Arab states, which he conceptualises as "gay international" in his book *Desiring Arabs* (2007). Massad argues that it "is the very discourse of the Gay International, which both produces homosexuals, as well as gays and lesbians, where they do not exist, and represses same-sex desires and practices that refuse to be assimilated into its sexual epistemology" (pp. 162-163). In arguing against a "Gay International", Massad's main criticism is that the culturally imperialist role of the LGBTI+ discourse is unaware of the grassroots struggles in the Arab world (and beyond in other Muslim societies), where queer becomes ahistorical and Orientalist, its local value reduced to a (post)colonial Westernisation project. One destructive outcome of this, for Massad, is that Eurocentric "visibility" strategies by international organisations may create backlashes in societies where queer sexualities have not been politicised. While analysing the disciplining of queer subjects under Western colonial forces is crucial, I resist framing this solely within an East/West binary that reinforces a simplistic liberated/oppressed dichotomy. Instead, I focus on the situated queer resistance practices that disrupt (neo)colonial boundaries, demonstrating how these located forms of knowledge and activism challenge the epistemic impulse to portray queer subjects from the Global South as passive victims.

I reaped benefit from the discussions on challenging the Western paradigms of visibility or "out and proud" narratives that evidently risk harming the queer

movement, and showcase how the queer movement navigates in/visibility paradigms of the West. Beyond a critique of epistemic oppression of international LGBTI+ rights organisations in the Global South, I highlight the grassroots origins and agency of the queer struggles in the Global South, and their situated knowledges in making resistance tactics possible, navigating between politics of visibility and hiddenness. I show this in my ethnography of street resistance in Istanbul Pride in 2019 (Article I), of digital Pride during the Covid-19 pandemic (Article II), of solidarity economies formed by the queer community (Article III) and of queer digital counter-archival practices (Article IV). I am here also inspired by the queer Palestinian scholar Mejdulene Bernard Shomali's work, *Between Banat* (2023), which explores queer women's political activism and cultural representation through transnational Arab archives. Shomali argues:

> "same-sex desire and homoeroticism between Arab women is neither an Orientalist, heteronormative fantasy for consumption nor an archaic facet of an old Arab past. It is also not a thoughtless duplicate of Western homosexual structures and communities. It is a contemporary shifting culture that is aware of, but not exclusively shaped by, these narratives. It is a queer interiority of its own." (2023, p. 106)

Along similar lines, I follow an epistemology of the situated, and yet transnational, queer experience. In their book focusing on transnational feminist and queer resistance, *Feminist and LGBTI+ Activism Across Russia, Scandinavia, and Turkey* (2022), Selin Çağatay, Mia Liinason and Olga Sasunkevich problematise the double-edged nature of visibility where instances of hypervisibility may lead to the disciplining of marginalised groups such as queers under control regimes. They also highlight that activists could go beyond in/visibility regimes due to multi-scalar resistance tactics that help them navigate between different scales of action—namely, individual/collective and local/transnational. While their approach to transnational resistance is creative and foundational for this thesis, I have sought a deeper understanding of the queer movement in Turkey with a focus on its situated historicity.

Thus, to challenge the binaries that depict the "authentic" queer from the Global South or the "oppressed queer Muslim" in Western discourse, I embrace the historically situated, transnational and cross-border features of the movement, while acknowledging the complexity of sexual politics in Turkey. I use *lubunya* (see Chapter 2) as a central term referring both to the social movement and to queer bodies in motion. I examine queerness as a transformative practice. This exploration traces how the meaning of "lubunya"

as a term of radical queer politics shifts and evolves in time and space. I use "lubunya" not only to recognise the historical grassroots of the sexual rights movement in Turkey, but also to unpack its relations to the transnational term "queer". Earlier scholars focused on the linguistic connections of the term through the analyses of the queer vernacular, or argot, Lubunca, explaining the roots and usages of different terms within the movement (Çakmak, 2023; Kontovas, 2012; Ozban, 2022). Inspired by these discussions, I delve into the usages of lubunya as a collective identity with an increasingly transnational character through digital spaces and diasporic positions. The term "lubunya" also provides a standpoint from which to examine tensions between the movement in relation to gender, class, ethnicity and political ideology.

Assemblage epistemologies

In this thesis, I adopt an assemblage epistemology to understand how queer resistance occurs rather than focusing on what the objects/subjects of resistance are. The question of "how" here is connected to the networked character of resistance: that is to say, how queer bodies, spaces and technologies come together to form queer assemblages. I see the "subjects" of my study from a post-humanist perspective, including non-human entities—queer resistance is not only a practice by humans, but a relational act between human and data bodies. As I conducted my fieldwork during pandemic times, queer everyday and political experiences I encountered were digitally networked in many instances. One of the most obvious examples of that in this thesis was the digital Istanbul Pride in 2020, which transformed a historically street-based event to a fully online experience (see Article II). This digital turn in activism made me opt for a "new materialism" instead of an anthropocentric view; I decided to approach queer bodies not only in the flesh but also as information (Haraway, 1991).

In this thesis, I argue for an assemblage epistemology of resistance that positions "queer" beyond being an identity overdetermined by language and discourse. I see queer as an assemblage whose "doing" is epistemologically relevant rather than merely its "being". As any effort to firmly define queer requires a (neo)colonial cartographic categorisation of queerness, I argue that to understand queer is to trace its doing. Queer is an interaction of bodily matter, technology, spatiality and affect; always in the making, transforming, and also challenged. I am inspired by Jasbir Puar's assemblage theory in arguing this, in which Puar (2017) questions the predominance of subjecthood and argues for affective ontologies that regulate how one acts. This is one of the main reasons why I chose different affective moments of resistance in

Turkey's queer movement, motivating queer activists to act and transform resistance cultures. My focus on Pride events, for instance, is informed by the intense interaction between corporeal and digitalised collectives. The networked activism during Istanbul Pride in 2019 through the #HerYürüyüşümüzOnurYürüyüşü (Every Parade of Ours is a Pride Parade) campaign (Article I), the digital Pride march in 2020, Neredesin Lubunya? (Where are you, Lubunya?) (Article II) and Boğaziçi University resistance (Article III) are examples of building affective assemblages.

The selection of situated resistance practices for my empirical articles is motivated affectively, both by myself as a queer researcher from Turkey and by my research participants. My turn to assemblage epistemology is not a negligence of queer identifications, personal life stories or experiences. On the contrary, it is an attempt to embrace emotions and fragilities beyond Westernised preconceptions of what the queer experience is about. I recognise the necropolitical aspect of queer resistance, where queer lives are challenged by capitalist and state violence not only in Turkey but in many different geographies in the Global North and South alike. In this regard, I am inspired by Margot Weiss's work, *Queer Theory from Elsewhere and Im/proper Objects of Queer Anthropology* (2022, p. 324), which reminds us that queer (and trans) are embodied modalities or vitalities who may easily be moved "toward other assemblages of life, nonlife, and quasi-life" (2022, p. 324). In this respect, the ethnographic practice is not a departure from the embodied, intimate and physical; its primary task is to understand the assemblages of queer intimacy, life and affects. In her conclusion, Weiss argues that queer is not a perfected desire for decolonisation and queer freedom; rather, it is "a desire that will always be frustrated, fall short, disappoint" (p. 330). Such an approach to queer not as a utopian ideal, or a queer subject without failures, but queer as "doing" and an everyday practice, both through the successes and failures in resistance, will be adopted in this ethnographic inquiry.

To study the feelings of my research participants behind and beyond the screen, I choose to be critical of the division between the digital and on-site ethnography and argue for the complexity of the ethnographic process in understanding interconnected spatialities of queer resistance. My field is neither only Istanbul as the epicentre of Turkey's queer movement, nor only digital platforms and hashtag activisms. Instead, I look at the instances where these spaces intersect, affect and transform each other. In a recent anthology edited by Paromita Pain, *LGBTQ Digital Cultures* (2022), the authors show how technological affordances and digital platforms impact queer cultural practices in different contexts from the Global North and South and how

networked activism is incorporated into the everyday lives of queer subjects. Esra Özban's contribution (in Chapter 9) is particularly interesting as she turns to YouTube as a platform in the aftermath of the ban on LGBTI+ events in Ankara in 2017. She looks at lubunya digital cultures and usage of Lubunca by content creators. However, the analysis does not focus on the downsides of digital platforms becoming primary spaces of queer resistance.

I explore digital spaces not as "safe spaces" where the queer movement can easily navigate and do transformative action, but as a contested space with the strong presence of surveillance and control regimes. I point out risks of online traceability and difficulties associated both with doing an ethnography of the queer movement at the digital level and doing queer activism in authoritarian contexts. I also highlight the problems of resulting epistemic divisions where the Global North is portrayed as a safe haven for building queer knowledge and the Global South as a space of surveillance. In a special issue, *Queering Middle-Eastern Cyberspaces*, Kuntsman and Al-Qasimi (2012) brought together queer digital activism scholars from the Middle East in seeking answers to the question, "how can critical cyber-queer scholarship write about non-Western or non-white queerness, without reaffirming whiteness and the Eurocentre as an epistemic center, thus recreating Eurocentric, Orientalist, and colonial mappings of the world into liberal and backward, queer and heteronormative?" (p. 5). In their ethnographies focusing on contexts such as the Iranian diaspora blogosphere (Shakhsari, 2012), Egyptian blogs (Walsh-Haines, 2012), lesbian and gay activism on the internet in Turkey (Gorkemli, 2012) and more, contributors bring online and offline experiences of Middle Eastern queers with their local and transnational encounters.

At the same time, I investigate the agency of queer individuals and collectives to alternate digital affordances, using those platforms in novel ways that go beyond the surveillance of the authoritarian regimes. In *Arabic Glitch* (2023), the digital media scholar Laila Shereen Sakr discusses how today's advanced surveillance regimes have transformed humans into "data bodies" whose online traceability and embodied personalities are entangled. On a hopeful note, she uses glitch theory to show how social media activists in the Arab world use errors and disruptions in digital technologies to create community-based actions and resist authoritarian surveillance regimes. Inspired by her approach, I portray this kind of complexity in digital spaces, where surveillance and resistance coexist in contestation.

Queer knowledge production

The epistemic violence towards queer knowledge production is another transnational issue that I address in this thesis. In Chapter 2, I provide an overview on how the Turkish state, at its very foundation, has been restrictive towards knowledge claims by those it oppressed: Armenian, Kurdish, queer and feminist. I argue that epistemic violence targeting the queer movement intensified after the Gezi Park Resistance in 2013, when queer knowledge started to gain stronger recognition amongst other marginalised groups. The growing anti-gender and anti-queer discourses with rising (neo)conservatism is today a global phenomenon, far from being unique to Turkey. One of the main tasks of this thesis is to show how queer knowledge production and memories remain alive in authoritarian times. The queer movement of Turkey has to deal with the epistemic violence of the colonial West and local authoritarianism at the same time. In *Knowing Women: Same-Sex Intimacy, Gender, and Identity in Postcolonial Ghana* (2021), Serena Owusua Dankwa refuses categorical approaches to sexuality and identifies that same-sex intimacies are built through situated experiences of failures and victories, and that stories and practices of intimacies like this build queer knowledge. I value situated queer knowledges in this thesis for being informed by the activist trajectories of my research participants.

In arguing for queer knowledge production as an integral part of transformative politics, I focus on queer counter-archives as a way of doing resistance (Article IV). Such practices are important in keeping and circulating the knowledge of resistance, especially in authoritarian times when the politics of hope is highly contested. In this thesis, I argue against the queer hope/hopelessness as exclusive conditions. Inspired by José Esteban Muñoz's (2019) discussions on queer hope, I focus on the non-linear experiences of queerness where queer counter-archives have the potential to make stories of resistance travel across time and space. Empirically in this study, those memories of the past, not necessarily memories of success but also of loss and failure, play an affective role for imaginaries of the queer movement. In conceptualising counter-archives, I am inspired by Ann Cvetkovich, who in *An Archive of Feelings* (2003) finds archival value in emotional experiences and life stories. From a Turkish context, Yener Bayramoğlu (2021) argues that archives of resistance contribute to queer hope in maintaining queer presence in the public sphere. While I fully acknowledge the value of queer counter-archives in sustaining resistance cultures, I also argue that the analysis of collective feelings should go beyond the conditions of hope/hopelessness. Hope can be a troubling concept to hold onto, or may even come across as

naïve, when (settler) colonial, authoritarian and capitalist projects are dominating the world, and feelings such as rage and anger become necessary to survive.

Thesis outline

This thesis is composed of a series of articles (see Articles I-IV) preceded by the Kappa composed of five chapters I detail here. The Introduction is followed by *Zooming into lubunya resistance in Turkey* (Chapter 2), which presents the context of the thesis. I begin by defining the terms *queer* and *lubunya* and situate the usage thereof both in the Turkish context and academically throughout this thesis. Later, I move on to identify some social injustices experienced by the queer community and its resistance in Turkey. Starting from the 1980s, I describe important moments in the queer resistance in Turkey and the complexity of the forces of authoritarianism and their impacts on queer spaces of resistance, and put forward the challenges and opportunities faced by the queer community in post-pandemic times. Chapter 3, *Theorising lubunya assemblages*, presents the theoretical framework of the thesis. I begin by introducing the assemblage theory and explain why I consider it useful for analysing queer resistance. Assemblage thinking also provides a framework for the chapter with my several focuses on different modes of assemblage. The first is on framing the subjective experiences of sexual citizenship in Turkey and how I see citizenship as an act and part of an assemblage. The second focus is on spaces of resistance, with their online and offline connectivity. I discuss how I theorise space in relation to queer resistance. The third is on affective solidarities and memory practices by the queer community. This section has a discussion on time with its ontology for a queer politics of hope. Chapter 4, *Methodologies for lubunya resistance: movements, immobilities, and affects*, describes the methodology of the study. I explain how I understand my ethnographic method through the thematic discussions on movements, immobilities and affects for the queer community. I introduce my research participants and give some details about how I conducted my fieldwork. Chapter 5, the last chapter of the Kappa, is *Conclusions and possible futures*, which includes the contributions of the empirical articles, key findings of the thesis and suggestions for further research. I advise the reader of this thesis to read that concluding chapter after reading the four empirical articles.

Zooming out from the introduction

In this introductory chapter, I provided an entry point to this thesis focusing on queer resistance practices in Turkey under its authoritarian neoliberal times. I intended the chapter to be a guide for the reader to understand, first and foremost, how the idea of the thesis emerged and why I decided to conduct such research. I presented a brief background of the study for those readers who are not familiar with the queer movement in Turkey; the following chapters describe it more comprehensively. I then explained the framework of this thesis: its empirical focuses, their timeframes, and its structure. These were followed by situating the thesis within the field of Gender Studies in relation to previous debates in feminist and queer literature. The Introduction concludes with a description of its main contributions by going through its four articles and the outline of the five chapters of the Kappa. Chapter 2 then focuses on the context of the study, explaining the trajectories of the queer movement and its resistance cultures in Turkey.

Chapter 2 – Zooming into the lubunya resistance in Turkey

To introduce the queer movement in Turkey comprehensively is an impossible task, as the movement has its roots in a long and situated history with resistance legacies and cultural impacts from all over Turkey; moreover, it is strongly connected with the global LGBTI+ rights struggle, including scholarly and activistic discussions on queer theory, trans feminism and intersectionality in reaching social justice. The movement is also transnational, with ever-growing diasporic communities from Turkey in countries such as Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States and their continuous interactions with Turkey's queer scenes. Considering the complexity of this global/local networking and the transnational character of the movement, in the first section of the chapter, *Queer, lubunya, and other "terrorists"*, I begin by defining the key concepts with reference to the LGBTI+ rights movement in Turkey. I start by examining the terms *lubunya* and *queer,* discussing their intersections and tensions as they will appear in consecutive chapters of this thesis. I also introduce Lubunca, the vernacular/argot of the lubunya community, and reflect on its political and cultural significance. This section further looks at the lubunya movement as one that transcends single-issue politics, delving into its complex intersections with class, gender, ethnicity and religion. In the second section, *#direnayol: Gezi Park, Pride, and queer resistance in anti-gender times,* I focus on some of the key moments in the history of the lubunya movement, illustrating the queer spaces of resistance in Turkey. This is paired with a discussion on the rise of anti-gender oppressive politics, exploring how these forces have impacted and reshaped the movement's trajectory.

Queer, lubunya, and other 'terrorists'

I use *queer* and *lubunya* interchangeably to refer to subjects who embody non-normative sexualities and/or gender identities. This choice reflects their concurrent usage within the LGBTI+ rights movement in Turkey. The togetherness of *queer* and *lubunya* comes from the unruliness, fluidity and flexibility of both terms in daily practices and speech. While being "a queer person" or "a lubunya" are used as self-identifiers, they are also used in referring to the movement as a sexual liberation struggle. Thus, terms like *queer movement* and *lubunya movement* refer to the transformative politics of this long-term social struggle in Turkey, on which I will elaborate in subsequent sections. In embracing the flexibility between *queer* and *lubunya*, I think of the queer politics of the "between" where solid categorisations become a homonormative obsession in the Westernised queer knowledge regimes with labelling and fragmenting subjectivities. This betweenness comes from the position of the queer movement beyond global/local or universalist/particularist binaries and is, rather, based on transnational becomings. I do embrace the multiplicity or unfinished mode of *queer* and *lubunya*, and this section aims to describe their tensions and entanglements in contemporary Turkey. As both terms are widely used in the movement, it would be misinterpretation on my part to favour one of the terms over another.

In Articles I and II of this thesis, I use *LGBTI+* and *queer* in reference to the movement. Later, in Articles III and IV, I use *lubunya* more centrally. The reason for this linguistic turn is two-fold. First is that during my field visits in Istanbul I observed an increased reclaiming of lubunya as a political common by the broader queer community. This shift in my fieldwork approach occurred because of my initial inability to travel to Istanbul due to the pandemic and later lifted restrictions, which led me to engage more deeply with lubunya activism and daily interactions within local sites. Being present in these physical spaces allowed me to immerse myself in the community's vocabulary and gain a richer understanding of its cultural implications. Second, I have started identifying myself more closely with the lubunya identity in the process of my fieldwork. In so doing, I do not aim to frame lubunya as an "authentic" or "isolated" experience or identity that is "unique" to the sexual rights struggle in Turkey. Instead, like earlier queer scholarly critiques on stark global/local divisions (Browne & Nash, 2010; Massey, 2005; Zengin, 2014, p. 26), I prefer to emphasise the inherent togetherness of global/local experiences of gender and sexuality, the togetherness of terms that may or may not conflict with each other in analysing queer resistance practices.

To understand where lubunya as a politicised identity comes from, it is crucial first to understand it as a linguistic term and to unpack the Lubunca vernacular from its origins. Queer vernaculars, or queer argots, are not unique to Turkey; similar formations exist in various geographies: Pajubá (Bajubá) in Brazil (da Cruz Martinho & Constantini, 2024), khabal'stvo in Russia and Ukraine (Ukolova, 2009) and isiNgqumo in South Africa (Msibi, 2013) are some examples (see Barrett, 2018, p. 216). A common feature of such vernaculars is their ability to bring lexical replacement to dominant languages to facilitate distinctive socialisation in the queer communities (*ibid*.) and to provide an undercover terrain for action-oriented politics (Anna, 2014). Lubunca is one of those vernaculars composed of undercover terms that hint both at the humour/joy within queer socialisation and the solidarity that is needed for collective safety. Today a popular vernacular for the queer community of Turkey, Lubunca has a long history with its roots in the language of Ottoman Istanbul denizens and citizenry of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Kontovas, 2012). The vernacular is believed to have originated from ethnolinguistic minorities' interactions such as between the Armenians, Greeks, Sephardic Jews and Romani in the Beyoğlu and Şişli districts of the city and was commonly used by gay, travesti[5] and trans women sex workers (*ibid*.). Like its Greek variant *Kaliardà,* Lubunca adopted the majority of its terms from the Romani language (Barrett, 2018).

Lubunca has been used as a form of resistance against heteropatriarchal state violence, mainly for practising sex work in more secure ways amongst trans women and transvestites. Nowadays, the vernacular is widely used by the queer community at varying knowledge levels with an indicator of the rootedness of lubunya struggles in Turkey. This also falsifies the right-wing authoritarian rhetoric of the AKP government, which seems determined to erase situated queer memories and explicitly argues against the LGBTI+ as an "ideology" or even a "national enemy" imposed on society by Western imperialism. Throughout this study, I use some key terms from the Lubunca vernacular that are most visible. I choose to use them mainly because of their prevalence in daily lubunya socialisations and digital spaces to describe certain affective moments in the resistance.

[5] A Turkish term, akin to the English "transvestite", historically used to describe cross-dressing individuals assigned as male at birth who did not necessarily identify as trans (Gürel, 2017). The term *travesti* has also been frequently used by mainstream media in Turkey referring both to self-identifying travesti or trans women individuals doing sex work, mostly as a pejorative term to associate travesti and trans sex workers as violent subjects, using labels such as "travesti terror" (see Aciksoz, 2024).

With respect to the secrecy of the vernacular's tactical usages in resistance, I do not aim in this thesis to go into a deeper linguistic ethnography of Lubunca. One of the commonly used terms, *madilik*, refers to malicious acts in the form of speech or behaviour that are insulting or harmful to other people (Savcı, 2013, p. 100), literally meaning "throwing shade" (Ozban, 2022, p. 133). While commonly used in a f(r)iendly manner, madilik is also used politically in referring to dangerous situations: for example, facing police violence or homo/trans/biphobic actions towards the community (İlaslaner, 2015). Madilik, in this regard, is a term that shows the systemic aspect of violence against lubunya. Rather than isolating the violent acts by the police from other forces of homophobia, madilik helps to frame such acts within politics of hate towards the whole community and to facilitate a collective reaction against it. *Gullüm* is another term that is commonly used in Lubunca, and it refers to "a set of fun activities, conversations, and good times spent among a group of people (and thus has communal connotations)" (Zengin, 2014, p. 1), or simply "chatting for fun" (Karakuş, 2018, p. 111; see Ozban, 2022). Later in this thesis, I explain the positive affective role of gullüm in facilitating solidarities (see Chapter 4); meanwhile it is crucial to highlight here that gullüm functions to create spaces of resistance against hate and violence, whether online (Ozban, 2022) or offline (Çalışkan, 2014).

While Turkish is the dominant language of socialisation and political activism within the queer movement, the Lubunca vernacular is an excellent example of Turkey's multi-ethnic and multilinguistic history. Lubunca brought together words predominantly from Romani but it also has ties with languages such as Arabic, Armenian, Bulgarian, Greek, Kurmanji and Ladino, which are minority languages in Turkey, not yet constitutionally recognised. This contradicts the macro-political efforts to sustain a myth of linguistic unity in Turkey, where the national project marginalises the presence of minority languages (Savcı, 2021, p. 145). The project is a result of a long process of Turkification that began with the late Ottoman Empire breaking from the multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multilinguistic past of imperial Istanbul and Anatolia, and intensifying with the establishment of the Turkish Republic as a nation-state (Ülker, 2005). In the course of my fieldwork, I observed how different activistic circles, for example Pride committees, have been making efforts to increase multilingual activism by using languages of ethnic minorities such as Arabic, Kurdish and Persian in their statements. As Turkey, and particularly Istanbul, attracts queer asylum seekers from different countries, especially West Asia, Central Asia and Russia, the linguistic turn in the movement's activism has been more prevalent.

The term *lubunya* is favoured by many queer activists in Turkey, yet it is crucial to examine the potential tensions impacting both *queer* and *lubunya*. In Foucauldian terms, Evren Savcı (2021) highlights that sexuality in the West has been a facet of modernity which reduces sexual freedom to a legal phenomenon, and the Western gay subject becomes the subject of rights, which is at the epicentre of legal recognition. One of the aspects of how Western ownership of queerness or LGBTI+ is claimed is by legalising terminology based on gay and lesbian cisgenderism. As a result, the West (re)creates the Eastern other with their "unique" subjectivities external to the Western-owned framework. In this context, the term *queer* is reproduced as a symptom of colonial modernity. In Turkey, this creation of "queer as a symptom of colonial modernity" (Savcı, 2021, p. 134) contributes to the Eurosceptic discourses of the AKP government in declaring "queer" as an import and (political) Islam as the guardian of familial morality against it. The outcome is that queer activism becomes the disseminator of the Westernised queer episteme (p. 136). This equation of queer as colonial imposition is commonly made ideological under anti-genderism, not only in Turkey, but also in places such as Hungary, India, Poland, Russia and the United States (Gökarıksel, Neubert, & Smith, 2019; Korolczuk & Graff, 2018; Norocel & Paternotte, 2023).

However, it is important not to reduce queer experiences to a linguistic phenomenon. Queer experience is neither a discursive imposition of the West, nor an authenticity of the local terminology that takes its truth only from language. I highlight *queer* as a bodily experience first and foremost, a potential for all bodies and their desires to transgress purely linguistic boundaries of heteropatriarchy. Therefore, I see language and embodied activity as mutually constituted. Reducing queerness to choices of terms would be against the very purpose of the term *queer*, as its undefinable character comes from its attachment to transgression beyond linguistic and geographical boundaries. Evren Savcı also highlighted this challenge for queer scholars from Turkey below:

> In the case of Turkey this epistemic challenge requires scholars to demonstrate that LGBT subjects or queer politics of Turkey are essentially Turkish, or to focus on local queer formations such as lubunya without attending to their entanglements with various dimensions of modernity. Scholars of queer times in Turkey therefore face the challenge of not reproducing the binaries of global–local, modern–traditional, and colonial–authentic. They also face the challenge of not reducing the cultural to the linguistic, by imagining the Turkish language to stand for Turkish culture as opposed to the colonial force of global English, an approach that veils the violent historical erasures that established Turkish both as a nationality and as a language (Savcı, 2021, p. 145)

Considering the above discussion on the (neo)coloniality of sexual subjectivities, the queerness of lubunya takes a much broader epistemic position than the limitations of fixed sexual identities of Western colonialism and the right-wing authoritarian appropriation of Islam as a heterosexist morality. The fluidity and cohabitation of *lubunya*/*queer* in terminology is a highlight of the transnationality of sexual rights struggles over colonial globalism or bordered locality. In this study, I do not aim for theoretically fixed categorisations of *lubunya* and *queer*, nor to describe why I prefer to use either *lubunya* or *queer* over the other on different occasions. Epistemically, I recognise the danger of globalised notions of sexuality in creating a "global gay" (Oswin, 2006) discourse based on consumerism and capitalist injustices. Lubunya, as also in queer, is everywhere; it is (inter)located, yet transnational, or as the Istanbul Pride activist chanted over the years, "Lubunya are everywhere, we are not leaving, get used to it!"

Lubunya therefore becomes a situated term that refers to sexually diverse and gender-variant people. Before its more widespread usage as a collective identity by the queer movement, the term was used by travesti and trans women sex workers in Turkey, particularly in Ülker Street, Bayram Street and Tarlabaşı in the Beyoğlu district of Istanbul, which were refuges for lubunya sex workers, especially in the 1980s and 1990s (Cingöz & Gürsu, 2013; Gürsu, 2013). The presence of lubunya in these neighbourhoods hints at the legacy of the cohabitation and intersectional alliances between different minority groups in Istanbul, whereas today many of them have migrated forcefully or willingly, or culturally assimilated into the Turkish majority. Those areas such as Beyoğlu were home to Greeks, Roma and Kurds alongside the trans sex workers. As Evren Savcı (2021) details in her ethnography, the Turkish-Islamic synthesis project implemented by the state after the 1980 coup d'état, coupled with the resulting alliance between police forces and right-wing Sunnism, specifically targeted neighbourhoods predominantly inhabited by working-class Alevites and Kurds affiliated with the radical left. During this period, the police militarised these areas, branding them as zones of "leftist terrorism" in order to impose anti-communist discipline. In the 1990s, the Turkish state and media perpetuated the rhetoric of "trans terror" and "travesti terror" in these same neighbourhoods, where many lubunya were demonised alongside other marginalised radical groups, as part of a broader effort to "sterilise" the neoliberal city (p. 86). It is, therefore, not a coincidence that marginalised groups such as lubunya and Kurdish citizens have been struggling with the same oppressing force of the state and its Turkish-Islamic synthesis. In a study on queer and Kurdish movements Emrah Yıldız also argued that:

> The LGBTQ community, in other words, had all the reasons to stand in solidarity with the Kurdish movement, and not only because the "Kurdish" Peace and Democracy Party (the BDP in Turkish) has been the sole supporter of including sexual orientation and gender identity in the new constitutional amendment addressing the equality of all citizens. It was because both communities, which are by no means mutually exclusive, have realized that it was the same political project that aimed at persecuting Kurds and queers alike. (Yıldız, 2014, p. 108)

These methods of using "terror" as a glue for marginalising minorities continued later in the 21st century, with the extension of the term to the *LGBTI+* as a whole. During the Boğaziçi University resistance in 2021, state homophobia was particularly evident in the targeting of queer students and the university's student organisation, which were labelled as "terrorist groups" in an attempt to criminalise the student activists (Özbay, 2022) rhetorically. Another instance of lubunyan connection to other marginalised groups was the assassination of left-wing Armenian journalist and human rights activist Hrant Dink in the Şişli district of Istanbul in 2007. Alongside the queer activists, a range of Armenian minority, Kurdish minority and Turkish political organisations and political figures have all contributed to the social movement that arose in response to Dink's assassination (Galip, 2020).

> I believe some minorities were not adequately included, especially the Kurds and other ethnic minorities. It's a form of activism that is overrepresented by Turkish, white and middle-class, and anything that doesn't fit into that framework is essentially excluded. In other words, it's also sterile. (Mert, he/him, 2021)

Such alliances do not mean the lubunya movement has not been challenged by tensions within itself, or with wider societal conflicts in terms of ethnicity, class, gender or religious differences. For instance, Kurdishness in Turkey has been one of the most discriminated identities, particularly since the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923. In a comprehensive study on the construction of Turkishness through a "Turkishness Contract", Barış Ünlü (2018) argues that Turkish culture and language became the norm for citizenship in the project of forming a Westernised nation-state. In his words, "while the state recognizes only one culture and language as legitimate, it declares others as illegitimate, worthless, and primitive. Consequently, any individual who remains within or chooses to stay connected to these other

cultures and languages is also seen as illegitimate, worthless, and primitive" (p. 196). The primary outcome has been the ongoing Turkification of other Muslim groups in Turkey since the early years of the republic, with Kurds, the largest Muslim ethnic group, resisting the assimilation policies of the new nation-state through both political and cultural means. Following the 1980 coup d'état, these tensions escalated into an armed conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurdish insurgent group, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). At a societal level, Kurdish culture and language have been racialised (Ergin, 2014), Kurdish identity has been equated with backwardness (Savcı, 2021) and frequently associated with "terrorism" (Cornell, 2018). Ünlü (2018) highlights further that the sociocultural survival of the Kurds depended on their commitment to a "Turkishness contract", which includes actions such as not speaking Kurdish in public, keeping a low profile of their Kurdishness, and performance of a double identity. The hegemony of this "Turkishness contract" in forming sociocultural subjectivity has been intensified further under the right-wing populism of the AKP and their commitment to the Turkish-Islamic synthesis and punishing those who do not conform to the ideology. In their commentary work, Rukan Atçeken highlights that these authoritarian policies impact queer movement as well, resulting in the negligence of ideological and practical relations with the Kurdish social opposition. As a result, the Kurdish queers feel more excluded and distanced from the movement (Atçeken, 2023).

While the majoritarian role of Turkish and Lubunca persists in the lubunya (sub)cultural sphere, it is also important to acknowledge the instances of resistance and alliances within the lubunya movement such as increasing usage of Kurdish in activism and solidarity statements by Kurdish rights groups. The anti-militarist and anti-war stance of the LGBTI+ rights organisations since the 1990s (Sandal-Wilson, 2021) and the usage of Kurdish signs in Istanbul Pride demonstrations since 2009 (Savcı, 2021) are to name but a few. Such instances reveal the commonalities between two struggles in terms of facing the same oppression from the cis-heterosexist and Turkish majoritarian nation-state. Most visibly, the LGBT Bloc during the Gezi Park Resistance (more details about the resistance further in this chapter) in 2013 brought together queer activists from Turkish and Kurdish backgrounds for the protection of Gezi Park in Istanbul against a neoliberal demolition project by the AKP government (Yıldız, 2014). In the aftermath of the Gezi Park Resistance, the Hevi LGBTI+ Association was founded by Kurdish lubunya activists who wanted to continue their solidarity from the park. The organisation focused on the issues of Kurdish lubunya, who face discrimination both from some Turkish queers and from heterosexist factions of the Kurdish rights movement (Kramer, 2022, p. 134). This is, obviously, not to say that the discrimination towards Kurdish

queers, or Kurdish citizens of Turkey in general, has been resolved in a post-Gezi era in politics. Rather, the solidarity seen during the Gezi Park protests revealed to social minority groups, the queer Turkish and Kurdish alike, how state-driven homophobia and nationalism operate in tandem under a unified political agenda (pp. 107-108). This agenda systematically targets those who do not conform to the heteronationalist framework—whether they are Kurdish, queer, trans or any other marginalised identity—branding them not only as political outcasts but also indiscriminately labelling them as "terrorists".

Another important tension here to highlight is the secular/Muslim divide in Turkey and its implications for sexuality. My above discussion on the "Turkish-Islamic synthesis" as a state ideology introduces Islam's oppressive role as a state apparatus rather than a spiritual and community experience. However, sticking only to this isolated reading of (political) Islam risks disregarding the daily experiences of Islam as a lived reality and erasing the located struggles of queer Muslims both in Turkey and elsewhere. These practices vary, from reinterpretations of the Qur'an for a queer transformation (Siraj, 2016), to queering of Islamic historicity by challenging Western and Islamic orthodoxies in its epistemology (Landry, 2011). In an ethnography of LGBTI+ Muslim life stories, Zeynep Kuyumcu showcases Islam as an affective and embodied experience for some queer subjects in Turkey, who have to navigate between a double discrimination, both from the secular queer community and heteronormative Muslim communities (Kuyumcu, 2020). It is, therefore, important to acknowledge that, while Islam becomes an oppressive force through state ideology, it is also a spiritual experience shared by various queer bodies which disturbs secular/Muslim binaries.

> During the [name of the lesbian organisation] period, just like in the '80s when men were doing this to feminist women, we pointed out that there was misogyny and that their humour was based on it. Then we heard responses like, "but which men are you referring to?", "which gays?" or "but this is homophobia," and so on. And then there's the defence: "Oh, but you can't take away our *gullüm*; it's part of gay creativity. Doing *madilik* is a performance," and so on. But really, how does a performance that degrades and expresses disgust towards the genital called *am* (pussy) empower anyone? However, when we look at it today, non-binary visibility has significantly increased in the queer movement, and they are using digital platforms very effectively to break down these kinds of divisions. (Eda, she/they, 2021)

While the lubunya struggle is also a gender struggle, it is important to unpack the complexity of the ways in which patriarchy is reproduced within the movement as well. First of all, although the term *lubunya* has widespread usage, it is still necessary to recognise that not all LGBTI+ individuals from Turkey associate themselves with this movement. Two notable and interrelated points of contention where the term *lubunya* becomes marginalised are cisgenderism (or transphobia amongst the LGB individuals) and class hierarchies. The term *gey* (gay), although used interchangeably with *lubunya* in many instances, is also used distinctively by some middle-class cisgender male subjects. The middle-class and oftentimes depoliticised gey-ness appears here as a distinction from the femininity associated with lubunya*, dönme*[6] or *ibne*[7] identities that are circulating in the queer spaces (Bereket & Adam, 2006, p. 137; Ozyegin, 2012). The formations of normative gay identity or spaces that exclude queer, trans and crip bodies become an instance of gayness that traps itself within a homonormative culture that benefits from "global gay" discourses and patriarchy. It is, therefore, important to acknowledge that some *gay* identities can easily align with masculinity practices that are not necessarily solidaristic with a queer feminist struggle or, at times, may appear even misogynistic and transphobic. However, patriarchal discourses can also find ground amongst the cisgender gay men who identify with the lubunya community. This is especially evident when the gay visibility tends to dominate lubunya cultures and Lubunca as a "gay slang" which contradicts the trans and genderqueer historicity of lubunya and Lubunca. For many women+ and non-binary members of the lubunya community, combating patriarchy is an integral as well as an external struggle. In an interview for *PEN Transmissions* magazine, lubunya activist Lilith explains the queer and trans features of lubunya:

> "Abla" [older sister] is gender-affirming if I'm referring to a woman, but it's also used for non-binary people like me. In my research on Lubunca, I asked one of my friends, "Why do you say 'abla' to this non-binary person?" and they

[6] *Dönme*, literally meaning "converted" in Turkish and originally used for religious conversion, is a term connotating transgender with context-dependent meanings (Çağlar, 2017). While it has been a derogatory term used by non-trans people denoting trans women, it has also been reappropriated by trans people (Zengin, 2024).

[7] *İbne*, akin to "faggot" in English, is a thomophobic/transphobic slur to ridicule one's masculinity representing a label of effeminate gay subjectivity (Tapinc, 2002). While the term keeps its negative connotation in many usages from a heteropatriarchal perspective, it has also been reclaimed within the lubunya community to a certain extent, evident from its usages in political demonstrations such as Pride and the Gezi Park Resistance in 2013; "Velev ki ibneyiz!" (so what if we are faggots!) (Karakayali & Yaka, 2014).

> said they use “abla” for anyone around them who questions the privilege of masculinity and the social position of masculinity in our society. This also reflects the fact that the social hierarchy of Lubunyas is a matriarchal one, not a patriarchy. It’s the opposite of saying “what’s up, bro” to anyone, of any gender. It’s “what’s up, sis”. (Eldem, 2023)

Today, the usage of *lubunya* is very much extended to the queer movement of Turkey overall, varying from individual identifications to referring to the LGBTI+ rights struggle. During my fieldwork, participants defined their gender identity or sexual orientation in different terms such as *trans kadın*/*woman*, *trans*, *queer*/*kuir*, *gay*/*gey*, *lesbian*/*lezbiyen*, *non-binary*. Four of the thirteen participants in this study identified with Kurdish identity through family background, either partly or fully. Interestingly, *lubunya* is used by all of them, referring both to the movement and themselves alongside other identifications they associate with. I also observed that the term had been remarkably used by queer activists as a collective identity to pursue radical queer politics against homonormativity both online and offline. It is important to highlight that sexual identity denoted by the term *lubunya* is not a static category but rather something built through struggle (Hirsch, Wardlow, & Phinney, 2012, p. 92; Zengin, 2014, p. 24) and becomes a symbol of resistance.

“What is economy, ayol[8]?”: Lubunya precarities

In Turkey, income inequality disproportionately affects the lubunya community, with transgender people facing particularly severe employment discrimination (Yılmaz & Göçmen, 2016). Furthermore, the welfare and care systems are largely exclusionary of the lubunya community, as the conservative policies of the AKP government prioritise support for heterosexual family structures (Yılmaz & Göçmen, 2023). The redistributive focus of the lubunya movement has been emphasised by activists on various occasions. For example, the Istanbul Pride Week Committee chose to centre the theme of redistributive justice during Istanbul Pride 2019, declaring the theme as “Ekonomi Ne Ayol?" (What is Economy, Ayol?) (see Article I). The committee stated in their Pride theme release:

[8] *Ayol* is a Turkish idiom popularly used by lubunya community that represents effeminacy. The term was also used during the Gezi Park Resistance in slogans and hashtags, such as #direnayol, #resistayol (Bayramoğlu, 2022, p. 2). Evren Savcı also describes the idiom in her ethnographic work as: “[b]eautiful untranslatable formulation ayol adding a limp-wristed affect to the utterance” (Savcı, 2021, p. 109).

> Today's crisis is not a new thing for the LGBTI+! We have been ceaselessly experiencing this crisis every second in the jobs we can't get, in the homes we can't live, and in our insecure lives. We know from our lives that the economic crisis which makes everyone suffer without differentiating between identities is also political. We are aware that we can't pin our hopes on the economy packages that are announced on TV to maintain our lives. At this very point, we ask to talk about what we need to stand on our feet: Economy? What's that? For years, we have been seeing in Turkey and in many different countries that politicians use crises to gain votes through populist discourse. These politicians portray the otherized people as a target as those who are responsible for the crisis and lay the burden of the crisis on those people, trying to squeeze us into ghettos and homes. The crisis we experience is in our lives and is real to a degree that neither populist politicians nor the intellectual discourse can solve it. As we see it in our practices, not any crisis will be solved without the LGBTI+ people and other oppressed identities are liberated. (Bianet, 2019)

The economic precarity has been particularly visible for trans women and travesti due to several factors. One of them is police violence and its economic outcomes, displacing trans sex workers from relatively safer neighbourhoods such as Cihangir (Selek, 2001) and Tarlabaşı (Unsal, 2015) in Istanbul, and Eryaman-Esat (Ozban, 2022) in Ankara, and disrupting their solidarity economies. Targeting trans sex workers to fine them for "unlawful" behaviour has also been a common practice by police officers in urban Turkey, especially in big cities like Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir (Taşcıoğlu, 2021). Employment discrimination is another precarity faced by the trans community, with hostile work environments and extremely low representation in public and private sectors (Kara & Doğan, 2024; Yılmaz & Göçmen, 2016). In his book *Normal Life* on critical trans politics, Dean Spade (2015) argues that an economic-justice-centred approach by grassroots queer and trans organisations is necessary for combating structural injustices against trans communities. One aspect worth acknowledging is the sociopolitical dimension of the lubunya movement. It serves as a means of engaging in queer and trans politics, not focused solely on advancing gay and lesbian rights within the confines of the capitalist nation-state framework. Rather, it is characterised by a commitment to pursuing social justice that extends beyond mere civic inclusion, aiming for broader societal transformation (Savcı, 2016) against persistent hierarchies based on gender, class, ableism and race.

Several LGBTI+ rights organisations across Turkey have been addressing social injustices targeting the lubunya community, such as economic precarity and employment discrimination. My empirical focus in this thesis is rather on the lubunya activists' own trajectories and their individual/collective

experiences of political action. Still, it is important to recognise these organisations: firstly, because of their valuable work for the LGBTI + rights advocacy and activism in Turkey; secondly, since my research participants have been involved at different levels, from being volunteers to engaging in more central positions. Lambda Istanbul is the first LGBTI+ rights organisation in Turkey, founded by the organisers of the initial Pride Week in Istanbul in 1993 as a grassroots group and gaining non-governmental organisation (NGO) status in 2006. They continued organising Istanbul Pride events between 2003 and 2011 and have been an informal school for many lubunya activists, whose members started different groups/organisations over time, including Voltrans Trans Men Initiative, SPoD and LGBTT Istanbul. Kaos GL was founded in Ankara in 1994 and has been a central hub for lubunya culture and knowledge production, through activist trainings, magazines and blogs. Another organisation is Pembe Hayat Derneği (Pink Life Association) based in Ankara. The association was founded in 2006 and focuses on trans-rights activism. Pembe Hayat organises "Trans Camp", where trans individuals discuss their issues and seek solutions. They also organise the annual queer film festival KuirFest in Istanbul and Ankara, which has become the largest lubunya cultural event in Turkey. In other Turkish cities, the LGBTI+ organisations such as Queer Adana, Özgür Renkler Association in Bursa, Hebûn LGBT Association in Diyarbakır, Siyah-Pembe Üçgen (Black-Pink Triangle) and Genç LGBTI (Young LGBTI) associations in Izmir amongst others have supported the rights of lubunya in different urban and rural contexts. The historical and ongoing work of these organisations and others shows the strong presence of queer movement in civil society activism. Therefore, it is important to highlight their central role in not only advocating LGBTI+ rights, but also everyday support and solidarity for queer people.

#direnayol: Gezi Park, Pride, and queer resistance in anti-gender times

In this section, I provide the historical context of the lubunya resistance in Turkey, to explain what has shaped the contemporary movement. Rather than attempting to recount the entire history of this long-standing resistance—which would be an immense task—I focus on some key moments of oppression and resistance that have been particularly transformative. These moments are not randomly chosen. Rather, I refer to them as their historicity has been highlighted by my research participants. This is the main reason; the

section is accompanied by "moments" from my fieldwork to which my participants refer as crucial for the movement.

> I think the salvation of this country will be through the trans movement. It may seem funny to you, but the system needs to transition* a little; everything needs to spin* a bit. Women must be converted*, men's patriarchy must be destroyed and converted* too. Turks must understand that they have to live together with the Kurds and turn*, the system must be transformed*. Then you will learn to live with me. (Interview with Gani Met, Koyuncu, 2016)

The statement above comes from Gani Met, a trans activist and founding member of the Pink Life Association, during an interview conducted by the organisation. Tragically, Gani Met died in April 2024. As an ardent advocate for LGBTI+ rights, Gani Met focused especially on trans issues. In the original conversation, she uses the term *Dönme*—marked with an asterisk (*) in the text above—throughout the interview. Historically, dönme referred to individuals who had converted, particularly in the context of religious conversion during the Ottoman period. Over time, it became a slur against transgender people. However, the word has been reclaimed within the community, taking on new meaning as a symbol of return and transformation.

In 2023, the 31st Istanbul Pride Week Committee chose "Dönüyoruz" (We are returning) as the year's theme, highlighting its multiple meanings—transforming, converting, returning and transitioning. Building on Gani Met's statement about the need for dönme for both queers and cisgenders alike, in this section I will trace the path of the lubunya movement, exploring key moments of dönme to understand how the movement has transformed the society of Turkey. This journey through the political genealogy of lubunya is a challenging one, characterised not by a linear progression of rights, but by a resistance marked by shifting temporalities, progress and setbacks. The lubunya movement has been challenging patriarchy, social injustice, the right to the city and liveability on many occasions (Özbay & Öktem, 2021; Savcı, 2021; Selek, 2001).

The spatial dimension of the movement is particularly necessary to mention, where urban spaces hold historical and recurrent importance for the resistance culture. One of the main factors is the community-building as, for instance, some neighbourhoods in cities such as Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir provided spaces of solidarity for lubunya to support each other against violence or economic precarities and provide better safety for sex workers. Also, some public spaces including parks or queer-friendly cafes and clubs become "queer spaces" that challenge cis-heterosexism and provide safer sexual and social encounters. Therefore, the spatial dimension of lubunya resistance has been

important against the attempts to destroy these spaces. These vary from the resistance to the gentrification projects in Cihangir and Tarlabaşı in the 1980s and 1990s to the destruction plans of Gezi Park in 2013 (Atalay & Doan, 2019, p. 115). The "digital turn" in resistance has not meant a retreat from offline spaces but, rather, the facilitation of online-offline connectivity.

Being lubunya under neoliberal Islam

The lubunya community in Turkey has always been marginalised by state authorities. However, the systemic targeting as a governmental policy has its grounds in the spatial struggle: first, due to the rise of neoliberal policies in gentrifying lubunya neighbourhoods, and an increasing ethno-religious majoritarianism. In this section, I delve into the experiences of the lubunya community, especially with the 1980 coup d'état and its aftermath. The post-coup sociopolitical sphere coincides with the rise of neoliberal hegemony in Turkey's urban spaces and yet increasing visibility for lubunya resistance culture and social movement. The trans sex workers' resistance is a highlight for the emergence of street protests, as their spatial resistance against police violence was giving today's outgrown lubunya movement its political roots. In the 1970s, Istanbul was already a known centre for trans women and gay men, Abanoz Street (today Halas Street) being the place for solidarity and doing sex work (Gürsu, 2013). Following the 1980 coup, Turkey adopted the "Turkish-Islamic synthesis" as a strategy by the junta to resolve earlier political polarisations between communism and fascism. The goal was to use Turkishness and Islam as unifying forces to consolidate the nation (Grigoriadis, 2013). This introduction of Islam into the public sphere was carefully tuned by the junta regime to prevent religious fundamentalism and, instead, position Islam in alliance with a neoliberal free-market economy evading union rights and welfare policies (Savcı, 2021, pp. 16-17). Their ideology led "neoliberal Islam" to appear as a political force in Turkey, which would lead to a series of centre-right to right-wing governments and eventually to today's political hegemony of the AKP. While the radical left and far-right groups had politicised the public sphere earlier in the 1970s, the 1980s marked a commodification of the big cities with free-market policies (Özbay et al., 2016). Besides, the military junta reiterated the hegemonic masculine political regime with a remilitarised structure of political institutions (Dönmez & Özmen, 2013).

The post-coup neoliberalism started an intensive gentrification process, especially in the urban centres of big cities such as Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, which resulted in a period of attacks on and displacement of the trans

community. One of the most visible areas of contestation was Beyoğlu, the historical district of the nightlife and culture of Istanbul. The Beyoğlu neighbourhoods of Cihangir and Tarlabaşı were places where trans sex workers were living together for work and the protection of the community. The anti-trans rhetoric was prevalent under the neoliberal government at the time (by the Motherland Party, abbr. ANAP). Police were tasked to oversee queer citizens and "clean out" Beyoğlu, especially from the trans presence; the surveillance practices included taking their fingerprints and doing forced displacements. In the late 1980s to 1990s, the police violence intensified further.[9] A key moment was the hunger strike that took place in 1987 to protest the continuous police violence towards trans women in Beyoğlu neighbourhoods. Initially started in lubunya homes, the strike moved later to Gezi Park (then Taksim Park) near Taksim Square (İnce, 2014b).

Gezi Park has been a symbolic clandestine queer location since as early as the 1970s. The park has served as a public space for cruising, especially for lower-class gay men in Istanbul (Özbay, 2017). The strike of 1987 was disbanded by the police shortly afterwards, resulting in some strikers continuing their activity at home. It is important to highlight here that many of the protesters were trans women as they were the ones experiencing the harshest police violence and at the forefront of the resistance (Tapan, 2010). While being the epicentre of the historical moment of trans resistance, Gezi Park as a clandestine queer and cruising spot was not accessible to all lubunya subjects in equal ways. The public sexual encounters have been mostly limited to masculine subjects such as gay men and not accessible to other subjects such as lesbians. Trans women could use these spaces for cruising occasionally, but they were often subject to police and vigilante violence, so it would not be arguable to consider the park as accessible (Özbay & Savcı, 2018, p. 156). The commonality in Gezi Park's shared symbolism as a lubunya space would be complete only during the Gezi Park Resistance.

[9] The 1990s marked a systematic violence against the lubunya community in Istanbul with the presence of the infamous police officer of the Beyoğlu district, Süleyman Ulusoy, nicknamed Hortum Süleyman (Süleyman "the hose"). The reason he was nicknamed "the hose" was his beating-up of trans sex workers around Beyoğlu by using a cut piece of hose (Akarsu, 2020).

Eşcinseller dağıtıldı

POLİS baskısını protesto etmek amacıyla önceki gün açlık grevine başlayan eşcinseller, Taksim Meydanı'nda polisin müdahalesi üzerine eylemlerine son verdiler. Özellikle akşam saatlerinde yol kenarlarında beklerken, polisçe karakollara götürülen eşcinseller, **"Baskıdan bıktık"** diyerek, açlık grevini başlatmışlardı. Açlık grevlerini sürdürmek üzere dün sabah da Taksim Parkı'nın merdivenlerine ellerinde gül ve karanfillerle oturan eşcinseller, **"Polisin kötü davranışlarından vazgeçmesi için ölene kadar aç kalmaya razıyız"** dediler. Eylemlerini zafer işaretleri yaparak sürdüren eşcinseller, çevredekilerin de büyük ilgisini topladılar. Ancak, daha sonra Taksim Parkı'na gelen polisler, eşcinsellere eylemlerinin yasadışı olduğunu söyleyerek, dağılmaları için uyarıda bulundu. Polisin kendilerine karşı çıkılması halinde grevcileri zorla dağıtacağını belirtmesi üzerine de eşcinseller, Taksim'den ayrıldılar. Eşcinseller, açlık grevini evlerinde sürdürebileceklerini söylediler.

Figure 1 Eşcinseller Dağıtıldı
The report from Milliyet newspaper on the lubunya sit-down strike in Gezi Park in 1987. (İnce, 2014b)

It was not until the 1990s that the lubunya community's organisational activism emerged, with the establishment of Kaos GL in Ankara and Lambda in Istanbul. These two organisations provided lubunya with new platforms for organising, becoming meeting places for queer solidarity and contributing to the queer cultural networking through parties, discussion meetings and other events (İnce, 2014a; Öktem, 2008). In 1993, Lambda, which was established in the same year (Yıldız, 2007), first attempted to organise Pride events in Istanbul under the title of Cinsel Özgürlük Etkinlikleri (Sexual Freedom Events), which is commonly referred to as "the banned Pride of '93" today. Despite the initially received permit from the Istanbul Governorate, the event was eventually banned after intensive hate campaigns and targeting by the mainstream media (Öktem, 2008), and "feminine-looking gays" from the Istiklal Street in Beyoğlu were arbitrarily detained on the date of the planned march (İnce, 2014a). Concerning this escalation of violence, it is crucial to pinpoint the discrimination and hate speech produced by the mass media in Turkey. The negative portrayal of the lubunya community was framed under

the singularising and pathologising label “homosexuals” as opposed to “normal” citizens. In so doing, trans women and gay men were particularly labelled as violent, immoral and marginal subjects in the news outlets. Meanwhile, the experiences of trans men and lesbian or bisexual women were almost completely excluded from media coverage (Gürsu, 2013, p. 13). Despite the negative portrayal and hate speech in the mass media, the lubunya community created alternative channels of queer knowledge production over time. Kaos GL, for instance, has been an important hub due to their news platform and cultural magazine issued since 1994, and the organisation provides many trainings on journalism, human-rights activism, queer culture and academia to facilitate queer organising around Turkey.

While Istanbul Pride Week has been organised annually since the 1990s, 2003 marked a significant turning point for the lubunya movement. The first successful Pride march during Istanbul Pride Week took place after years of activists’ participating in public demonstrations alongside leftist groups, including the labour movement on May 1st and the feminist movement on March 8th (KaosGL, 2019). Organised by Lambda Istanbul, the Pride march took place in Beyoğlu towards Mis Street, a street with a known queer presence and nightlife. The Pride marches continued in this area with increasing participation each year in Istanbul, organised by Lambda until 2011. Later, the annual Istanbul Pride Week Committees took over the organisation as a coalition of different lubunya grassroots initiatives and individual activists in the city. In 2013, the Istanbul Pride march reached nearly 100,000 participants, and many other cities, such as Ankara, Izmir, Bursa, Antalya and Eskişehir, held their marches over time.

> I first encountered lubunya activism around the end of 2004, when I started university. I found it through Lambdaİstanbul's blog pages. I was staying in a student dormitory, and I came across it while researching in the Internet Cafe there. I didn't come across Kaos GL at the time. I was researching what was what, who was like me, and who wasn't in Istanbul. It was like old forum pages. I remember that. (Idil, she/her, 2020)

The online spaces have been important for lubunya, not as an isolated space but as a facilitator of spatial socialising. One of the highlights is the presence of the Legato (Lesbian and Gay Association) mailing list by university students in Turkey, which provided online connectivity for many queers across different geographies in Turkey in the early 2000s (Gorkemli, 2012). However, the

digital spaces at the time were accessible mostly to middle-class lesbians and gays living in cities. It is possible to argue for a "digital turn" in political activism with the arrival of social media platforms (Tufekci, 2017) and the Gezi Park Resistance in 2013—the largest social movement in the history of the Turkish Republic, bringing together not only lubunya activists but also leftists, Kurds, feminists, workers and university students among others (Gençoğlu Onbaşi, 2016, p. 285). The Gezi Park Resistance started in May 2013 in response to the AKP government's plans to destroy the park and rebuild a historical military barracks to function as a shopping mall. Lubunya activists had been among the first groups to occupy the park because it functioned as a queer cruising spot in the Taksim area. The park was especially important for the working-class queers, who could not afford some queer bars and clubs (Ertugrul, 2022, p. 231). The Gezi Park Resistance emerged and spread as a protection of a political public space against the privatisation and commercialisation of this symbolic location in the city. The official state records show there have been 3,611,208 people participating in 5,532 protest events in 80 Turkish cities (TİHEK, 2014, p. 7).

> An LGBTI Bloc was formed after the occupation of Gezi Park, and as I said, we as lubunya were there from the very first day. As soon as I finished school, I went there and stayed in the park. Then there was a police raid, and the occupation happened again. While we, the LGBTI Bloc, stayed in the tents, we came together with Beşiktaş fans [Çarşı], Kurds, Turkish Airlines protesters (there was a protest at that time), the leftist movement, and many other different people there. But if you ask me, the most interesting was how close we were to the Beşiktaş [football club from Istanbul] fans. They were chanting the slogans; we were chanting together. (Burak, he/him, 2021)

Lubunya was one of the first societal opposition groups to occupy and be present at the Gezi Park Resistance due both to the historical significance of the park for sexual encounters and the increased targeting of lubunya by government officials. The repression from the AKP government started to become evident in 2010 when the Minister of State for Women and Family Affairs Selma Aliye Kavaf stated that "homosexuality is a biological disease" in her public speech, which received heavy criticism from LGBTI+ rights and feminist organisations and the Turkish Medical Association (TTB). Her statement would later be followed by other homophobic and transphobic statements by governing officials. During Gezi, LGBTI+ organisations

alongside unaffiliated queer individuals came together to form the LGBT Bloc. This bloc was one of the most active and diverse groups, involving many individuals from different sexual orientation and gender identity backgrounds at the park in a collective resistance. In the LGBT Bloc and Gezi overall, a harmony of queerness as a common political identity was revealed, not only because of queers reaching higher visibility, but also by bringing people together from presumably conflicting identity positions, revealing their flexibilities and collective potentials (Ertugrul, 2022, p. 232).

In their study on the Gezi Park Resistance, queer scholars Cenk Özbay and Evren Savcı argue: "the most recent public revolt against the neoliberal privatization of public spaces in Turkey featured all genders in the fight for a commons, from the perspective of both queer and feminist claims to public space" (2018, p. 517). In this regard, one of the main goals of the Gezi Park Resistance was for the park to become a resistance site for "queer commons", where its unifying role for all queer subjectivities gradually changed the use of the term *lubunya* into becoming a more inclusive identity, rather than excluding some groups such as cisgender lesbians or trans men, who do not share the same historicity of the space. Similarly to queer, if lubunya is in a process of becoming, whose frames are rather unfixed, then Gezi Park had been a collective spatial experience in expanding the concept. This establishment of a "queer common" is also the very resistance against neoliberal efforts to fragmentise and depoliticise subject positions within queer communities.

The prominent presence in the park of lubunya as the LGBT Bloc allowed interactions and alliances not only between the already connected groups, such as feminists and leftists, but even with those usually associated with heteropatriarchy and masculinity, such as football fans. This coexistence of previously hostile groups for a common cause created temporal spaces for changing discourses based on solidarity—for instance, transforming the political chants from heterosexist or misogynist rhetoric to non-sexist forms by the interventions from the LGBT Bloc and Kaos GL (Erol, 2018, pp. 430-431). The movement quickly spread nationwide, fuelled by digital networking on Twitter through hashtags like #direnGezi (resist Gezi) and #occupyGezi. Initially, the mass media, including the national news channel CNN Türk, ignored the protests, even airing a video clip from a penguin documentary during the main evening news. However, Twitter became a crucial tool, spreading awareness of what was happening in Gezi Park. Within days, people across Turkey occupied local public parks, organised forums to discuss resistance tactics and political issues, and created communal libraries and solidarity economies (Tufekci, 2017). In June 2013, Istanbul Pride reached its

highest-ever participation thanks to the solidarities that emerged in Gezi Park between lubunya and other opposition groups (Pearce, 2014).

The "Gezi spirit" that emerged from the 2013 resistance has since become a powerful symbol of Turkey's resistance culture, representing the political alliances and shared identities that were forged during the protests (Cabadağ & Ediger, 2020; Karakayalı & Yaka, 2014). This spirit is the legacy of "utopian coexistence and lived interdependence" (Savcı, 2021) of commons which made wider coalitions more prominent. Gezi Park was a dönme for the future of lubunya resistance in using social media effectively and gaining respect from the wider publics with the legacy of the protests, transforming the resistance culture of the group forever. The impact of Gezi in resistance cultures motivated me to focus on those instances in lubunya resistance where embodied experiences collide with online manifestations, revealing their transformative potential for lubunya both for bodies as data and in the flesh.

Figure 2 Taksim Square
A picture from the Pride march in Taksim Square in 2013, Gezi Park is visible in the background on the right. (Duvar, 2023)

Authoritarian interventions in space

While the "Gezi spirit" transformed the resistance cultures in Turkey forever and reclaimed the political potential of the public spaces, it had resulted in deepening restrictions by the AKP government on public assemblies for opposition groups. The increased pressure on the public spaces had lasting

impacts for the lubunya movement, whose spatial struggle is crucial for their resistance cultures. Here in this section, therefore, I discuss how the AKP's authoritarianism impacted queer spatial resistance. As the Gezi Park Resistance succeeded in protecting the park from destruction and in transforming the resistance cultures of the lubunya community, President Erdoğan's electoral authoritarianism (Yılmaz & Bashirov, 2018) gradually furthered an "authoritarian turn" in Turkey towards a right-wing populist ideology after the Gezi Park Resistance (Benhabib, 2013). Erdoğan's revanchism towards the oppositional success of Gezi facilitated the authoritarian longings to create pious generations accompanied by a strong anti-gender discourse (Gökarıksel, Neubert, & Smith, 2019). Similar populist interventions in queer lives by conservative governments took place in Hungary, Poland and Bulgaria during the same period. The well-attended 2014 Istanbul Pride, alongside new Pride festivals across Turkey, marked the last year of a Pride march without police violence. In 2015, Istanbul Pride was banned by the Istanbul Governorate at the last minute with the argument that Pride coincides with the Islamic holy month of Ramadan and the event "touches on the people's religious sensitivity". The police attacked the protesters, using plastic bullets and tear gas, and detained several participants. The Istanbul Governorate banned every Istanbul Pride march between 2015 and 2023 due to alleged concern about "public order and security". In 2016, the governorate expressed in their banning decision that only locations indicated beforehand by the Governorate are permitted by law and that Taksim Square or Istiklal Street were not among these locations (Yıldırım, 2022). Lawyers and activists have repeatedly challenged the decision from the Governorate as it contradicts the Constitution's Act 34, which explicitly states that "everyone has the right to hold unarmed and peaceful meetings and demonstration marches without prior permission".

> But on the other hand, Pride Week has been blocked since 2015, the Governorate does not allow the march, and a big negotiation process begins. And as the Istanbul Pride Week Committee, even though they sometimes show us other areas, we insist on "No, we will march in Taksim." Because Taksim has been the queer icon and queer space for centuries. Many of us queers living in Istanbul, after turning 18, find ourselves in Taksim, and it raises us, like a school. (Burak, he/him, 2021)

The spatial struggle for symbolic queer locations in Istanbul has been a central force in response to how governmental institutions have been enforcing their depoliticisation of the public sphere through authoritarian interventions. The Constitutional Act 34 also follows with a statement that in case of disturbance to *kamu sağlığı* (public health) and *genel ahlak* (public morality), the right to meetings and demonstrations can be restricted. The Governorate has been using these two paragraphs to ban Pride events on no legal grounds, declaring queerness as a threat to public health and morality.

Although the bans complicated street activism, the lubunya community continued organising Pride marches and accompanying physical gatherings. As a grassroots and horizontally organised group, the Istanbul Pride Week Committee and many other Pride committees around the country (such as in Izmir, Antalya or METU/Ankara) continued their struggles thanks to the "networked resistance" legacies from the Gezi Park Resistance and beyond. They learnt how to use social media more effectively and launched countless social media campaigns to reach visibility despite the increased pressure and police violence rooted in Turkey's "authoritarian turn". As a voluntary-based group with income from personal donations such as through solidarity parties, the committees also had no financial ties with companies or NGOs, which allowed their independence and radical transformative politics that have been crucial for a queer struggle.

Pandemic times and withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention

Another moment of dönme for the lubunya movement has been the global Covid-19 pandemic, which drastically limited access to the public sphere and put the lubunya community into an even more difficult position than before. While continuous curfews and quarantines became the norm, the new situation benefitted the AKP government in using "public health" concerns to ban public protests as risky gatherings. The #evdekal (stay home) campaigns dominated social media globally; although aimed at the protection of lives by reducing the spread of the virus, these simultaneously defined the home as a heteronormative private sphere of safety. Many queers who could not afford their own homes had to be stuck with their homo/bi/transphobic parents or partners (Dickinson et al., 2024). Still, the lubunya community found ways of togetherness through the spaces afforded by digital technologies. Community-based online parties were organised as a continuity of resistance and socialisation (Altay, 2022). In June 2020, the Istanbul Pride Week Committee organised the 28th Istanbul Pride Week on different platforms such as Zoom, Instagram and YouTube. The central theme of Pride was *Ben Neredeyim?*

(Where am I?) with a focus on queer safety during the pandemic and the conditions of queer immigrants. This Pride was unique in bringing together lubunya not only from Istanbul or Turkey but from all over the world, with hundreds from different locations and a digital Pride march on *neredesinlubunya.com* (see Article II).

During the pandemic, state-imposed anti-genderism deepened the targeting of the lubunya community. The governmental discourse was mainly framed as politics of erasure and denial of queer presence. Although same-sex sexual practices are not legally criminalised, the marginalisation of queer citizens in Turkish society has been intensifying, both on the streets in the form of police violence against public demonstrations and through the production of hate speech on social media channels. These conditions threw up some severe challenges in forming safer queer spaces, especially in times of pandemic. Yet pandemic restrictions did not put street resistance to an end. In January 2021, President Erdoğan's decision to appoint Melih Bulu as the new rector of historic Boğaziçi University in Istanbul, even though another candidate had been elected in the rectorate elections, sparked a resistance movement within and beyond the university. When Bulu outlawed the university's queer student organisation BULGBTI, many queer and feminist students and academics started a strike against Bulu's unelected rectorship. While the networked resistance was organised around the popular social media platform Clubhouse, many students faced detainment and lawsuits due to protesting at the university campus and their posts on Twitter. The Boğaziçi University resistance constituted another moment when queer subjectivities became equated with terrorism, immorality and rebelliousness because of their mobilisation against right-wing authoritarianism and state homophobia, being defined as unwanted subjects in opposition to "moral" and "respected" citizens (Özbay, 2022). In the months following the spark of the Boğaziçi resistance, Erdoğan gave a speech that illustrates his politics of denial of queer presence in Turkey:

> LGBT, there's no such thing. This country is national, spiritual, and it walks towards the future with these values. […] We do not consider these young people, who are members of terrorist organisations, as the true national and spiritual values of our country. Are you a student, are you a learner, or are you a terrorist trying to raid the rector's office, attempting to occupy it? This country will not be a country dominated by terrorists, and we will never allow that, I want this to be known. Therefore, we are doing what is necessary, and we will continue to do so. This country will no longer experience and allow an incident like Gezi in Taksim. (Bianet, 2021)

The above statement is only one of many from Turkish President Erdoğan in recent years in which he uses anti-gender rhetoric. In 2021, Erdoğan's unconstitutional decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention followed as the most concrete example of the erasure of the feminist and queer activists' achievements. The Istanbul Convention had been signed in Istanbul in 2011 under the official name of "The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence". It "obliges that the states are under the responsibility to develop comprehensive policies, including the obligation to condemn not only violence but all forms of discrimination against women, to prevent, investigate and punish violence, and to implement these policies in both public and private spheres" (Kurnaz, 2023, p. 167).

While Turkey was the first signatory state of the Convention in 2011, the Convention was denounced by the AKP government due to its mentioning of "sexual orientation and gender identity" (Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, 2011, p. 3). In the aftermath of the withdrawal by a presidential decree, the anti-gender and anti-queer rhetoric intensified. The AKP argued that the convention, which explicitly protected rights based on "sexual orientation and gender identity", should be replaced with a "domestic and national" regulation prioritising the protection of family structures from the perceived threats of "homosexuality and gay marriage" (Bayar, 2024, p. 29; Sayın, 2022). In recent years, this proposed constitutional amendment has become a frequent tool for threatening the lubunya movement and feminists, while also mobilising (neo)conservative and Islamist factions within the Turkish society. The politics of hate directed at feminist and queer movements, along with state-sponsored homophobia in Turkey, mirrors a global wave of anti-genderism, which has gained traction alongside right-wing populism (Gökarıksel, Neubert, & Smith, 2019; Korolczuk & Graff, 2018). While in Europe, this backlash has manifested as "family mainstreaming" policies opposing the EU's "gender mainstreaming" initiatives—often seen as political elitism from Brussels (Kourou, 2022)—in Turkey, it has morphed into an "anti-Western" narrative rooted in political Islamism, where gender is portrayed as a Western ideological imposition (Eslen-Ziya, 2020).

State homophobia in Turkey is not solely a product of the AKP's anti-Western rhetoric. Turkey's Westernisation project, initiated with the founding of the Turkish Republic, has long played a role in defining the limits of sexual citizenship. For decades, successive Turkish governments have promoted an ideal citizen who is heterosexual, Turkish, and Muslim, marginalising those outside these norms. Nukhet Sirman (2013) refers to this as "familial

citizenship", where the ideal citizen is a sovereign husband with a dependent wife (Kandiyoti, 2016, p. 107). Since the 1920s, this citizen was envisioned as Turkish and Sunni Muslim, committed to secularism and national interests. In recent years, the AKP's right-wing authoritarianism has further intensified this heterosexist, familial ideal by embedding "Islamic" morality and eroding secularism (Gökarıksel, Neubert, & Smith, 2019; Yilmaz, 2015). This binary, family-centered model of sexual citizenship frames queer identities as threats, rendering them undesirable within the familialised social order (see Keyman & Içduygu, 2013).

It is also important to argue here that the controversy around the Istanbul Convention's pro-LGBTI+ stance impacted the relationship between feminist and queer movements. After the decision by Erdoğan to withdraw from the Convention, the LGBTI+ rights discourse over the Convention was shown as the main factor for the presidential decision. Governmental attempts to distinguish between feminist and queer movements in Turkey have caused, for instance, "conservative feminist" group KADEM's (the Association for Women and Democracy) change of stance about the convention from being in favour to being against. However, despite the efforts to cause divisions, many feminist and queer groups stood and acted together in their online campaigns and street protests against the withdrawal (Özkazanç, 2024).

The intensified digital connectivity during (post-)pandemic times has also been where translocal and transnational solidarities found more ground in lubunya activism. The consecutive years of restrictions on public gatherings due to the pandemic and authoritarian interventions led to the development of other forms of resistance that focused on queer cultural and knowledge production. Podcasts and blogs have been some platforms where lubunya could interact to reach wider audiences without putting themselves at further risk of policing or being infected by Covid19.

Zooming out from Chapter 2

In this chapter, I provided a background and context to the lubunya movement in Turkey. This has been a crucial chapter to write, as it has become the space for me to delve into details of the lubunya resistance and provide the readers of this thesis with the historical background of the movement's various cultures that are only briefly touched upon in the empirical articles (Articles I–IV). I started the chapter with a conceptual discussion on *queer* and *lubunya*, explaining that both terms are significant in reference to the situated roots and

transnational connections of the struggle. I introduced the origins and interactions of lubunya both as a political and cultural identity, as well as its associated vernacular/argot, Lubunca. This initial section also explained why I use the terms interchangeably in the chapters of this Kappa and the empirical articles. Later, I moved to the genealogies of the lubunya movement, providing transformative moments in resistance as they have been highlighted by my research participants. I did this by, first and foremost, focusing on the lubunya resistance practices both independently and in relation to the oppressive role of the state authorities.

Chapter 3 – Theorising lubunya assemblages

In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical framework and concepts that I have used in the research process and the analyses presented in the empirical articles (Articles I–IV). I start my discussion by introducing the assemblage theory; it is the overarching theory of this thesis, according to which lubunya resistance practices can be understood as formed by an assemblage of different yet interrelated components. Here I introduce these components under three themes of lubunya; *lubunya as subjects*, *lubunya as spaces* and *lubunya as affects*. Under the first theme of *lubunya as subjects*, I discuss *sexual citizenship theory*, which dwells on how politics of gender and sexuality impacts the construction of citizenship as a practice, something that is openly contested by the nationalistic framework of the Turkish nation-state and global anti-gender politics. The second theme, *lubunya as spaces*, delves into theoretical understandings of spaces of resistance. Here I conceptualise my approach to the role of spatiality in making resistance as a multi-scalar and everyday practice. My take on spaces here challenges online/offline and visible/invisible binaries in doing resistance, and instead argues for the role of technological affordances in providing flexibility to refracted publics. The third and last theme is *lubunya as affects*, which focuses on the role of affective interactions in building lubunya resistance. I discuss the role of emotions and memories in making resistance not only as a spatial struggle but also as a question of time.

On assemblage theory

Lubunya is not merely a fixed subject position but a lived, spatial experience that oscillates between visibility and invisibility in public spheres. It is, at times, a temporal reimagining and redefinition of space, creating moments of

cohabitation that transcend the constraints of cis-heteronormativity. At other times, it finds itself compressed within the narrow confines of certain neighbourhoods or framed within the digital spaces of screens. Lubunya is also a set of emotions—a spectrum of feelings that spans from the warmth and solidarity of *gullüm* (collective queer joy) to the tensions and uncertainties of *madilik* (acts of defiance).[10] It is a flexible, fluid and ever-changing mode to feel and identify as a collective based on sexual variance and gender identity. It is also not free from internal challenges, as different subjects cohabit different power positions. With that in mind, is it possible to categorise a queer/lubunya subject? Can we conceptualise it? And if so, how? In this theoretical chapter, I do not intend to theorise as to what lubunya is; that would be an ontological mistake, an attempt to appropriate the concept or even dislocate it. Rather, I follow the traces of lubunya resistance as a practice, and propose a theorisation as to how and why this practice interrelates with subject positions, spaces and feelings.

Lubunya: from subject to movement

I begin by asking whether it is necessary—or even possible—to conceptualise lubunya as a fixed subject category. As I discussed in Chapter 2, lubunya is not, and cannot be, stabilised in a fixed position, as lubunya in Turkey and in diaspora hold diverse subject positions based on sexuality, gender, ethnicity, class and disability. These different and complex power relations among lubunya subjects foster an interaction with other societal struggles such as workers', feminist, Kurdish, Armenian and other. Lubunya is also a "movement". It refers to queer subjects with experiences of (im)mobility, who engage with and reshape cultures of resistance through activism, both within and outside organisational structures. I adopt an assemblage ontological framework (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and thus my focus is on how that "movement" is formed by relations between different actors from bodies that are organic and inorganic and in their relations to spaces and affects. The assemblage framework helps me see the "identity as an event of temporality" rather than as a given status of stability (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Queer theory scholars David L. Eng, Jack Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz (2005) called for a "subjectless critique" to renew queer studies by destabilising an understanding of queer subjects as a fixed identity category. Their approach challenged the fallacy of a proper queer subject located in the

[10] See Chapter 2 for a discussion on the terms *gullüm* and *madilik*. (or see Appendix 1 for glossary)

Western world; instead, they argued that "what might be called the 'subjectless' critique of queer studies disallows any positing of a proper subject or object for the field by insisting that queer has no fixed political referent" (p. 3). Their intervention into the conceptualisation of queer has been useful in expanding queer theory, allowing for thinking of a queer time and space beyond modernist linearity, of queer utopianism and futurity, as well as in showing the complexity of queer resistance and its intersections with other power hierarchies based on race, class and ableism. Therefore, the subjectless critique is also a way to show connections between the queer struggle and decolonial, feminist, antiracist, crip and refugee struggles. The ontological framework that I am inspired by distances itself from gay-rights discourses that can be complicit in (settler) colonial nationalism with homonormative and homonationalist knowledge regimes. In their engagement with subjectless critique, in the special issue called *Left of Queer*, David L. Eng and Jasbir Puar (2020) argue furthermore for an "objectless" queer critique, claiming that the subject-object distinction is rather blurry in today's biopolitical materialisms (p. 16). Rooted in an object-oriented ontology, they focus on the biopolitics of objects whose agential roles may be impactful for queer lives. Such theoretical approaches will be used in the empirical articles of this thesis to propose an understanding of contentious networked activism during Istanbul Pride and of everyday resistances by lubunya activists.

Forming lubunya assemblages

In this thesis, my focus on the assemblage epistemology of resistance resonates with Jasbir Puar's objectless critique in queer studies. Puar's objectless critique can be extended to her assemblage theory perspective, where she argues that intersectionality and assemblage theory can be in friction rather than in opposition to each other (Puar, 2020, p. 50). For her, reducing intersectionality into identity politics has reached its limits in analysing queer struggles. While some intersectional analyses emphasise the subjects of "difference" to critique the fixed liberal subject-of-rights, this overemphasis on the ontology of subjects struggles to acknowledge global injustices' complexity (Puar, 2017, 2020). Puar argues that the "modern subject is exhausted" (2017, p. 206); it is overly analysed, and fragmented. She states that:

> …to dismiss assemblages in favor of retaining intersectional identitarian frameworks is to dismiss how societies of control tweak and modulate bodies as matter, not predominantly through signification or identity interpellation but rather through affective capacities and tendencies. (2020, p. 63)

The identity politics framed under a reductionist reading of intersectionality also fixes the subject across time and space, which cannot grasp the importance of temporality in catching the moments of action and their potential for radical transformation (Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2017). Therefore, Puar suggests a move away from the sole focus on subjectivity and, instead, towards an assemblage thinking of intersectionality in exploring queer movements. I agree with Puar in this critique and understand lubunya identity not as a predefined starting point of analysis but as a concept for affective encounters, a travelling and transforming idea between subjects, spaces and affects. This assemblage approach is an ontological shift from "subjects of rights" to "subjects of acts" whose interaction with other humans and non-humans becomes central for (queer) knowledge production (Haraway, 1991). A similar shift is observed in queer movement transnationally, where stable categories of gender and sexuality are increasingly deconstructed, and queer grassroots groups are aiming for a radical transformation of the heteropatriarchal gender regime (Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2017, p. 1524; Puar, 2017).

An assemblage approach helps me to theoretically frame the complex interactions between my research participants and their actions in relation to different spaces of resistance. In *Terrorist Assemblages* (2017), Puar discusses *queer* as an assemblage that is spatially and temporally contingent yet brings the corporeality of the body as an important element. She argues that, when the ontological division between matter and discourse is eradicated, we can see the complex interactions of bodies of humans, spaces, institutions and technologies in creating their own knowledge. As lubunya become more digitally connected, they engage in new mobilities between various subject positions, emotions, spaces and technologies. To understand lubunya practices, one must examine the novel and emotionally charged spaces of resistance that emerge, transforming resistance cultures against heteropatriarchal structures (Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2017, p. 1525). This assemblage approach is the point of departure for my analysis in the empirical articles of this thesis (see Articles I–IV).

In the following sections, I will look at the relational modes that together make lubunya into a movement. Firstly, I focus on political means for practising resistance by lubunya as subjects. I do this through discussions on sexual citizenship, which help me to conceptualise the lubunya subject in relation to state and global power hierarchies. Secondly, I look at the relationships of lubunya with the spaces of resistance, and how those "spaces" can be theorised, not merely as geographic or technological surfaces but as active modes of resistance with their spatial symbolisms, embodied presences and digital affordances. Lastly, the affects come as another central mode,

making visible the role of memories and sticky emotions that circulate around those lubunya subjects and spaces.

Lubunya as subjects

In this section, I discuss the concept of *sexual citizenship* and its potential for exploring the ongoing limitations and oppression in regard to gender and sexuality in Turkey. In analysing the overdetermination of sexual citizenship with its cisheteropatriarchal limitations, I look at two interrelated forms of disciplining: firstly, via a global, yet domesticised, anti-gender discourse towards the queer community; and secondly, in the context of the Turkish nation-state, where citizenship became a ground of Turkification and national reproduction. As I approach the concept of sexual citizenship as a practice of resistance rather than a legal status, it becomes crucial to discuss the limitations to such practices. In my discussion, I refer to different theoretical perspectives in the existing literature on sexual citizenship not only as an experience in Turkey, but also as a transnational phenomenon disciplined by the global neoliberal order.

Who is a sexual citizen, and where?

In conceptualising sexual citizenship as part of the lubunya assemblages, it is important to approach citizenship as an act of resistance, rather than relying on the legal framework of citizenship as a status of being a political subject of a nation-state. The main concern of this section is to investigate the potential of the concept of *citizenship* as an ability to perform resistance in the context in which the public assemblies are increasingly effaced and the politicised spaces are erased by the right-wing populist hegemony of the AKP government.

To understand how gender and sexuality experiences are relevant for *citizenship as practice*, it is crucial to look at the scholarship that discusses citizenship as a pluralist concept. In poststructuralism, the radical approach to citizenship challenges liberal individualism and emphasises group and cultural rights, rejecting the idea of a fixed universalism in defining social justice. One prominent example here is Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's (2001) concept of *radical democratic pluralist citizenship*, defining citizenship as a political and cultural subjectivity. Concerning the question of how citizenship is performed, Mouffe (1995) redefined democracy as a realm of agonism and confrontation; citizenship is thus a dynamic form of

subjectivity with different particularities. In her view, citizenship is "a form of identification, a type of *political identity*; something *to be constructed*, not empirically given" (Mouffe, 1992, p. 75; emphasis mine). This approach highlights a solidarity-focused form of belonging, as Mouffe formulates:

> …a conception of citizenship that through a common identification with a radical democratic interpretation of the principles of liberty and equality aims at constructing a "we", a chain of equivalence among their demands to articulate them through the principle of democratic equivalence. (Mouffe, 1992, pp. 79-80; emphasis in original)

Drawing on this tradition, I conceptualise citizenship not as a given status that is accorded equally to subjects of a nation-state; rather, my point of departure is that citizenship is never given equally, equality of a liberal or civic subject being a myth. I approach citizenship as a constant struggle, a resistance practice that is based on the claiming of rights, and associated possibilities to claiming radical transformations. As Mouffe argues, agonism is integral to democratic processes in societies, and citizenship consists not solely in voting or having rights but acting and resisting the interests of particular groups of struggle. This approach helps me to acknowledge the importance of the moments of resistance in the lubunya movement and to make visible how power struggles and social conflicts shape acts of citizenship and the expressions of sexuality. Mouffe's theory of citizenship reveals the radical democratic potential of plurality: that citizenship is never a fixed category of law, and that its radical potential comes from the openness to change its meaning through political activism. This kind of approach resonates with the assemblage thinking of sexual citizenship suggested by Puar (2013, 2017) in which political practice becomes the facet of radical transformation to what citizenship may become.

In discussing the lubunya resistance, one central question is the "sexual" aspect of citizenship: that is, why and how sexuality and gender matter in the very (de)politicised subjectivities. Queer geography scholars David Bell and Jon Binnie (2000) argue that every form of citizenship is inherently sexual, as citizenship is deeply intertwined with identity, and sexuality plays a central role in shaping identity (p. 67). Sexuality is not to be put at the periphery of identity construction, as both normative and non-normative categorisations of citizenship largely depend on sexualities. Sexual citizenship appeared as an analytical tool to understand different ways in which sexuality has been at the epicentre of disciplining of the bodies. It was coined by David Evans (1993) in *Sexual Citizenship: The Material Construction of Sexualities*, which focused on consumerist discourse. He claimed that sexual identities carry the risk of

being reduced to marketised categories under capitalism. Evans' discussion is concerned with spatial representations of sexual minorities, specifically how their public or private interactions with space, especially the urban space, have been commodified. Lisa Duggan (2002) described this process as a condition of "homonormativity" that is promoted by the market and effaces the political aspect of sexual citizenship (Oswin, 2006). Building on Duggan's discussion on neoliberal consumerism of homonormativity, Jasbir Puar (2017) also introduces the term *homonationalism* for the process of disciplining the queer bodies within the nation-state framework. Puar examined how Western nation-states build themselves as sexually progressive through a sexualised and racialised exclusion of people of colour as "potentially homophobic". In this way, white homosexuality becomes a facet of modernity for the "homofriendly" nation-state (p. 78). While these discussions are valuable in problematising sexual citizenship as either a subjugated consumerist practice or a racialised exclusion, I argue that such analyses risk being US- and Eurocentric in that they position queer subjects mainly in the Global North and do not attend to the located experiences of queers in the Global South with their more complex interactions with neoliberal hegemony.

In this thesis, I aim to challenge the conception of homonationalism that limits the analysis of the exclusion of queer identities and experiences to a Western nation-state framework. I follow here queer sociologist Evren Savcı (2021), who argues that Puar's conception of homonationalism is valuable yet incomplete, as it positions Islam to be a cultural and minoritarian phenomenon, which does not acknowledge instances of political Islam(ism) in alliance with Western capitalism. This is to say that capitalism not only causes a certain homonormativity for gay or lesbian subjects of "the West" and the marginalisation or demonisation of "the cultural other", but it also positions itself and its neoliberal ideology at the centre of homo/trans/biphobic structures of political religious fundamentalism. Savcı's analysis reorients "neoliberalism" from being the property of the West and Islam as the inevitable cultural other or even a unified "undesirable ethnicity" (Savcı, 2021, p. 133). This indicates a homophobic nature of capitalism which sees profit in state homophobia, while producing an illusion of capitalist inclusion for queer subjects. Building on the critique of homonormativity/homonationalism by Savcı, I argue that the lubunya movement struggles against a persistent and complex alliance of authoritarian neoliberalism that does not limit itself to fragmenting queer subjectivities as consumer-subjects, but also, as I showcased in Chapter 2, displaces lubunya from urban centres for neoliberal profitability and demonises their subjectivity with an authoritarian ideology.

According to queer and crip theory scholar Margrit Shildrick (2013), a top-down conceptualisation of citizenship leads to a "citizenship of indifference" that normatively defines the fixed rights and duties of any citizen. It functions inherently for the normalisation and domestication of bodies, or, in other words, for a standardisation of binary, heterosexual and ableist bodies in framing the normative citizen. Shildrick uses Michel Foucault's concept of *governmentality* to explain the notion of citizen, in which law produces its truth and disciplines the citizen-subject according to intended norms (Foucault, 1978) and in which "equality of all before the law inherently risks effacing difference, at the very moment of appearing to recognise it" (Shildrick, 2013, p. 144). In their work on queer times in Turkey, Cenk Özbay and Kerem Öktem (2021) exemplify such conditions of citizenship:

> The history of the Turkish Republic is also a history of attempted homogeneity in all spheres of life, and hence the marginalization of certain religious, ethnic, and cultural minorities and social groups. Members of these groups have often been excluded from the country's founding narratives, its citizenship practices, and from what we can call the social and political mainstream. (p. 118)

Inspired by their statement, I find it crucial to argue for the need to focus on sexual citizenship with its transformative political potential. In the copresence of authoritarian and legal interventions as to who is a (sexual) citizen and what a citizen can do, it becomes ever more important to theorise sexual citizenship beyond a subject position and part of an assemblage.

Lubunya as spaces

As lubunya resistance practices are central to my research, I am confronted by the question of what it means to "practise resistance" and a need to explain why I analyse resistance as a spatial phenomenon above all else. In previous studies on resistance, it is conceptualised as an exercise of action or a practice: to "resist" means to withstand hegemonic power structures, with an aim of destabilising the recurrent power relations (Baaz et al., 2016, p. 17). Two resistance traditions have been distinguished by resistance scholars: one in the form of visible *contentious resistance* such as social movements and street protests (della Porta, 2018; Tilly, 2008) and the other in the form of *everyday resistance* practices that are subtle and integrated into social life, and yet potentially transformative (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013, p. 3). Historically, a common practice has been to attribute primacy to contentious forms of

resistance which are easily associated with social movements. From this perspective, the success of a movement is measured by its visibility in public spaces and in contentious transformative actions such as strikes, street protests and public campaigns (della Porta, 2020; Tilly, 2008). Although these are very useful resistance tactics, in this thesis I challenge the idea of paradigms of visibility as a measure of success and go beyond the visibility/invisibility dichotomies (see Article III) (cf. Liinason, 2020).

Accordingly, I follow scholars in queer studies who have highlighted the potential undesirability of visible contentious politics for reasons of safety of the queer community, especially with the rise of global anti-genderism and local authoritarianisms (Çağatay, Liinason, & Sasunkevich, 2022; Stella, 2015). I am inspired by the idea of resistance in the "grey zone" (Murru, 2020, p. 172) that brings together unorganised and (generally) individual actions and more organised forms of activism of the lubunya movement (Çağatay, Liinason, & Sasunkevich, 2022). This blurring of boundaries challenges the ontological primacy of contentious politics where large-scale resistances are strongly associated with urban space. It opens for individualised, subtle and everyday forms of resistance in translocal actions (Lilja et al., 2017). The issue of visibility is particularly relevant for the lubunya movement of Turkey as queer bodies can easily be policed due to their online and offline appearances with the rise of the AKP's "authoritarian neoliberalism" and its arbitrary surveillance regime. Çağatay, Liinason and Sasunkevich (2022) propose a multi-scalar approach to analysing resistance, which acknowledges feminist and queer resistances at micro, meso and macro levels and their constant interchange with each other. Adopting this multi-scalar perspective, my conceptualisation of *resistance* recognises the togetherness of individual/collective and subtle/contentious forms of resistance practices. This is evident in the empirical articles of this thesis, which do not make a distinction between large-scale collective actions, such as 2019 Pride protests in Istanbul, and small-scale resistance, such as recording and posting one's daily walk (see Article I). The critical point of analysis here is how these practices become translocated and move from one scale to another via networked connectivity and digital affordances.

The concept of *counterpublics* is widely used by queer scholars in describing queer communities' relationship to space. I use neo-Marxist political philosopher Nancy Fraser's conceptualisation of counterpublic due to its importance for emancipatory and transnational queer movements. According to Fraser, feminist and queer struggles challenge the hegemony of the (neo)liberal political subject who appears as a majoritarian male (Fraser, 1992, 2007). Fraser's analysis is interesting because it highlights the participatory aspect of

political subjectivity that finds its grounds not through a legal-national framework but through resistances that imagine social justice by means of a transformative and transnational vision. Such an approach is complementary to my conceptualisation of sexual citizenship as a practice. Fraser calls these alternative publics that are critical to the neoliberal regime "counterpublics": their members come together for oppositional interpretations of redistributive justice and politics of recognition to produce collective counter-discourses (Fraser, 1990, p. 67). To conceptualise a global justice of "queer counterpublics" (Soriano, 2014), it is important to critically discuss the injustices targeting queer people based on exclusionary neoliberal politics and identify colonial capitalist power hierarchies targeting the queer communities. Fraser's theory on (queer) counterpublics can be applied to the lubunya movement in Turkey, providing a relevant framework for an understanding of the ongoing struggle against the hegemony of the AKP's authoritarian neoliberalism.

Making spatial histories

To explore the lubunya movement with its spatial resistance is to acknowledge the movement's rootedness in specific histories and memories associated with those spaces. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1997) argues that social struggles are inherently situated within specific locations and historical contexts, even with their global agendas. For instance, public spaces like Taksim, İstiklal Street and Gezi Park in Istanbul hold significant importance for the spatial resistance of lubunya movement. Over the years of struggle, from the trans resistances in 1980s and 90s to the key moment of the Gezi Park Resistance in 2013, these locations have gained even greater symbolic significance (see Chapter 2). Through the collective actions and memories associated with these spaces, the lubunya movement asserts "queering of the space" (Doderer, 2011), reshaping the urban landscape in the process. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge an agential character of "spaces of resistance", not as passive geographic surfaces for social movements but as affective entities with their contested and reclaimed histories (Escobar, 2001). Taksim Square and nearby Gezi Park hold a unique position as a historic centre of opposition movements such as the labour movement, ethnic minorities, feminists and queers, managing to bring them together on different occasions (Gül, Dee, & Nur Cünük, 2014). Thus, the importance of these spaces emerges not only from their urban spatiality but also from their affective symbolism that unites these different movements with a collective memory of these moments.

Despite the efforts in recent years by the AKP government to erase these spatial memories as well as to reduce these spaces to neoliberal spaces of

consumption by transforming them through gentrification projects or police barricades, their legacy carries the constant potential for (re)politicisation. This character of the spaces of resistance in Istanbul led me to Doreen Massey (2005) and her understanding of space as a relational concept. Massey sees space as dynamic and ever-changing; its meanings are never fixed but remain in constant transformations due to struggles over them. By using an open conceptualisation of space as contested, I argue for its relationality, whether online or offline (see Articles I–II). In Massey's terms, Gezi Park and Taksim create a "sense of place" that is "a phenomenon which implies the geographical stretching-out of social relations and to our experience of all this" (1993, p. 61). The queer historicity of Gezi Park, both as a social space for gay and trans cruising and as a space for political resistance for all lubunya, gives a sense of place in which lubunya feel situated and belonging to Istanbul's urban geography. It is thus not a coincidence that all my participants, even the few who were not full-time residents of Istanbul, have developed strong feelings of belonging in relation to Gezi Park and its "sense of resistance". This also challenges the idea of place as a presumably timeless surface. Place is, rather, conceptualised with its symbolism created in a particular time and space. Therefore, the effective place-making is a practice based on queer memories.

Massey's theory on space is also helpful in understanding how pandemic temporality impacted the spaces of resistance. In challenging space's timelessness, Massey (2005) argues for the significance of temporality in the spatial experience. The Covid-19 pandemic significantly reshaped perceptions of public and private spaces, raising questions about the relevance of such a dichotomy altogether. For the lubunya community, the boundaries between home and activist spaces became increasingly blurred as most solidarity gatherings and even queer solidarity parties took place in the corporeal isolation of home spaces. With platforms like Zoom becoming central spaces of resistance, new power hierarchies emerged. For instance, ageing or disabled queers faced greater challenges in accessing certain activist circles, highlighting disparities within these virtual environments.

From networked publics to refracted publics

With digital technologies playing a crucial role in facilitating resistance cultures, my PhD research has been guided by the question, how can we approach the (counter)publics and public sphere differently? What makes the Gezi Park Resistance, for instance, transformative in theorising public space and changing resistance practices within the lubunya community and among other societal opposition groups? In this regard, I have been influenced by

Benkler et al. (2015), who define these contemporary spaces of resistance as a "networked public sphere" derived from online-offline entanglements of the public with today's "digitally networked" society or "networked publics" (Pink et al., 2016; Vivienne, 2016). These networked publics appear as groups of people organised around a social imaginary (or a discourse) that makes further political identifications and interactions possible (Warner, 2002). In the analyses by feminist and queer ethnographers, Gezi has been an example, alongside similar "#occupy" protests such as the Arab Spring in Tahrir Square, Egypt and the Indignados movement in Spain, of a turning point in regard to public space with the emergence of Web 2.0 or the era of social media platforms (Gómez Nicolau, Eschle, & Bartlett, 2023; Tufekci, 2017). Zeynep Tufekci's analysis of Gezi Park is a significant example of resistance as a networked practice, with Twitter being the leading digital platform contributing to organising resistance.

The lubunya resistance practices in digital spaces are at the core of the analysis in this thesis. Therefore, understanding how digital technologies afford certain practices is an important theoretical inquiry. The growing literature on digital affordances provides effective ways to understand this connection by exploring online-offline entanglements in resistance cultures and the impacts of technological tools, such as hashtags and algorithms, to facilitate or contest resistance cultures. I see technology as a crucial component of the lubunya assemblages due to its agential role in affording human actions, but also because of how the lubunya community alternates technological tools.

Informatics scholars introduced the term *digital affordances* to explain how technologies provide and enhance the potential for a particular action (Earl & Kimport, 2011; Majchrzak et al., 2013, p. 39). My take on the affordances is related to the assemblage theory, in which technological affordances are meaningful only through their relationality with bodies and spaces (Shaw & Sender, 2016). This approach assumes that human agency is important for alternating how certain technologies can be used, even outside their intended functions. Digital spaces can be queered just as offline spaces, in creating micro-communities or in producing queer knowledge online (Pain, 2022). In Turkey, the intensified state restriction on the access to public spaces has made it more difficult for lubunya to act on the streets. As a consequence, digital spaces have become increasingly crucial in terms of community-building, solidarity gatherings or even for more contentious events such as Pride, bringing together lubunya in Turkey and diaspora to facilitate resistance cultures. This relationality makes the queer body into a more-than-human entanglement (Bates, 2017), using technology to transform what it has been initially intended to do within the constraints of a heteropatriarchal matrix.

One of the commonly used affordances in activism is hashtags that have been particularly popularised by social media platform Twitter [known as "X" since July 2023]. Hashtag activism has been a central way of doing networked resistance since the early 2010s. Oh, Eom and Rao (2015) name this function of hashtags "technolinguistic grammar" as they provide grammatical tools to bring together the messy interactions on social media and organise them for the continuity and mobilisation of discussions. Hashtags can unify political discourses, build collective identities and become bridges between social media platforms, locations of struggle, and resisting bodies (Tufekci, 2017; see Article I). Their networked character also blurs the boundaries between public and private spaces, as spaces that would be considered private or personal can potentially be impactful in activism due to online connectivity. In this regard, the "networked public sphere" is a way to facilitate multi-scalar resistance through the affordances of digital platforms where everyday resistance practices and contentious politics may coincide.

Despite their advantages, digital spaces also need to be investigated as spaces of contestation and oppression of queer movements, as these spaces do not remain protected from authoritarian interventions and politics of hate (Khosravi Ooryad, 2023; Koçer & Bozdağ, 2020). Social media is a space of intensified disputes leading to political polarisation between social groups (Nikunen, 2018), with retrogressive personal narratives easily reaching hypervisibility online. In Turkey, hate speech on social media is prevalent with homophobia (Ozduzen & Korkut, 2020), racism against refugees (Ozduzen, Korkut, & Ozduzen, 2021), social media manipulation by the government or the AKP's troll armies producing hate speech (Bulut & Yoruk, 2017). Turkey's authoritarian turn meant also an intensification of digital surveillance, especially in the aftermath of the Gezi Park Resistance, from targeting specific groups to becoming a norm for society as a whole (Topak, 2017). The intensification of online surveillance raises the question of fragilities in resistance cultures. In her analysis of the networked publics, Tufekci (2017) argues that newer methods of surveillance include:

> …demonizing online mediums, and mobilizing armies of supporters or paid employees who muddy the online waters with misinformation, information glut, doubt, confusion, harassment, and distraction, making it hard for ordinary people to navigate the networked public sphere, and sort facts from fiction, truth from hoaxes. (p. xxviii)

The research into surveillance on social media in Turkey shows that the AKP government has been using post-Gezi social media efficiently to create such

information gluts, by using troll armies who are popularly called "AK Trolls" on social media (Saka, 2017). [11]

The algorithmic oppression of marginalised groups has been expressed as a threat to online queer activism, where offline systems of oppression are translated to algorithms. A crucial outcome of cis-gendered, able-bodied and heterosexist norms that shape the standards of algorithms is "shadow banning" of marginalised online communities (Rauchberg, 2022). Ideologically biased algorithms threaten queer visibility on social media by categorising their contents as inappropriate. Despite the oppressive impact of algorithms and more visible surveillance systems, online communities adapt to these technologies with novel resistance tactics. The digital ethnographer Crystal Abidin (2021) argues that in today's online spaces determined by political contestations, fake news, data leaks and pandemic restrictions, the networked publics are transformed into "refracted publics". Today's digital cultures are shaped by flexibility that develops tools to combat oppressive tools such as hashtag hijacking with collective action or triggering algorithms (Abidin, 2021, pp. 6-7). The alternations of technology can also lead to the creation of novel spaces of resistance, not necessarily visible to the wider public but tactically hidden and subversive. I find the concept of the *refracted public* useful in describing how the lubunya movement sustains their networked resistance. According to Abidin, today's refracted publics use subtle yet effective forms of connecting in digital spaces, shifting between politics of visibility and invented invisibility, depending on their political aims. She calls this tactic "silosociality", which is based on affording visibility that is communal and localised in which "the content is tailor-made for specific subcommunities and rabbit-holes and may not be accessible or legible to outsiders" (Abidin, 2021, p. 4). The concept of refracted publics is useful to understand how the lubunya movement engages with and moves within the networked public sphere in their activism. Abidin's theory is also helpful to challenge visibility as a precondition to study lubunya resistance practices and focus on the value of analysing what remains invisible to the wider publics. Her theory motivates this thesis to look upon what digital affordances may provide to those "silos" for the communities to remain hidden from state surveillance, hate speech or authoritarianism.

[11] AK Trolls appeared as the AKP's reaction (not formally acknowledged) to social media mobilisation during the Gezi Park Resistance, mostly used on Twitter, relying largely on bot accounts with "surveillance through surfing the net; and disruption, by targeting critical accounts in a wide array of ways to change the discourse, discredit the individual or movement, obtain proprietary information, or block an account" (Saka, 2017, p. 172).

Lubunya as affects

I would like to argue here that doing an ethnography on social movements but not talking about feelings would be missing maybe the most important aspect of the ontologies of resistance. In the course of my fieldwork, I experienced and witnessed a storm of feelings: sometimes fear emanating from the risk of trouble, at other times anger when witnessing blunt injustices, and at still other times a collective sense of joy that comes with togetherness. During the interviews, I realised more deeply that these feelings are often collective, shared amongst the community. They travelled and, many times, stayed with us. Understanding how the feelings of fear, rage or joy impact the lubunya is crucial to my theoretical inquiry Therefore, this section explores the affect theory and how this theory and its concept of *affective solidarities* figure in my analysis of lubunya resistance cultures. In this thesis, affect theory is helpful to see bodily actions taken by the lubunya community (whether individual or collective) as to how lubunya defines and anticipates a queer world. This approach directs my attention away from the reductionism of lubunya or queer identity as a static category and their predetermination as the only way of facilitating collective action.

Affective solidarities

In theorising the role of affect in this study, I argue that resistance is an affective process in which a circulation of emotions, whether in corporeality or in dataisation, facilitates lubunya resistance practices. In her work *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003) criticises the poststructuralist focus on language as a primary source of knowledge and, instead, pays attention to affective interactions in seeking knowledge of resistance. Sedgwick deploys the term *reparative reading*, or a return to the ontology of intersubjectivity and community. Her affective ontology of the body helped me follow the traces of "becoming lubunya in action"—through bodily performances, online manifestations and vernacular formations. Moreover, Sedgwick argues that affect has a freedom of circulation between bodies. The very impossibility of preventing it from moving around makes affect highly contagious and, in many instances, attached. This can be seen as the reason for the ease of affective circulation to move between different scales of resistance: an everyday or individualised action can circulate affectively and eventually become transformative. Sara Ahmed discussed the attachment of affects to objects in her essay *Happy*

Objects (2010), introducing the term "sticky objects". She proposes that the flow of emotions between people can be facilitated by the objects which happen to become "sites of personal and social tension" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 11).

I conceptualise affect closely as a "doing" of the lubunya resistance and making individual affects move into collective ones and thereby build solidarities. Therefore, it is important to explain what I mean by "affective solidarities". I borrow the concept from Clare Hemmings (2005, 2012), who introduced it in her discussion on affect's role in feminist movements. While arguing for the primary role of affect for social movements and transformation in facilitating collective belonging, Hemmings uses the concept of *affective dissonance* (2012) as a feeling of discomfort and desire for transformation. She argues that such dissonance is at the core of feminist movements because of the onto-epistemological gap, or tension, between the hegemonic knowledge available to queer subjects and their embodied experience in the world (Lakämper, 2017). Hemmings argues here that the solidaristic motive does not come from the sameness of a shared identity but from collective anger at existing injustices and countering the violation of embodied presences. The idea of productivity for rage or anger is important to explore, as oppression is not necessarily a demarcation of hope. Hemmings argues:

> [I]n order to know differently we have to feel differently. Feeling that something is amiss in how one is recognised, feeling an ill fit with social descriptions, feeling undervalued, feeling that same sense in considering others; all these feelings can produce a politicised impetus to change that foregrounds the relationship between ontology and epistemology precisely because of the experience of their dissonance. (2012, p. 150)

Her analysis is highly relevant to lubunya experiences as situated and spatial: the feeling of exclusion from normative epistemologies of space coexist with affective resistance against it. The argument I adopt from Hemmings here is not that lubunya is or should be an exclusive subject position that can be produced only through being exposed to emotional distress or violence. Rather, it points out the potential of every gendered and (de)sexualised subject "to feel" the violence that heteropatriarchal society produced and to be able to act upon it. The queer vernacular of Lubunca also finds its grounds affectively in both distorting a normative language structure and collectively motivating lubunya in bodily acts of resistance. The feelings of fear, anger or rage are commonly associated with the Lubunca term *madilik* which designates encountering discomfort. A situation of madilik induces the affective response from lubunya to share with other members of the community, for instance in case of police violence or homo/bi/transphobic encounter (İlaslaner, 2015, p.

49). *Gullüm,* another central concept in the vernacular, has an added term *gullüm alıkmak* (making gullüm), which connotes the collective act of joy or humour as resistance against moments of madilik (Ozban, 2022, p. 134). In the next chapter on methodology, I will open up these concepts, both as emotional processes during my fieldwork and as shared affect in the lubunya movement.

Affective temporalities and lubunya times

During my fieldwork, temporality has strongly influenced affective interactions due to different, yet interrelated, "crises" or "turns". One was Turkey's authoritarian turn (Benhabib, 2013), becoming especially visible after the Gezi Park Resistance in 2013, and after anti-gender and anti-queer rhetoric intensified with right-wing populism at the governmental level. The second one was the crisis of (post-)pandemic times, where the spaces I have been interested in faced drastic restrictions in the public sphere through curfews and quarantine measures. A common outcome of these temporalities was public authorities challenging and restricting spaces of resistance. Time is also related to building knowledge of resistance, as situated queer memories and vernaculars in Turkey are significant for the continuation of resistance cultures. In theorising the relationship between affect and temporality, Hemmings (2005) argues, using a Deleuzian reading of mind and body, that affect is not only about repeated bodily exposure to triggering situations. It is a continuous flow of emotions between the body and mind that can stay, be reflected upon, politicised by the mind and acted upon in a bodily performance (p. 564). Therefore, the affective cycles create judgments not in the moment but in continuity with a reflexive and political potential. Another affect theory scholar, Brian Massumi (2011), argues, from a Spinozian perspective, that affect is never in the present, but it is a movement between the past and the future. This is due to the capacitation of the body to carry the past affectively and imagine the future through these affects. Massumi argues:

> So there's a reactivation of the past in passage toward a changed future, cutting transversally across dimensions of time, between past and future, and between pasts of different orders. This in-between time or transversal time is the time of the event. This temporality enables, and requires you, to rethink all of these terms – bodily capacitation, felt transition, quality of lived experience, memory, repetition, seriation, inclination – in dynamic relation to each other. (2011, p. 38)

My interpretation of affective temporality is inspired by the above discussions. I am curious about the lubunya movement's ability to generate queer

knowledge and resistance tactics. I see these not merely as a reactionary politics against authoritarianism but as rooted in a continuous culture of movement. In Article IV, I explore how they draw motivation from past struggles and advance towards queer utopian imaginaries. Affect as a bodily feeling is important here, where an assemblage thinking brings the elements such as memories, language, bodies, spaces and technologies together, to create the affective state. This state is not static; it is a relational becoming (Massumi, 2011, p. 38). This understanding of the queer as a "relational becoming" is what I highlight in building lubunya assemblages.

Queer affective imaginaries

The discussion on time and relational becoming takes me to the affective potential of lubunya for transforming society with imaginations of queer futurities. Sara Ahmed (2013) discusses such potential as a critique of heteronormativity that "functions as a form of public comfort by allowing bodies to extend into spaces that have already taken their shape" (p. 148). For Ahmed, the queer subject has the critical position and ability to feel the discomfort of heterosexual space: queer presence in these spaces feels disturbing to heterosexism as the queer does not "sink into" a space that has already taken shape. This is the difference for a queer subject who does not follow a heteronormative culture providing homonormative lives (Halberstam, 2005) of marriage, having children, and participation in war for nation-states; queer is against the very idea of "normativity" that produces the subject and space not to be queer (Ahmed, 2013, p. 149). The focus on queer futures is not based on setting new hetero or homo norms, but on being norm-critical against heteropatriarchal institutions and society.

A similar queer approach to temporalities is articulated in Puar's assemblage theory that reads time as "anticipatory temporality", or as a queer reclaiming of time beyond the authoritarian efforts to stop its progression. If time is reclaimed as an entity for radical transformation, then anticipatory temporality is a "modality that seeks to catch a small hold of many futures, to invite futurity even as it refuses to script it" (Puar, 2017, p. xix). This thinking turns the moments of queer anticipation into queer epistemologies, to see "how anticipation is folded into sometimes painful, joyful, or hopeful moments of connection to queer histories" (Brilmyer, 2022, p. 171). In the case of Turkey's lubunya movement, thinking beyond the "authoritarian now" is a way to understand the struggle as an "anticipatory resistance". My conceptualisation of such an anticipatory mode of resistance is inspired by José Esteban Muñoz (2006) critique of *presentism* in analysing queer movements. Muñoz argues

that a focus on the present is not productive and puts resistance into a paranoid and passive position. His intervention in queer politics is a reminder of the radical potential of the struggle, a "response to queer thinking that embraces a politics of the here and now underlined by […] pragmatic gay agenda" (p. 825). Here, queer is a horizon rather than an identity, something to be imagined and in the making that exceeds the limitations of current authoritarianism(s). This queer perspective commonly leads to a discussion on hope, where queer becomes a doing of politics of the unknown, creating possibilities for acting towards radical transformation.

The politics of hope is not necessarily dependent upon optimism or positive feelings. Hope as an affective mode can be in copresence with negative affects or despite the politics of hate that circulates and targets the lubunya movement both locally and transnationally. However, it is also important to challenge the hope/hopelessness dichotomy, especially when queer politics oftentimes becomes a matter of necropolitics and survival, and where possibilities of political gains remain distant (Savcı, 2021). In *Atmospheres of Violence*, Eric A. Stanley (2021) uses the concept of "overkill" to describe how killing of queer/trans individuals is not an act of the moment, but a killing of that which is already constituted as dead. Stanley writes that "trans/queer life is a threat that is so unimaginable that one is *forced* to not simply murder but to push the dead backward out of time, out of history, and into that which comes before" (p. 33, emphasis in original). Therefore, *overkill* describes a politics of hate and erasure that connotes a violence that is epistemic beyond that which is corporeal; it is an act to erase the queer memories and futures. From this vantage point, I argue that such blatant forms of violence to which the queer movement is exposed need to go beyond a hopeful politics. I agree with some queer scholars from Turkey who highlighted the constitutive role of "hopeless activism" in doing the politics of hope (Bayramoğlu, 2021; Savcı, 2021). As Savci discusses in her analysis of trans resistance in Turkey, *Queer in Translation*:

> Perhaps it was their [trans activists'] collective survival as a condition of gacılık,[12] or their forced daily dealings with state apparatuses, or their heightened vulnerability to violence due to their labor conditions that made their analyses so insightful and their organizing so relentless though hopeless. Perhaps it was all of these. Refusing both being reduced to bare life and the neoliberal biopolitical life understood as "life as long as it serves (structures of) power," their activism against hate involved imagining a different kind of life altogether for all, away from state terror as well as neoliberal precarities. (2021, p. 108)

[12] *Gacı* means "trans woman" here in Savcı's reference to queer slang (Savcı, 2021, p. 94).

Hopelessness is not necessarily equated with inaction or passivity. Rather, it is the affective role of hopelessness in the lubunya movement that could push for action, for an affective solidarity that is rooted in a collective sense of grief, anger or loneliness. On a more hopeful note, Yener Bayramoğlu (2021) argues that hope and hopelessness can coexist, where the glimpses of hope in the archives of the lubunya movement appear to facilitate resistance in hopeless times (p. 191). In this thesis, I see lubunya memories and counter-archives as valuable affective entities, where memories are not disconnected from the present and the future but, rather, transform how lubunya survive and imagine queer futures. Still, I argue that these affective solidarities emerge from memories that are not only grounded in hopeful achievements, but that stories of failure and loss can also have strong affective solidaristic impacts. As I discuss in Article IV, I choose to argue against hope/hopelessness as a binary condition in looking at the memories, and state the radical transformative potential of keeping the memories of collective loss and despair. This could pave the way toward a radicalised hope as imagining of the queer futures.

Zooming out from Chapter 3

In this theoretical chapter, I explored how the relations between lubunya subjects, spaces and affects form an assemblage theory central to this thesis. If sexual citizenship is understood as a political practice, not tied solely to a formal legal status but rather to the lives of those politicised due to their gender and sexuality, then how lubunya subjects enact this practice becomes a critical analytical question. From the secular-nationalist founding of the Turkish Republic to the authoritarian neoliberalism of the AKP government, there has been a persistent effort to overdetermine and rigidly define what constitutes citizenship and political subjectivity. In contrast, my understanding of sexual citizenship within this assemblage framework focuses on the struggle against inaction, reclaiming the politicised subject as one of movement. As the empirical articles of this thesis will demonstrate, resistance practices—as forms of political acts of citizenship—are made possible only through the sexual citizen's relations with spatial and affective interactions.

This is why access to the spaces of resistance is crucial for the lubunya resistance cultures; as I have also touched upon in Chapter 2, the lubunya movement is a spatial struggle. In my theoretical discussion on space, I argued that space is a dynamic mode of assemblage, rather than an inactive geographic surface. This dynamism, first and foremost, means that space is not only a fixed

place or location, but it is an active entanglement of online and offline. My empirical articles show how offline spaces of resistance are digitally amplified. For instance, Article I delves into the #HerYürüyüşümüzOnurYürüyüşü hashtag campaign and how the affordances of the hashtag transformed the experience of the urban spatiality of Istanbul for the Pride activists. The online spaces are also transformed by offline spatiality, as I showcase in my analysis of Istanbul Pride 2020 in Article II: the symbolism of Istiklal Street, Taksim and Gezi Park changes the way online spaces are used by activists. The affective role of these symbolic spaces of resistance has made an online Pride march possible (see Article II). However, I do not approach digital technologies as purely emancipatory spaces; rather, their affective potential also intensifies state surveillance and violence. Therefore it will be important to see how the lubunya movement navigates between different spaces to identify risks of (hyper)visibility and use affordances creatively as refracted publics to prevent undesirable invisibilities (see Articles II and III).

I emphasised the role of affect within lubunya assemblages, where affects circulate not only between spaces and subjects, but also between memories and future imaginaries of the lubunya movement. The violence inflicted by the AKP government on the movement is both biopolitical and epistemic, aimed at erasing lubunya knowledge and enforcing an authoritarian temporality that seeks to trap the movement in a state of timeless inaction. Approaching affect as memory beyond the AKP's authoritarian temporality will help me to study resistance not merely as reactive, but as deeply rooted in the past struggles and future aspirations of the lubunya community. I will empirically explore how lubunya subjects engage in memory work and counter-archiving as everyday acts of resistance that transcend the authoritarian present. I will also examine the interplay of hope and hopelessness in queer resistance, demonstrating how collective memories of loss and despair fuel radical transformation and solidarity (see Article IV).

In overview, this chapter brought together an assemblage of theoretical concepts and approaches that will be used to unpack the complexity of Turkey's lubunya movement. I argue that, to scrutinise the affective and digitally amplified lubunya resistance cultures, an assemblage approach provides the necessary analytical tools to explain why it is important to focus on the relations between lubunya subjects, spaces and affects, and their own ontologies, in making resistance practices possible. Informed by the discussions in this chapter, the assemblage perspective also framed my research methodology, which I describe in the following chapter.

Chapter 4 – Methodologies for lubunya resistance: movements, immobilities and affects

This study explores movement(s) in multiple senses: as a social movement and as the physical mobility of lubunya across various spaces—within the walls of homes, on the streets and on digital screens. It also delves into non-movements or immobilities, shaped by travel restrictions, lockdowns and the confinement of lubunya bodies within homes, rooms, borders and even their own skin. At its core, this study is about being moved by lubunya, encompassing the emotions it stirs—shifting between oppression and resistance, fear and joy, isolation and solidarity.

In this methodological chapter, I reflect on my ethnographic journey as a lubunya researcher from Turkey. By ethnography, I mean a combined form of qualitative methods: in-depth interviews, participatory observation and my fieldnotes. This ethnography is multi-sited, by which I mean I was navigating between online and offline spaces, while grappling with the immobilities imposed by the pandemic and post-pandemic times as well as border regimes shaped by (non-)EU citizenship. The main field sites of this study are the urban spatiality of Istanbul and digital platforms such as Zoom, Twitter, YouTube, and other online spaces. When I started this research five years ago, I assumed I would have the freedom to travel between Turkey and Sweden. I took it for granted that I could quickly return to my home country to re-enter lubunya spaces, conduct my fieldwork at will and to my plan, and (re)connect with the movement I was part of. But six months into my research, spatial experiences drastically changed: borders closed, and movement became a necropolitical issue, tied to the risk of life itself. For some time I had to stay mostly in my room in Gothenburg, Sweden, like millions of others who had to comply with *#stayhome* orders or recommendations. For many lubunya, homes that had already been spaces of heteropatriarchal hostility became spaces of isolation and queer loneliness.

In the first section, "For a lubunya methodology of resistance", I explain why I decided to conduct a multi-sited digital ethnography and how I approach the knowledge about lubunya resistance. This is followed by details of my ethnographic fieldwork, with the section "Lubunya in movement(s)" serving as the entry point for exploring lubunya as a movement and situating the research. "Scattered immobilities and other madiliks" addresses the challenges of researching the lubunya movement, reflecting on how immobility and disruptions have shaped the research process, especially under authoritarian and pandemic times. The section "Gullüm and moving solidarities" focuses on affective solidarities and emotional interactions in the field. While I reflect on the successes and failures of this fieldwork throughout the chapter, in its conclusion, "Ethics and positionality", I provide my ethical reflections by sharing details about my positionality, protecting the integrity of research participants and how I handled the research data.

For a lubunya methodology of resistance

In this section, I explain why I choose to focus on lubunya resistance practices as my main empirical material, and how those resistance practices contribute to the lubunya knowledge production. The rise of anti-genderism as a state ideology in Turkey highlights that the oppression faced by the lubunya movement is not only political, spatial and psychosocial but also deeply epistemic.

This study is an attempt at queering ethnography with a critical interdisciplinary approach in the field of Gender Studies. This queering methodology rejects static definitions of queerness, embracing it instead as a fluid, messy and evolving process of subjectivity. Influenced by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) in Chapter 3, I approached queerness as a process of "becoming", where the subject is always in flux, never fully defined. In this sense, queerness remains partial—an ongoing subjective experience that resists closure, aligning with Donna Haraway's (1991) notion of situated, partial knowledges. In resisting universalist knowledge regimes, I draw from Haraway's concept of feminist objectivity as "a doctrine and practice of objectivity that privileges contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connections, and hope for a transformation of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing" (Haraway, 2013, pp. 584-585). The queerness of this ethnography lies in its openness to the unexpected, its embrace of imperfection, its decentring of the fixed subjectivity and acceptance of the

ontology of the situated lubunya practices. My analytical point of departure is where and how lubunya, as political subjects-in-the-making, create their knowledge and challenge political and epistemic injustices.

In my methodology, this approach is key in demonstrating the fluidity between seemingly distinct realms: the body and technology, offline and online spaces, visible and invisible experiences, and the dynamic movement across these presumed boundaries. Haraway's perspective helps me to explore how these transitions shape lubunya resistance practices. The movement of lubunya, such as by organising a digital Pride march, resists authoritarian efforts to immobilise subjectivities under cis-heteronormative skins or national borders. Instead, it embraces lubunya ontologies that transcend these boundaries. In my fieldwork, the fluid interplay between my experiences behind the screen and the urban spatiality of Istanbul has been essential—whether conducting interviews, following protests, participating in Pride events, navigating Twitter feeds, or writing my manuscripts. This fluidity is mirrored in the activism and everyday resistance of many of my participants, where the connection between their lubunya bodies and digital technologies plays a core role.

Haraway's approach to identity formation informs my research when it comes to taking digital as an embodied practice instead of arguing for the disappearance of the ontology of bodies. Her argument does not privilege the standpoint of the subjugated, as no subject position can claim a totality of a particular identity experience (Haraway, 1991, p. 193). Instead, it provides a partial connection to the field that produces objectivity with my critical positioning as a lubunya researcher. Therefore, I consider the Eurocentric queer knowledge regimes as partially present and take located lubunya epistemological knowledge as a factor whose presence is crucial to reaching objectivity. This ethnographic study, in this regard, focuses on the situated experiences of lubunya resistance practices. I look at those moments of resistance that have been highlighting online-offline entanglements in practising lubunya resistance. These include a digital ethnography on Twitter and exploring its role in doing street activism; understanding how digital Pride events such as Istanbul Pride draw their power from offline symbolism and interactions; and listening to my research participants' activist trajectories as partial experiences of the networked spaces of lubunya resistance.

Lubunya in movement(s)

Figure 3
Queer Bloc at Hrant Dink Commemoration Day, Şişli, Istanbul. Placards translated from Kurdish and Turkish as “For Hrant. For Justice”. Photo by author (19 January 2023)

During my four years of ethnographic research, I traversed the landscapes of the lubunya movement, both physically and digitally. My participants and I were constantly on the move—shifting between spaces and experiences. But what exactly did we do, and what did it mean to be in a state of movement? Lubunya is not confined to any single place. Lubunya is everywhere: in urban and rural areas, in workplaces, in civil society, in academia, on social media and within the global diaspora. It is a community that is being bordered, but

also that defies borders, continuously redefining itself. As both an ethnographer and a lubunya myself, I navigated these complex spaces. This section explores what it means to be in movement, illustrating key moments from my fieldwork that capture the instances of lubunya movement and its multilayered presence.

At the beginning of my work with the thesis, my plan was to conduct fieldwork in Turkey's three largest cities: Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. Alongside a digital ethnography on queer social media activism from Turkey, I intended to interview LGBTI+ rights organisations in these cities to gain deeper insights into how they use digital technologies in their activism. However, six months into my PhD studies, the Covid-19 pandemic struck, and my travel plans to Turkey were abruptly halted. The sudden, drastic shift in access to public spaces and the rapid growth in importance of digital technologies in everyday life made me rethink how I should plan my research process. I became worried about the future of lubunya street activism, particularly Istanbul Pride, which, despite facing severe police violence since 2015, had been the largest annual street resistance of the lubunya movement in Turkey. I wondered how Pride activism, so rooted in physical space, would adapt to the new conditions. As a result, I decided to move my focus to Pride activism in Istanbul. Later, I conducted twelve in-depth interviews with lubunya activists from Turkey who had partaken in the digital Pride events. Finding participants was not easy at the beginning, since I was unable to go to Istanbul due to the pandemic restrictions. The absence of physical social spaces had a clear impact, as it hindered opportunities for intimate, one-on-one interactions. Zoom as the main platform for social interactions afforded group discussions, albeit in highly controlled and categorical settings. To navigate this limitation, I drew on my insider position as a lubunya. I decided to use a snowballing method by reaching out first to activists I had previously met and expanding my participant group through their referrals. With some participants, I maintained ongoing interactions throughout the fieldwork, while with others, our meetings were limited to just one or two encounters.

Our interviews took place both during the height of the pandemic lockdowns and in the post-pandemic period, when travel became possible again, resulting in a variety of interview settings. We met in spaces such as a teahouse in the Kadıköy district, a café in Şişli and, more commonly, in my and my participants' homes via Zoom. While places like cafés were highly public, they gave us the feeling of being lost in the crowd. They also caused unexpected yet usually pleasant interruptions: for example, talking to a waiter, ordering drinks, bumping into a friend, and usual resting breaks. Sometimes, we would hear a song we both liked, which interfered with our conversation and turned the

subject in another direction. However, the majority of the interviews took place on Zoom, in a space that felt much more organised and controlled by me and my participants. At the beginning of some Zoom interviews, a sense of formality was unavoidable. Due to the lockdown, we associated Zoom with work meetings, conference presentations and seminars. It was, however, interesting to observe how all my participants and I were already proficient in the affordances of Zoom, so it did not take long for us to master being able to sit in front of our screens for between ninety minutes to two hours and not whine about it. Even so, some participants occasionally referred to "Zoom fatigue", especially during the late periods of the pandemic.

Although we were on Zoom together, that did not mean we always had a similar virtual experience. In most of my interviews, I preferred the privacy of my home space in Gothenburg, Sweden. This was mostly my bedroom, as I lived in a shared flat with four roommates, and was interrupted at times by the clatter of kitchen utensils from the other side of my bedroom wall. Using Zoom as the communicative platform for interviews accentuates the role of digital affordances in ethnography (Leonardi, 2013).

My participants were in different locations, such as their homes, workspaces, gardens and libraries. I remember how Eda's sunny garden brightened my mood when I was jaded by the Swedish winter's greyness, how Idil's purring cat appeared on the screen demanding food, or how the smoke of Burak's cigarette blurred the screen. All these moments of interference from their worlds were reminders that we were in embodied spaces, and our positions were as corporeal as they would have been in a café in Istanbul. One shared experience for the participants was how movement between different locations has been integral to them in their activist trajectories. For instance, Idil was moving between activist spaces in Ankara and Adana when we were in touch for interviews; she also travelled to Europe for her work at a transnational LGBTI+ rights organisation. Some others had moved from Turkey to diasporic positions in different countries. Hakan moved from Istanbul to Canada during the time we were in touch for this research. Deniz and Eda had moved to Berlin before, became part of the large lubunya diaspora in that city and participated in all the Istanbul Pride events online from their homes. Mert had moved to the United States for his education shortly before we conducted our interview, but then returned to Istanbul on many occasions. I myself moved from Gothenburg to Malmö during the fieldwork process, at the same time as I was coming and going between Istanbul and Sweden. Although these participants had a variety of personal reasons for moving, an emerging common cause was increasingly unliveable conditions under deepening authoritarianism and harsher economic conditions for lubunya in

Turkey. These movements added an extended multi-sited aspect to my ethnography, as it is not only about located experiences of lubunya resistance within national borders but also how translocated and transnational practices occur with an online-offline entanglement in activism spatiality.

The age range of my research participants spans from early thirties to early forties, and this deliberate choice is based on several factors. First, I sought participants who had witnessed and engaged with the Gezi Park Resistance as lubunya subjects. Their first-hand experience of Turkey's largest social movement with its networked character was important in understanding the impact of Gezi and digital technologies on lubunya resistance cultures. Second, I aimed for participants who had lived through the rise of authoritarian neoliberalism in Turkey from the early years of the AKP government to its current right-wing populist regime. These long-term activist trajectories contributed to the thesis in shaping the historical narrative of the lubunya resistance (see Chapter 2) and to understand the shifting landscapes of queer politics.

Istanbul as the ethnographic alan

In the lubunya movement, Istanbul is commonly referred to as one of the main *alans* for lubunya to politicise and socialise. It therefore came as no surprise that all my participants had a certain connection to Istanbul through their lubunya subjectivity. This was either by living there or by having the experience of coming out in the city's Pride march, finding new lubunya friends, exploring their own gender and sexuality, or initiating their activism in grassroots organisations like Lambda Istanbul, taking part in the Gezi Park Resistance and so on. In Turkish, *alan* has multiple meanings. It means "field", referring to a piece of land, but it also means a field in a more abstract sense, as in "field of knowledge". I use *alan* for Istanbul because of this twofold meaning: it is both an *alan* for corporeal resistance and *alan* as an idea that lives in the memories of many lubunya and contributes to building the knowledge of resistance. In taking Istanbul as an *alan,* I am inspired by Doreen Massey's (2005) conceptualisation of place: "if space is […] a simultaneity of stories-so-far (rather than a 'surface'), then places are collections of those stories, articulations of the wider power-geometries of space" (p. 130). For Massey, the place is not just a "geographic surface"; it is a constellation of people's trajectories and processes experienced socially (p. 141). Many of my participants maintained a strong connection to Istanbul as a central space for lubunya socialising and politics, whether through physical presence or via virtual platforms. They engaged in events such as Istanbul Pride or participated

in online gatherings arranged by LGBTI+ organisations such as LambdaIstanbul and SPoD during the pandemic restrictions. This connection to Istanbul transcends the boundaries of time and space. Some of my participants still live in the city, while others are now elsewhere, yet they hold onto their legacy of activism and their ongoing ties with the city as an *alan* of lubunya resistance.

Most of my participants have volunteered in at least one of the LGBTI+ advocacy organisations in Istanbul. Some also had experiences of forming lubunya neighbourhood collectives, creating lubunya-related content on digital platforms, Pride activism, trans sex workers' rights activism, crip-queer activism, social media activism, and the like. Many of these experiences have not been isolated to a single engagement but been often multiple and simultaneous.

They have different class backgrounds—working-class and middle-class—visible mainly in their family legacies. Many of my participants were partly or wholly financially independent from their birth families, yet they had to form different solidarity economies with friends, chosen families or birth family members. For Idil, for instance, the pandemic put her under severe pressure due to the impossibility of doing sex work under lockdowns. Deniz also experienced job-related precarity for a long time after moving to Germany due to their lack of German language skills. Özgür had to use charity money collected by the community to escape from family violence. The ethnic identifications varied with Cypriot, Kurdish, and Turkish for some, while others did not identify with an ethnic group and preferred to define themselves as Türkiyeli (from Turkey).

Moving to digital pride

While the primary *alan* of this ethnography was Istanbul, its spaces moved across borders and screens as I traced the movements of the lubunya community. What started as a plan for on-the-ground fieldwork in Istanbul transformed into a digital ethnography that explored online lubunya spaces and activism. From Sweden, I followed lubunya resistance practices through the social media platforms Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, as well as the websites of LGBTI+ rights organisations in Turkey. Starting with the initial observation of these platforms and exploration of the impacts of digital affordances between 2019 and 2021, I let myself get lost in the messiness of cross-platform discussions and the multimodal usage of videos, texts, pictures and sounds.

By opting for conducting a digital ethnography, I highlight the ontological role of technology in the empirical chapters of this research in differently situated and located ways of political action. Christine Hine's (2017) work *From virtual ethnography to the embedded, embodied, everyday internet*, with its emphasis on the multi-sited fieldwork experience, has influenced my ethnography. Hine's "digital" ethnography suggests a focus on the "machine-generated" aspects of the ethnographic settings, such as following hyperlinks or algorithmic bias, which are also sites the ethnographer follows. Inspired by Hine's work, I discovered the fundamental role of specific hashtags and hashtag activism in bringing together the messy connections of digital spaces in the moments of resistance and facilitating further collective actions with their "technolinguistic grammar". After following various digital campaigns and collective actions initiated by activists, I found the #HerYürüyüşümüzOnurYürüyüşü (Every Parade of Ours is a Pride Parade) hashtag campaign particularly impactful. It gained traction across multiple platforms, becoming a trending topic (TT) on Twitter, while also serving as a tool for everyday resistance for individual activists, even those not necessarily seeking mass visibility. Initially, I used *Twitter API for researchers* to collect publicly available data, and encoded them with the help of *Atlas.ti* software. While *Atlas.ti* was useful for categorising hundreds of associated tweets initially, I later decided to focus on the hashtag manually and let myself be moved by it and its hyperlinks, one tweet taking me to a video or a picture, to an external website, other platforms, and back onto Twitter. I also observed corporeal usages of hashtags, such as #HerYürüyüşümüzOnurYürüyüşü, by activists as a form of networked resistance. Many activists recorded themselves on the move (to work, school, home, etc.). They posted it on social media to emphasise that, even in the act of walking, lubunya and their bodily movement is political (see Article I). All my movements following hashtags between different communicative modes, such as videos, pictures, texts and sounds, led me to conduct a multimodal discourse analysis, centring the hashtag and its discursive role in facilitating other corporeal or digital forms of action beyond the conventional modes of communication. I analysed the campaign and Istanbul Pride in 2019 as an example of networked resistance, illustrating novel tactics used by lubunya activists in Turkey (see Article I).

Like in many other countries, June is celebrated as a Pride month in Turkey, and it is vital for the lubunya community to organise Pride marches and associated events in their cities. While travelling became a matter of necropolitics during the pandemic, it was also a time that I needed to reflect on how I approached my research. It was evident to me, even in digital ethnography, that non-digital-centricity was a crucial path to understanding the

broader sets of social and political relations in physical spaces. The idea was that human interactions, no matter how digitalised the ethnographic setting, always involve non-digital components (Pink et al., 2016). When the non-digital became unreachable, an emerging question was, what would happen to Pride events? Crisis temporalities were not new to the lubunya. The community has been continually exposed to different crises, such as state oppression, societal/familial pressures and economic crisis, and already knew how to show resistance (see Chapter 2).

The crisis temporalities were also reflected in the main themes of Istanbul Pride events over the years. In 2019, "What is Economy, ayol?" (Ekonomi ne ayol?) focused on the economic crisis and its severe impact on lubunya. In 2020, "Where am I?" (Ben neredeyim?) captured the pandemic crisis and transition of street activism to digital spaces. The following year, in 2021, the theme was "Street" (Sokak) emphasising the need to return to street activism. In 2022, "Resistance" (Direniş) highlighted lubunya resistance against the crisis of authoritarianism. In 2023, the theme "We are transitioning" (Dönüyoruz) carried a double meaning (because of its double meaning in Turkish): it signified both the lubunya "return" to spaces targeted by authoritarian neoliberal policies and underscored the strong trans presence in queer politics in Turkey. In 2024, the theme "I remember, do you remember?" (Hatırlıyorum, hatırlıyor musun?) highlighted the importance of lubunya memories and the legacy of resistance.

Soon after the lockdowns had been introduced in 2020, it became clear that they would not stop Pride activism in Turkey, and many digital-only Pride events were organised. My second sub-study was therefore carried out in these digital spaces. I participated in sixteen Pride events from Istanbul and Izmir via Zoom, Instagram livestream and YouTube livestream. An important aspect of the digital Istanbul Pride was its translocal and transnational character, where the existing borders drawn upon lubunya became easier to transgress. Nearly half of my participants had by then relocated to countries other than Turkey, yet they could participate in Istanbul Pride in 2020. This was often the case for others at the meeting, as both participants and, at times, guest speakers participated from countries other than Turkey, such as Canada, Cyprus, Germany, Italy, Norway, Spain, Sweden and the United States. I was one of those lubunya who could partake in the events from a distance, in my case from Sweden, meeting new people I would not otherwise have been able to reach.

It has been a challenge to define my role as an ethnographer and as a lubunya from Turkey in these events, as digital Pride was a new experience for all of us. At every Zoom meeting, a collective agreement was reached aimed to define the safety of these spaces in a non-hierarchical way. In such a setting,

due to the impossibility of seeking consent in a digital space where participants can come and go and where the utmost safety of the participants was a priority, I decided to be there as a participant to reflect on my own experiences without using the details of the discussions or identities of speakers or participants in my research. For a more insightful understanding of digital-only Pride after my involvement in Pride events, I contacted some of the activists who had partaken in Istanbul Pride in different roles, from being a participant to being in the organising group. I ended up holding in-depth interviews with eight activists; each took between one and two hours. My initial contacts were people who had been more actively involved in the Istanbul Pride Week Committee in the past; thanks to this, I learnt about different committees and changes over time. Later I conducted four more interviews for my fourth sub-study, focusing on the lubunya counter-archival practices in digital spaces.

Moving to the city

After a long-lasting border closure and restrictions, I travelled to Istanbul in October 2022 to continue my ethnography in physical spaces. Though being in a global city with more than sixteen million inhabitants was initially overwhelming after having been isolated in Sweden, I realised quickly how much I had missed Istanbul's liveliness. The feeling was particularly fulfilling after being exposed to videos of empty streets in the years of lockdown, which created a somewhat dystopian image of a city that is usually always on the move. I was on the streets a lot, sometimes just strolling in areas like Istiklal Street, Taksim or Şişli, and at times participating in lubunya events and hanging out in lubunya spaces. One of the highlights of my visit was attending the 11th Pembe Hayat KuirFest, an annual lubunya film festival and the largest lubunya cultural event in Turkey, organised by Pembe Hayat Derneği (Pink Life Association). The festival's film screenings, panels and workshops took place in scattered locations around the Beyoğlu district, the historical heart of lubunya life in Istanbul. While I participated in them during festival days and mingled with other lubunya, there was a feeling of movement between scattered queer interventions in the city. Most of the locations were relatively hidden from the broader public, so there were no posters or rainbow flags immediately visible. Nevertheless, we could still navigate as participants where to go next, thanks to digital networking. Sometimes I would use informal networks of friends to find the location for an event, being lost on the floors of a building with no conspicuous signage to direct me there.

I arrive at the Pera Museum, There is a huge crowd at the entrance. I am astonished by the number of people coming to the event and how publicly it is arranged. While I stand near the entrance, confused about whether to enter the queue, the museum guard casts a glance at me and approaches: “Are you here for the film festival?” I say a bit hesitantly, “Yes, should I enter the queue?” and he replies, “Ah no, that queue is for the Istanbul Biennial; your event is here inside, in the basement. You can come in.” Once I enter the museum building, I follow stairs to the basement, where trans Pride flags and festival posters are hung. I smile at myself, how I had believed the festival may take place so visibly. But I am here now, and the sudden change in the atmosphere is astonishing. (My fieldnotes, October 2022)

Spatially, KuirFest events provided a form of camouflage from the public eye, in line with the resistance tactics by the lubunya movement of moving between visibility and invisibility and practising refraction within very public locations and hiding beneath them. This can be understood as targeted visibility, as Crystal Abidin argued in the discussion on “refracted publics” (see Chapter 2). Due to the digital connectivity of the events on social media platforms, a lubunya from afar could know where the events would take place. By contrast, the events remained unknown to the immediate public in the street near the event hall. This refracted experience of the public brought safety and trust in spaces not so easily threatened by heteropatriarchal interventions. Yet it is important not to romanticise such tactics, as invisibility was still necessary in dealing with the AKP’s authoritarianism. A known example of this comes from the resistance tactics in tackling the police violence, initiated officially during the 14th Istanbul Pride Week in 2017. The Pride theme was #Dağılıyoruz (WeDisperse), as the activists dispersed into smaller groups during the protest to avoid police violence. While there are significant advantages for resistance cultures in resorting to perceived hiddenness, the decreased visibility in the public sphere has impacted the potential for queering new spaces. This is a matter of immobility in terms of the right to the city. I encountered few problems in accessing spaces that I identify with. However, whenever I went to an event, the location was hidden until the last minute. This entailed there being a lack of continuous spaces such as the LGBTI+ rights organisations’ offices. All in all, the feeling of temporality of lubunya spaces brings participatory issues. It is an ongoing resistance struggle, where lubunya has loudly called “Sokaklar bizim!” (Streets are ours!) repeatedly over the years, yet it has also increasingly become challenging to create inclusive spaces for

newcomers. In the following section, I will unpack the issues related to the immobilities of the lubunya community.

Scattered immobilities and other madiliks

Figure 4
Beyoğlu, Istanbul, A collage of different graffiti, translated as: “refugees welcome…”, “…to hell”, and “resist lubunya”. Photo by author (17 October 2022)

While multiple forms of “movement” played a significant methodological role in this study, they starkly contrast with the immobility experienced by both the lubunya community and myself in my research process. Due to the border closures in March 2020, “temporality” became a key added dimension of the

study, as the pandemic drastically altered the conditions of time and space. An important form of immobility that impacted the research process was the difficulty in crossing borders. The ongoing bordering practices between the European Union and Turkey caused travel restrictions for me as a researcher, due to my being a non-EU temporary resident in Sweden, and difficulties for some of my participants in travelling during our activist research collaborations. Occasionally, I was immobilised due to long periods of waiting to renew my residence permit and uncertainties with the migration process; I could not leave the country at those times. In this regard, immobility is also an ontological question in this study, in that "not appearing" or "not being able to appear" in a place is part of a subjective experience and political outcome of border regimes, both for me and my participants (see Article III).

In the first several months of the pandemic, I asked myself, "Is this truly an ethnography if I am stuck within the walls of my one-room flat? What kind of an ethnography is this, when the thing I see most is the hippodrome from the window behind my desk and occasional horse-races with the roar of a fake audience to spur the horses on? Am I doing an ethnography or just horsing around?" Although I had from the start been considering doing digital ethnography, the pandemic forced me to start my fieldwork online. As part of the community, I felt the frustration of not being able to travel to Istanbul for Pride events, parties or any other occasion. It became essential for me to understand what lubunya can do in this temporality, the ontologies of the digital, and how immobility impacts the community. I decided to focus on Istanbul Pride for these reasons: as an event with a long legacy of lubunya resistance and as a unifying force for many to come together through social media activism and deal with the isolation, scatteredness and loneliness that immobility brings.

While exploring the impacts of digital technologies on the resistance culture of Pride was a primary focus, I also decided that broader experiences of lubunya during the pandemic beyond the digital Pride were necessary to explore. This is because, while we were able to meet and socialise with each other in digital spaces, we were not able to see each other's lives beyond the digital. One indicator was that many of us were stuck in small spaces, and the isolation had become a shared feeling. As I conducted the majority of my interviews on Zoom, we were constantly within our own walls and sharing our differing (yet also very similar) pandemic stories as we were located in different countries and under associated restrictions; that stark reality affected most of our conversations. I remember all the frustrations related to doing almost every social activity behind the screen and being limited to the frame

of Zoom or similar video-calling programmes. While I was talking with Eda, she shared her frustrations as:

> I was sitting at home a lot, in my room, and when I stared away from the screen, it is the same wall, me, the socks with panda pattern; and then I am both on the screen but also dancing in my room. There were queer parties on Zoom, which made me very excited, and I found it fabulous. It was like someone texting me, "Haydi!" [Let's go!] as if we will go from Tatavla to Beyoğlu. The first weeks were fun. Later, I realised I cannot really do it; I could not stand up and dance, and I felt shy. I do not feel so joyful when I am alone. So, it didn't work out. I did my best but couldn't get into the digital party mood. (Eda, she/they, 2020)

I had a similar experience to Eda's when I participated in lubunya parties online, appreciating the tremendous effort of the organisers and DJs and finding the solidaristic space with lubunya artists meaningful. The feeling of isolation was also a feeling of disconnection from the lubunya community. One way to cope with this was to share our experiences onscreen, recalling the lubunya memories of street resistance, texting each other during panels, parties or workshops, and having moments of gullüm (collective queer joy). It gave a feeling of refuge to share this immobility and have this space of solidarity.

However, there were also difficulties and feelings of desperation associated with digital events. As illustrated in the previous section, the sense of isolation and longings to meet in person were evident in many participants. This feeling intensified, as organising events was already getting more and more difficult for lubunya due to governmental oppression. There were also other madiliks (acts of defiance; here it also means: challenges for lubunya) in digital spaces. For instance, Deniz was one of the participants with whom I was in touch early on, informing one another about upcoming online events. We could help each other on how to register, as there were security measures to block potential intruders from the Zoom rooms. On one occasion during digital Istanbul Pride, when YouTube was used as the platform for the Hormonlu Domates Ödülleri (Hormonal Tomato Award Ceremony), the livestream was repeatedly shut down by YouTube on the claim that it was violating the platform's community rules. This was a surprise, but after obtaining the Zoom link from Twitter we continued to watch Hormonlu in relative safety. However, intruders arrived alongside and posted transphobic slurs in Spanish to sabotage the event. Shortly afterwards, the Istanbul Pride Week Committee moderators blocked the intruders by using the Zoom function that allowed the host to disconnect them from the meeting. This incident that interrupted a convivial space for lubunya was a troublesome reminder that the digital spaces were contested, not safe from homo/trans/biphobic discourses.

Another critical aspect of digital Pride events was that not everyone could participate equally. For instance, some participants could not even turn on their cameras or speak up because they were living in their parents' household and had to follow everything discreetly, or their internet connection was unstable. This was a reminder of the digital as an embodied experience and that participants in all those gatherings are in specific physical spaces that may be hostile to their participation in Pride. When I interviewed Hakan, a crip lubunya rights activist who had been involved in organisational activism since 2013, he shared his experiences of digital gatherings during the pandemic, which had caused extra immobility for people in his circles. It was challenging, for instance, for a blind lubunya to participate in their meetings, and he eventually stopped joining events and felt isolated. During our chat, he expressed his frustration, saying, "The Pride march was done on digital media [in 2020], and I think it was a very creative method. However, I think it cannot replace the impact of being on the streets." All in all, while the Lubunya community strongly resisted the pandemic immobility and found new ways of coming together, all this happened with many disruptions and uncertainties.

During my days in Istanbul and when visiting its lubunya scenes, one of the most striking observations was the heightened police presence throughout the city. While police surveillance was not new—especially given the AKP government's increasing grip on public spaces since the Gezi Park Resistance—this time it felt even more pervasive and systematic. İstiklal Street (or Pera), for instance, where I had spent a considerable amount of time over the years, used to be a place for public protests by many groups, especially leftists, feminists and queers. I made several visits to Taksim Square and Gezi Park, both as meeting points with friends and to remember the days of the Gezi Park Resistance. These places were oftentimes occupied by Çevik Kuvvet (riot police), TOMAs (riot control vehicles), and areas were occasionally blocked to prevent public demonstrations. Here authoritarianism has become a spatial experience, with immobility imposed by barricades, blockades or the occasional ID checks that had become a normalised part of daily life. With Istanbul Pride approaching in 2023, concerns about police violence were also present. Only a week earlier, the 9th Istanbul Trans Pride had taken place in Şişli, and the police violently detained activists during their press statement (Kepenek & Yılmaz, 2023). Following the updates online, I observed that squares and streets were closed, as if there were an extraordinary social upheaval expected. The feeling of immobility was attached to fear—the fear of witnessing violence, an organised politics of hate that knows no limits.

We are at a queer theatre performance in Pera during Istanbul Pride. Towards the end of the play, Mert, who is sitting next to me, comes close to my right ear and whispers, “Police are here, apparently.” It gives me a sudden tension. I look at him, surprised, and then ask, “You mean inside the building?” He checks his phone quickly, and replies, “No they are not inside, but they are gathering at the entrance and asking questions. We should end the event.” I nod quietly in reply. Shortly afterwards, one of the organisers interrupts the performance and shares the same information with everyone in the room. We leave in smaller groups so as not to attract unwanted attention or to show that there has been an event going on. The theatre hall empties slowly. Once we are out, we walk up to Istiklal Street and join its flowing crowd. Not to be followed, to disappear. (My fieldnotes, Istanbul, June 2023)

The above moment was only one of the more intense experiences of police presence that I saw during Istanbul Pride in 2023 and is just a hint of the continuous violence targeting the lubunya community. Especially in Pride marches, the police’s usage of plastic bullets, batons and arrests has been evident since 2015. An important outcome was in observing the arbitrary function of authoritarianism. While police were usually present at demonstrations, it was rather unexpected to have them at a cultural event like this, encroaching into the already restrained lubunya spaces.

And yet the intervention in lubunya cultural events was becoming more of a norm. In the same month, police raided a screening in Kadıköy of the film *Pride* (Warchus, 2014), and the Istanbul Governorate banned a Tea&Talk event by Lambda Istanbul. Although I did not attend those events myself, the feeling of being stuck in an authoritarian here and now was becoming prevalent. It demanded extraordinary effort by activists and organisers to deal with all the risks during Pride and related events and to create safer spaces for lubunya. I had to think twice before going to an event where, at times, the feelings of paranoia were overwhelming. These immobilising effects of the forces of authoritarianism have shaped my fieldwork.

Gullüm and moving solidarities

Figure 5
An Istanbulite cat chilling at the display of queer bookstore Frankenştayn Kitabevi during an event. Photo by author (January 2023)

This lubunya ethnography is also about a "movement" of emotions. I approach emotions in line with the queer scholars' emphasis on affective ontologies, as relational: they make lubunya "to be moved", facilitating interactions and resistance practices. Emotions make lubunya attached to one another as discussed by Sara Ahmed:

> Emotions are after all moving, even if they do not simply move between us. We should note that the word 'emotion' comes from the Latin, emovere, referring to 'to move, to move out'. Of course, emotions are not only about movement, they are also about attachments or about what connects us to this or that. The relationship between movement and attachment is instructive. What moves us,

> what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place. Hence movement does not cut the body off from the 'where' of its inhabitance but connects bodies to other bodies: attachment takes place through movement, through being moved by the proximity of others. (2013, p. 11)

Also, place has an affective element or, perhaps more accurately, place *is* an affective form of space. Istanbul as an *alan* is what connects many of the lubunya of this study. Yet it's not just the physical city itself, but the emotional attachments to it that continually (re)shape both the city and lubunya's subjectivities. What I have observed during the fieldwork is that the attachment between Istanbul and lubunya in this study is affective: whether the participants reside in Istanbul or not, the city has shaped how they define themselves, just as the city was shaped by the lubunya movement.

Doing the ethnography was a process of building reciprocal relationships in a community of solidarity. It has meant forming lasting friendships, sharing feelings, identities and positions, but also identifying certain tensions with other groups or within the community. Through my own affective attachments to Istanbul and to my participants as they disclosed their subjectivities to me, I also needed to reflect on my own and share it with them, which became a journey to get to know myself and explore my relationship to gender and sexuality, and to the city.

> I am not gay as in the globalised frame of the term; it gives me discomfort. I have the desire to resist homonormativity in the way I resist colonialism. I am a lubunya from Turkey, moving between borders and changing geographies, yet I am still a lubunya. I love how this gives me freedom, not categorising myself and limiting my sexuality, but defining myself through collective memories of resistance. (My fieldnotes, 2022)

I wrote the reflection above in my fieldwork journal after attending a Kuir Gazino event during the 11th KuirFest in Istanbul. The Kuir Gazino was a space of solidarity, where we had lots of gullüm through watching the drag performances, dancing, singing and, most importantly, feeling the intimacy of being physically together in the same place. The venue was a meyhane (wine bar/tavern), a traditional social space where people gather to listen to Turkish music while being served rakı and meze. On that night, the space was completely taken over by lubunya, to the point where it was difficult to move through the crowd. I reunited with some friends I had not seen for years, and

being a lubunya from Turkey made the experience deeply affective. In that moment, I realised that my movement in the field also involved being moved emotionally. I acknowledged the importance of reflecting on my sexual subjectivity and performativity in the research process and an epistemological openness to my fluid positions in the field, following other queer ethnographers (Probyn, 1993; Rooke, 2010, p. 154). It was also a process of acknowledging my lack of experiences of resistance as a cisgender person and learning from trans activist trajectories. I needed to understand how my cis corporeality does not experience heteropatriarchal violence at the same intensity as trans bodies do, or how transphobic organising of society and spatiality makes trans survival a constant struggle.

My fieldwork journal has been a companion through emotional ups and downs and moments of gullüm and madilik throughout the past five years. The journal was an idea rather than a specific object. At times, I forgot about it, and at other times, it became the main place for recording and remembering the moments of my fieldwork. For instance, as a self-defined forgetful person, it is thanks to my journal entries that I can write this very text. What do I mean by saying the journal was an idea rather than a fixed object? The form and method of my journal changed over time, depending on my needs in the field and spatial experiences or difficulties. On some occasions, it was a physical notebook. I have used several of them throughout the process, some smaller for their practicality, some colourful to brighten up my mood on dark winter days, and others to replace the original when I forgot to bring it with me. Writing in a notebook was sometimes impractical or impossible, like at a protest or a march, or in a more intimate setting to interact with my participants. I sometimes used my digital tablet to attach pictures to my text to retain my visual memories. I recorded my voice a few times when I found it more practical or my feelings motivated me to do so. I attached these recordings to relevant texts, which helped me to organise the multimodal character of journaling via sound, visuals and writing.

My mobile phone also proved a valuable aid in taking pictures of the scenes, primarily to remember what spaces I had been in or to keep visual memories. It was another way to keep journaling, a practice always available in the moments of remembering and inspiration during a walk in the park or on a train from Malmö to Lund. Journaling has been a way of producing my fieldnotes, inspired by the (auto-)ethnographic traditions. The fieldnotes as a reflexive/affective method for the events or social settings are important for producing “thick description” in the ethnographic genre. Thick description is crucial in ethnography, particularly in contextualising the (sub)cultural practices from a located perspective (Geertz, 2008). What I mean here by

"thickness" is a situated reflexive/affective observation of the *alan* of Istanbul and framing the epistemological ground by the ethnographer. The thick description provided by my continuous journaling practice resulted in the epistemological centrality of "movement" and in the thematic choices I made in this chapter, namely, the focus on *alan,* immobilities and affects.

During interviews, our language of communication was Turkish. However, I cannot take Turkish as a fixed language and leave it there. A very important aspect of our conversations was the scattering of Lubunca in our conversations in Turkish. The vernacular appeared at certain affective moments, sometimes helping us to deal with emotionally demanding topics from a more light-hearted perspective. That said, the usage of Lubunca varied from one interview to another, due both to different levels in its fluency by my research participants and my own limited knowledge of the vernacular. At times, I could not understand certain Lubunca terms and asked for clarification, which contributed to the feeling of shifting positions between being an insider and outsider to the movement.

While we used popular terms such as *madi(lik)*, *şugar*, *paparon* and *koli*[13] during the interviews, lubunya events and digital campaigns, one of the most affective terms we used was *gullüm*. I discussed several meanings of the term in Chapter 1, yet here it is crucial to highlight the methodological function of making *gullüm* or *gullüm alıkmak* in this study. Making *gullüm* "works as a survival strategy for coping with everyday *madiliks* of institutionalised violence, such as routine police harassment, or daily inconveniences as mundane as, for example, unstable internet connections" (Ozban, 2022, p. 134). In many of the interviews, my participants touched upon certain madiliks such as police violence, pressures from birth families, stories of being closeted, economic precarity, employment discrimination, homo/bi/transphobia at structural levels, and so on. Talking about these experiences was not always easy. In those moments of discomfort, we made gullüm by making fun of ourselves or the situation as a way of coping and a form of affective resistance practice. Besides the interviews, in the moments of police harassment, such as the event at the theatre during Istanbul Pride in 2023, we used humour to deal with the unwanted presence of paparons. Gullüm (and Lubunca) became an (un)expected method in this study to obtain and create knowledge, as it has been a resistance method for lubunya for many decades. Eda also highlighted this role of gullüm during our interview:

[13] See Appendix I for the meanings of these and more Lubunca terms.

> In Turkey, activism was done around friendship in those times [referring to 2016-17], and one night you make some gullüm together, and it can turn out to become a political action the next day (Eda, she/they, 2020)

Especially during the pandemic, I observed the vital role of digital spaces for gullüm in staying connected to the lubunya movement. Lubunya podcasts and vlogs became particularly popular in creating an affective sense of togetherness and solidarity. Thus it became interesting to explore these spaces, also when I began producing a podcast on feminist and queer issues from a transnational perspective with two of my colleagues. This is how I started following lubunya podcasts such as *Talking Lubunya*, *Queer Forum,* and *LGBTI+ Insight.*[14]

> Onur: I mean, we started doing our podcasts TechnAct Talks before the pandemic, but I became more and more engaged with podcasts during the pandemic. I found out about Talking Lubunya in that loneliness, you know; now I needed to find something about…
>
> Sezen: You needed to listen to more podcasts after that?
>
> Onur: Exactly.
>
> Umut: Even though we didn't start with the pandemic, we gained so many followers during the pandemic as well. We heard that too many people heard about us.
>
> (Interview with Talking Lubunya, May 2022)

The above excerpt is from the joint interview with Sezen and Umut of *Talking Lubunya* that I recorded in May 2022. We discussed, among other things, how both the pandemic and authoritarian temporality increased the affective value of podcasting. Our discussions during this episode and their podcasting experiences prompted me to focus further on digital spaces as spaces for emergent resistance practices. I was also inspired by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's "reparative reading" as a model for an affective methodology. Sedgwick (2003) criticises the "paranoid reading" of queer experiences as being closeted, and of queer subjects as oppressed recipients of violence, a reading that becomes tautological and has a generalising impact on queerness. From a Deleuzian perspective, she argues that reparative reading can work as a method

[14] The names of these organisations are pseudonymised. (see Article IV)

that turns us towards affects and relationality between queer subjects and objects:

> No less acute than a paranoid position, no less realistic, no less attached to a project of survival, and neither less nor more delusional or fantasmatic, the reparative reading position undertakes a different range of affects, ambitions, and risks. What we can best learn from such practices are, perhaps, the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of culture – even of culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them. (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 150)

I found Sedgwick's understanding of affective methodology relatable in discussing the ontological role of gullüm in lubunya culture, facilitating a politics of hope beyond the authoritarian paranoia. While focusing on emotional connections and relations is a conscious decision, I was also aware of the impossibility of grasping all the complexity of emotional trajectories by activists. Nonetheless, my writing attempted to provide hints of the affective dimension of lubunya resistance cultures. Later I saw that it is not necessarily the joyful aspects of lubunya memories that contribute to the resistance practices, but the feelings of loss, desperation and anger can cause "affective dissonances", which can be transformative (Hemmings, 2021; see Chapter 3). Therefore, I decided to talk to those digital lubunya content creators on the role of memories and counter-archiving practices in relation to imagining futures. This approach emerged from the need to explore the aspects of lubunya resistance in digital spaces, not only as reactionary to authoritarian or pandemic temporalities but as part of the everyday resistance and knowledge production.

Ethics and positionality

So far in this chapter, I have explained the details of my multi-sited ethnographic study under three thematic discussions. In this section of the methodological chapter, I provide the ethical considerations and reflections on doing ethnography as well as my positionality as a lubunya-researcher. Feminist scholars Annette Markham, Tiidenberg and Herman (2018) argue for "ethics as methods and methods as ethics" in building feminist methodologies, as both methods and ethics are conceptually and practically enhanced when researchers apply the qualities and functions of one concept to the other (p. 2). Inspired by their perspective, I carried out this ethnographic study with such a

dialogue in mind, seeing ethics always as part of building upon and using my methods, as well as informing my ethical reflections by the methods and by the knowledge I have gathered from the field and academia. During my PhD studies at the Department of Gender Studies at Lund University, I gained a deeper knowledge about ethical perspectives through two courses I took, on research ethics following a comprehensive cross-disciplinary principle and on internet ethics with a focus on digital ethnographic studies. In my department and in the wider research community, I also took part in various discussions on feminist ethics and co-authored a book chapter on the centrality of feminist ethics in doing digital ethnography (Kilic & Kochaniewicz, 2024). As we also argue there, gender studies research requires a feminist reflexivity consisting of continuous consideration of our own intersectional positions, as well as of the processes, representation and involvement of participants, and the dynamics of reciprocity throughout the research journey. This reflexivity must be applied not only before and during the research but also after its completion, ensuring an ongoing critical engagement with the ethical and relational dimensions of the work (De Seta, 2020; Sultana, 2007). In this section, I discuss how I considered my positionality and reflexivity throughout this ethnographic journey, as well as sharing more practical information on data processing and identity protection of the research participants.

Being a lubunya-researcher

Throughout my PhD research process, I navigated between my "insider" and "outsider" positions in the field on different occasions. While identifying with and being part of the movement I was researching was definitely a strength, there were also moments I felt as an outsider, both as a researcher but also as an emigrant to Sweden and being away from Turkey for many years. The most obvious advantage of my positionality was my background as a citizen of Turkey who grew up and lived as a queer person until my early twenties, having Turkish as my first language, and already with a certain level of first-hand knowledge of queer politics in Turkey. This position helped me to navigate in the field, allowing me to understand activistic discussions which mostly took place in Turkish, and to feel a belonging. However, oftentimes I found myself in an "outsider" position, as my presence in Turkey throughout this research was temporary. In addition to the pandemic and migration-related disruptions to my travels, having other personal and work responsibilities in Sweden made me divide time between both places and with rather unpredictable timeframes. Therefore, as a lubunya-researcher subject, my position includes both dimensions of being insider and outsider, or as it is

discussed in feminist standpoint theory, a position of "outsider within" (Biricik, 2014; Collins, 1986).

As a lubunya living in diaspora for nearly a decade, I have been at a physical distance from the lubunya movement and everyday life in Turkey. This position has some obvious outcomes in the form of partiality in the knowledge construction in my thesis, such as not continuously being part of the everyday and thus not in the same way exposed to blatant discriminations and violences as lubunya are. My "outsider within" position helped me to recognise the values of community and resistance in the movement, especially within contemporary times of intensified authoritarianism, policing and violence. Less attention to the challenges in the movement and a stronger focus on the significance of the lubunya struggle can be criticised for attempting to romanticise certain aspects of being/becoming lubunya and for giving too little attention to the daily challenges and persistent tensions in the movement. However, instead of being immersed in the negative affects of "paranoid reading" practices, as Sedgwick (2003) argues, I have been more strongly influenced by practices of "reparative reading", which have allowed me to find pleasure and strength in the material. By doing so, I attempt to build an anticipatory practice, inviting the possibility to imagine alternative worldings taking shape alongside the authoritarian now. From this position, I see the significance in contributing to the knowledge of lubunya resistance, in that the rise of lubunya as a political identity has made my choice of centralising it as a main concept of analysis timely. Therefore, this thesis is a contribution to a dialogue, an approach in exploring the complexity of lubunya, a collective politics that although rooted is still inchoate.

Keeping the integrity of research participants

Another significant ethical issue to consider has been the safety of my research participants and my own. Doing an ethnography with the lubunya movement opens questions of political identifications related to sexuality, and to subjective experiences of participants that include contestations of authorities, other groups, individuals, etc. When I conducted the in-depth interviews with my participants, I sought informed consent. Before my fieldwork began, I prepared a document that informed the participants about the scope of the study, how their data and responses would be processed and protected, as well as how they could keep in touch with me if they changed their mind about their statements or participation altogether (see Appendix 1). While some participants formally signed the document, some others told me that there was no need for formalities: in spite of that, I informed them verbally about the

scope, their involvement and right to withdraw from the research process and received their verbal consent. I ensured their confidentiality and saw the practice of consent by research participants as a continuous process rather than a static one, where participants are integral agents of knowledge production and can always be in dialogue with me. Besides, I considered the discussion on "contextual integrity" by Nissenbaum (2010) useful when making such decisions. Nissenbaum argues that privacy is not about making personal information absolutely hidden, which, in the case of my study, would mean omitting critical activist trajectories. Privacy is instead considering what appropriate information should flow within contextual norms by highlighting the knowledge of lubunya resistance.

I focused on mitigating potential harm to participants and communities in this study and on the epistemological benefit of resistance practices, contributing to activistic dialogues rather than risking participant integrity or privacy. My interview participants, who are lubunya activists, have diverse backgrounds and positions in their activism. While some of the activists were very open and wanted to make their presence visible, some others preferred to remain anonymous. Although there are several reasons for these requests, a common ground was their desire not to be traced or targeted by an increasingly authoritarian government in Turkey. For me, as different choices by the participants bring certain challenges for narrating the study, it has also been a self-reflective process to decide whether it was a good idea to disclose some identities even with their given consent. I used pseudonyms for my participants, deciding not to use their birth names or chosen names for the safety of the research process. A few of my participants told me that I could use their names as they are very public figures and their names may occasionally appear in media outlets. However, I still referred to them by pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality in case of future conflicts with state powers or other individuals and the risks involved because of arbitrary authoritarianism. I chose their names from commonly given names in Turkey, which I thought would reflect their personalities and various gender identities.

Ethics of doing digital ethnography

Doing research about lubunya resistance in a context where claiming social justice is increasingly policed and violated by the government brings serious ethical challenges. The never-ending consideration of what kind of actions would put people at risk, or what would increase traceability, becomes even more complex with the multimodal character of data including texts, photos and videos from different platforms. Digital ethnography scholars John Postill

and Pink (2012) stress the importance of understanding how and why activists use social media platforms and argue that a turn to digital is not abandoning long-term immersion in the resistance culture but acknowledging the complexity of online and offline appearances of bodies and messy interactions. Besides, they suggest that the field for the ethnographer is more open than ever before, which requires a combination of conventional methods of activism research with digital ethnography (p. 125). This necessitates novel perspectives on reflexivity for the researcher to consider and flexibility to move between entangled spaces rather than separated (Pink, 2009).

The digital provides mostly "grey data" (Rambukkana, 2019), which makes it more difficult to categorise them as public or private. Annette Markham and Buchanan (2012) argue that people can develop more privatised expectations from digital platforms that are widely considered as public. The level and depth of communication is impactful on how people perceive these spaces. Besides, the information shared on these platforms can change form, as tweets can be deleted or accounts be made private. Therefore, in this thesis, I followed Markham and Buchanan's case-based approach as online research that brings up some dialectical tensions. This means I did not assume content on digital platforms sent by individual accounts such as tweets, posts, pictures or videos to be public data. Open digital spaces, which is to say spaces that were neither privatised nor confidential, were treated as spaces in the public domain. In open digital spaces, I did not use any of the data that came from individual persons or hinted at their identities. Such an approach resonates with Haraway's (2013) cyborg ontologies in doing feminist digital research, where our bodies and identities leave traces in digital spaces.

Handling personal data

I conducted this ethnographic research under the praxis of good research conduct and in compliance with the Swedish Ethical Review Act and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The ethical approval of the larger research project within which this thesis is a part has obtained from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority as part of the wider research cluster "TechnAct: Transformations of Struggle" (with reference IDs 2019-04737 and 2022-02534-02).

During my fieldwork, I informed the research participants about the aims, methods, risks and benefits of participating in the study, that their participation was voluntary and that at any point their consent, and without any reason, could be withdrawn. I stored research data in a coded index, where the code is documented by a code key kept in a locked box accessible only to me as the

author of this thesis. The Swedish Personal Data Act defines personal data as all kinds of information that directly and indirectly can be referred to an individual person. To protect the personal integrity of my research participants, I encoded all the personal data and pseudonymised participants in such a way that no unauthorised persons would be able to access the personal data of the research participants in the study. During the transcription process, I encoded ethnographic material such as recordings or fieldwork notes. In the Kappa and empirical articles of this thesis, I used pseudonyms instead of the names of the individuals. Other personal data has been treated so that they cannot be traced back to an individual person. I have been committed to protect the dignity, physical and mental well-being and human rights of all persons involved in the study.

The Swedish Archive Ordinance Act stipulates that all research documents should be archived according to national and local regulations for at least ten years after the ending of the research project. The project follows these regulations. Archived documents will be stored so that they are protected against destruction, damage, misappropriation and unauthorised access.

Zooming out from Chapter 4

Writing this chapter has been an affective process for me. It meant having flashbacks from the fieldwork and recalling moments of tension, happiness, fear or joy shared with my research participants. I was also reflecting on the whole research process each time I worked on the text. In line with this affective process that accompanied writing, I narrated the chapter thematically rather than in a chronological order of events that took place during the fieldwork. The first theme, *Lubunya in movement(s)*, referred to following lubunya in the traditional sense of a collective enterprise, but also the very act of movement—of myself between locations of physical and digital, of my research participants, and of lubunya as a political identity on the move. The second theme, *Scattered immobilities and other madiliks*, became relevant in relation to the shared feelings of pandemic isolations, fear of violations, and practical disruptions, referring to times when things did not go as planned, or those of failure or pessimism. It helped me to reflect on the fieldwork as a challenging process, as much as it has been joyful. The third theme, *Gullüm and moving solidarities*, was on solidarities in terms of the connections I made, but also to explain my method of connecting and documenting the affective processes in the field. The last section was about ethical considerations and my

own positionality in this thesis as a lubunya-researcher. I explained how methods and ethics are entangled, but also that ethics as a feminist practice is a continuous and reflexive process.

In the next and final chapter of this Kappa, I present the concluding remarks of this thesis. The chapter will give a holistic look at the research with a focus on its contributions, but also identify its limitations and suggestions for further research.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions and possible futures

Almost a year after concluding my fieldwork in Istanbul, I returned to the city again in June 2024 to catch up with some friends, and because I had missed the habit of going there frequently. I was on a short break after my final seminar at my home department in Lund, Sweden. My visit coincided with the start of Pride Week, though I knew I would miss the march itself as my return ticket to Sweden predated it. As it turned out, and by now to no one's surprise, this year's march too got banned by the Istanbul Governorate. On the last day of Pride, the police barricaded Taksim Square and Istiklal Street to ensure that a march would not happen at those symbolic locations. However, this time the Istanbul Pride Committee circumvented the ban: through online interactions, they moved the route of the march to Istanbul's Suadiye neighbourhood, where hundreds of participants gathered, hung a large rainbow flag from a building on the Bağdat Street and marched across the streets (Yılmaz, 2024). This act of resistance, queering the city in the face of police control, was widely shared on social media with posts showing hundreds of lubunya marching together. It was a powerful reminder of the community's continuous efforts of resistance and echoed the famous chant of the movement: "Alışın, her yerdeyiz!" (We are everywhere—get used to it!).

The above memory is just one example of the lubunya movement's novel resistance practices in claiming its own queer time and space amid ongoing governmental oppression of public spaces in Turkey and the global rise of anti-gender and anti-queer movements. Finishing my work on this thesis is also a matter of "time", reminding me as its author that we are always, in one way or another, limited to a certain period of time for exploring and analysing social change. In an increasingly neoliberal(ising) academia, time becomes somewhat of a foe, an antagonising dimension to which even feminist and queer researchers need to submit themselves, limiting their analyses and their writings. Therefore, I would like to remind the reader that this thesis is a timely, yet time-bound, intervention both to queer resistance in Turkey and to

transnational queer studies from the Global South. Even the process of writing this thesis witnessed many different temporalities as well, from rising authoritarianism to pandemic and post-pandemic times; from advancing surveillance regimes to transforming queer resistance tactics both in Turkey and globally. What I have done in these almost five years of work was to follow the "movement" of lubunya through these challenging times with the ongoing efforts to make a space and time of its own.

In this concluding chapter, I explain what the main "Contributions" are each of the four empirical articles of this thesis. The section "Zooming out from the thesis: key findings" follows, to provide a holistic view of the thesis by listing the main findings of this study that may benefit both researchers in the interdisciplinary field of Gender Studies and queer activists around the world: namely, on the conceptualisation of queer spaces of resistance, rethinking sexual citizenship as a queer political practice, and in understanding queer resistances as affective assemblages. To end my concluding remarks, "For future research on transnational queer resistance" engages with the possibilities for future research that this thesis hopes to motivate researchers to pursue.

Contributions

Article I, *"Every parade of ours is a Pride parade": Exploring LGBTI+ digital activism in Turkey,* is the first empirical article of this thesis and focuses on the #HerYürüyüşümüzOnurYürüyüşü hashtag campaign and networked resistance that took place during Istanbul Pride in 2019. The study contributes to the discussions on online-offline entanglements in queer resistance by providing an analysis of a well-known hashtag campaign and its interconnections to the urban spatiality of Istanbul Pride activism. Using a digital ethnographic perspective, the article follows the hashtag from the initial phases of the campaign to its function as a multilinguistic grammar and as a facilitator of collective sense-making processes during the Pride month. The article shows how LGBTI+ activists used the hashtag: first, to facilitate an everyday resistance practice with the act of walking on their streets, which afforded this activism to become a translocal experience in different parts of Turkey. Secondly, the hashtag was used by the Istanbul Pride Committee on the day of the Pride march to help participants in navigating the streets of Istanbul to tackle police violence. The main theoretical contribution of this article is the conceptualisation of the public sphere with the impact of digital technologies in LGBTI+ activism. The article shows that we need a deeper understanding

of the "networked" character of the public sphere by going beyond online-offline and public-private boundaries of resistance practices. This demonstrates that in today's networked public sphere, the symbolism of spaces of resistance—such as Taksim Square, Gezi Park and Istiklal Street—can travel digitally to be experienced translocally and transnationally. Empirically, the article provides an insight from one of the most contested annual Pride events where the public assemblies were constrained by the AKP government. The article shows "grey zones" of LGBTI+ activism between small- and large-scale resistances by exploring how queer bodies, locations and technologies interact. The article was published in the journal *Sexualities* on 17 December, 2021.

Article II, *Digitalising sexual citizenship: LGBTI+ resistance in digital spaces in pandemic times,* builds on ethnographic data from the time of the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. The particular focus of the article is on the transformations of queer resistance practices in Turkey in pandemic times. The article is based on a multi-sited ethnography of the first-ever digital Istanbul Pride in 2020. I highlight the affective impact on LGBTI+ activists in Turkey of the deepening electoral authoritarianism there and of the Covid-19 pandemic not only in restricting public assemblies, as I argued in Article I, but also in digital spaces with increased surveillance regimes and politics of control. I contribute with a theorisation of LGBTI+ resistance as "affective assemblages". This means an understanding of resistance as an affective practice based on the interactions between bodies of (non-)humans, technology, institutions and places. This is also my main study that delves into sexual citizenship as a theoretical and analytical category. First, I investigate the right-wing populist efforts to limit sexual citizenship to a heterosexist familial citizenship as a normative category of the nation-state. Then I turn towards a conceptualisation of sexual citizenship that highlights citizenship as an act rather than being a fixed legal status, which is formed and transformed by affective assemblages. Moreover, the in-depth interviews with Pride participants offer accounts of the affective experiences of digitalisation of Pride activism. Both the experiences of research participants and my participatory observation contribute to theorising "refracted publics" to describe the queer community's uses of contentious and subtle everyday resistance tactics to together navigate between visibility and safety. The article was published in the journal *Feminist Media Studies* on 23 January, 2024.

I wrote Article III, entitled *Transforming queer spaces in changing paradigms of in/visibility*, as a contribution to the upcoming volume *Spaces – Bodies – Revolts: Emerging Digital Cultures, Feminist Struggles, and Global Change*. This piece discusses the changing paradigms of in/visibility in

forming queer spaces both in Turkey and transnationally. I discuss how visibility ceases to be the main goal of activism, especially with the rising right-wing populism and anti-gender politics. I treat these as global phenomena and describe their consecutive consequences in Turkey, such as the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. I ask how feminist and queer responses emerge in counteracting a politics of hate. A theoretical discussion that combines the queer community as "counterpublics" and "refracted publics" leads the article towards an analysis of effective resistances that are not necessarily visible to the wider publics. The paper argues for a queer transnational solidarity approach in combating not only the rising anti-genderism, but also the homonormative and homonationalist "global gay" discourse, which aims for visibility of white cis-gendered and able-bodied queerness while queer people of colour are further marginalised. I highlight that cartographies of a capitalist-consumerist gay visibility and recognition create a mapping of "queer liberation" under the Eurocentric gaze, which undermines the decolonial and situated understanding of transnational queer struggles. I exemplify this with a critique of globalised instances of EuroPride and WorldPride events. Empirically, I look at transnational solidarities of grassroots queer initiatives which are based on solidarity economies, such as Lubunya Deprem Dayanışması (Earthquake Solidarity Network) from Turkey. Overall, the article critically examines Eurocentric visibility paradigms and highlights the significance of refractions in the public sphere in navigating forces of authoritarianism and neoliberalism.

Article IV is a chapter in the edited volume, *Feminist and Queer Imaginaries of Hope in a Turbulent Era.* I entitled it: *Lubunya counter-archival practices and radical hope.* The chapter focuses on queer counter-archives and the politics of hope and hopelessness. Drawing on the argument from the previous article, that paradigms of visibility are not necessarily desirable for a successful queer resistance, in this text I take the discussion towards what queers imagine beyond the authoritarian here and now in Turkey. I use the politicised term "lubunya" for Turkey's queer movement to emphasise its grassroots historicity and an increased usage of the term among activists in recent years. From this vantage point, the chapter asks: what is the role of lubunya memories in doing queer time and space beyond authoritarian politics of erasure? I start the article with my own memory from the field to explain how the Turkish state institutions try to shape the dominant narratives by erasing memories of the marginalised minorities. By adopting Eric Stanley's concept of *overkilling*, I argue that violence is also extended onto an epistemic level, with the anti-gender efforts to erase lubunya histories. I consider lubunya counter-archiving as an affective tool of doing resistance against the epistemic violence and

against the authoritarian temporalities. I look at some examples of lubunya digital platforms, such as *Talking Lubunya*, *Queer Forum* and *LGBTI+ Insight*, whose contents hold counter-archival features for the lubunya community. Their memory work and lubunya knowledge production in digital spaces function as a queer world-making, reclaiming not only the histories from an authoritarian redrawing but also possible futurities. My choice of the topic was influenced by the pandemic temporality, since, in the timelessness of the lockdowns, these platforms appeared as important sources for the queer community; holding fast to memories of resistance played a significant role in transformative politics.

Zooming out from the thesis: key findings

As its main research question indicates, this thesis explored transformations in queer resistance practices with a focus on emergent spaces of activism in Turkey. Moving from summarising the above contributions of each empirical article, in the discussion below I zoom out from the thesis to explain thematically the key findings of this thesis from a holistic perspective.

Rethinking queer spaces of resistance

One of the key findings of this thesis is the conceptualisation of queer spaces of resistance, particularly through the lens of Turkey's transnational queer movement. The thesis demonstrates that queer resistance is inherently a spatial struggle. In today's digitally networked societies, this spatiality brings together grassroots politics of location and digital connectivity, where online-offline entanglements in activism create novel forms of resistance. These novel forms of resistance transcend the conventional binaries of contentious/everyday or collective/individual actions. I argue that with the support of digital affordances and the networking of queer bodies, very individual acts of resistance can transform into collective ones.

Each of the empirical articles of this thesis contributes to this argument by examining lubunya spaces of resistance through situated yet digitally networked perspectives. Article I engages with scholarly debates on the "networked public sphere" (Tufekci, 2017) through the empirical analysis of the hashtag campaign #HerYürüyüşümüzOnurYürüyüşü (Every Parade of Ours is a Pride Parade) during Istanbul Pride 2019. The hashtag itself invokes the act of parading (or walking), which affords the embodied presences of

lubunya bodies in the digital spaces by circulating videos of their "walking as an act of resistance". The article also reveals how Twitter and the hashtag were tactically employed on the day of the Pride march to foster collective sense-making, as participants navigated the streets around Taksim while protecting each other from police violence. Article II highlights the symbolic importance of places like Taksim Square, İstiklal Street and Gezi Park, all of which serve as powerful sites of struggle and identity formation for lubunya in Istanbul. The digital Pride march, *Neredesin Lubunya?* (Where are you, Lubunya?) exemplifies how the symbolism of these physical spaces can be re-imagined and carried into the digital through affordances, extending the geography of activism beyond national borders. Article II also shows the impact of crisis temporalities such as the Covid-19 pandemic in spaces of resistance, where the drastic limitations on public spaces, as happened with lockdowns, and bans on public assemblies complicate doing queer politics. The article warns that the disappearance of queer bodies from the streets—due to increased governmental oppression and the ambivalence brought on by the pandemic—risks a deeper participatory crisis. This crisis could diminish the potentials of queering the heteronormative public sphere, weakening the transformative potential that queer activism holds within both digital and physical spaces.

In relation to the transformations of spaces of resistance, another main finding of this article is about challenging the paradigms of visibility in queer resistance cultures. The thesis suggests that with the rise of global anti-genderism and right-wing populist governments across the world, reaching mass visibility is not desirable by queer communities. The danger of undesirable visibility relates to the associated risks in using digital technologies, pointing out that digital is far from being a safer space for activism; rather, it is a contested space that oftentimes accommodates forces of oppression such as state surveillance, hate speech and even legal persecutions. In relation to these risks, queer communities of struggle increasingly use digital spaces not with the aim of public visibility but to navigate their safety beyond surveillance regimes by creating subcommunities and silosocialities that are associated with the acts of refracted publics. In Article II, I discuss the concept of refracted publics which captures the lubunya movement's tactical navigation between positions of visibility and invisibility. This approach leverages networked resistances–such as during the digital Istanbul Pride events in 2020–to safeguard the community from surveillance and state repression. By viewing the networked queer resistance as an action of refracted public, I emphasise how resistance extends beyond overt, contentious actions. The article suggests that subtle and everyday forms of resistance are crucial for political survival and community-building, especially

under authoritarian conditions. The example of Article III deepens this discussion by pointing out that visibility politics allows the reiteration of "global gay" discourse and making homo- and cis-normative discourses and bodies overrepresented in queer politics. The article also shows how platforms like Twitter, Instagram and TikTok disrupt conventional boundaries between public and private spaces. Queer resistance becomes multi-scalar, operating across different levels of visibility and engagement, making these digital spaces crucial for fostering new forms of resistance. Together, they form a dynamic, multi-layered resistance that reinforces and amplifies each other.

Sexual citizenship as an embodied act

Another finding of this thesis which intersects with the discussions on spaces of resistance was on the conceptualisation of sexual citizenship. In this thesis, I question the conceptualisation of sexual citizenship as the status of (il)legalised subjects, which attempts to reduce the queer movement's struggle to becoming "subjects of rights". I highlight that seeing sexual citizenship as a legal category not only contributes to the bordering and fragmenting of the transnational queer movement, but also reduces the struggle to an idea of inclusion to heteropatriarchal knowledge regimes. Sexual citizenship is also useful in understanding the disciplinary role of the nation-state framework of citizenship where cisgendered heteronormativity is sought in defining ideal citizenship as a familial, docile, nationalised and reproductive subject position. This complicates the relationship of queer subjects with the state as "subjects of marginalisation" whose presence does not benefit the majoritarian codes of the nation-state. The case of Turkey and its Turkish-Islamic synthesis as a central ideology of citizenship in creating the Sunni, male and heterosexual subject as the ideal citizen reveals the commonalities between marginalised communities in Turkey such as the Kurdish minority, women, religious minorities, refugees and lubunya subjects.

To challenge the normative constructions of citizenship, I analyse sexual citizenship as an act rather than a subject position where the epistemological focus of exploring queer politics is to look at "doing" queer politics. In Article II, I argue that sexual citizenship is a situated and affective political practice. I adopt ideas from Puar's (2017) assemblage theory, in order to deconstruct the primacy of identification as a fixed status in forming resistance and, rather, see it in a continuum based on relationality between bodies of subjects, spaces, and affects. This ontology of relations underlines the very formation of sexual citizenship as bodies of acts.

Lubunya as affective assemblages

The third contribution of this study in understanding lubunya resistance as affective assemblages. Four empirical articles of this thesis show how subjects, spaces and affect intersect in doing lubunya resistance in different yet interrelated ways. In Article I, the networked resistance during Istanbul Pride 2019 shows how the urban spatiality of Istanbul was navigated by affective interactions of activists on Twitter. Article II highlights how digitised queer places in Istanbul became affective entities for Istanbul Pride participants in 2020. Article III argues for lubunya earthquake solidarity economies as affective processes connecting lubunya subjects transnationally for mutual support. Article IV champions the value of affective memories in transforming both the future of spaces of resistance and lubunya subjects with counter-archival practices.

The thesis also illustrates the usage of the vernacular Lubunca in communicating affects of lubunya, creating those clandestine moments for queer joy despite the hostilities caused by authoritarian temporality. Furthermore, Lubunca contributes to the bridging between the past and the future of lubunya as an affective social movement.

The thesis has additionally shown the complexity of digitalisation in lubunya activism as an affective process. Most of the research participants problematised the digital spaces, not necessarily always seeing them as spaces of emancipation and movement but as limiting or hostile spaces due to the fear of state surveillance or online hate speech. The fear was oftentimes associated with the arbitrariness of digital surveillance regimes, where the traceability of bodies in the digital increases the risks of interrogation and lawsuits. Others also voiced their feelings of frustration and isolation as street resistance for the queer movement has become extremely difficult in recent years due both to the Covid-19 pandemic and anti-gender authoritarianism; moreover, the digital spaces, especially when they lack the possibilities of physical presences, create the feeling of a digital closet.

For future research on transnational queer resistance

This thesis aimed at contributing to the transnational queer studies from the Global South with a focus on Turkey's lubunya movement and their resistance practices. The lubunya epistemology of resistance was the focus both in showing a historically situated perspective from Turkey and exploring how novel forms of resistance emerge with advancing digital technologies. In the

closing remarks below, I identify certain topics on which future research can be built, with the hope of giving inspiration for further scholarly debates in transnational queer studies.

In this thesis, I used *lubunya* as part of an affective assemblage where I highlighted its ontology through the individual and collective acts of resistance. Therefore, my motivation was to ask questions of "how" in analysing those actions of the movement. While the contextual discussion in the thesis identified certain tensions within the movement due to complex intersectional subject positions such as being Kurdish, having different class backgrounds or varying gender identities in Turkey, there need to be further analytical investigations into the potentially exclusionary aspects of the movement culture or lubunya as a self-identity. These can be further examined from intersectional analyses of lubunya spaces from an ethnographic perspective.

One of the emergent aspects around the tensions of the lubunya movement is queer asylum-seekers and refugees in Turkey. As Turkey's refugee laws do not allow non-European refugees and asylum seekers to settle permanently in the country and offer only temporary protection status, it is very important to discuss the fragilities involving queer refugees, especially those coming from West and Central Asia, and their relationship to the discussions on sexual citizenship. There are recent contributions to queer studies which focus on queer refugees' legal and sociopolitical conditions either in transit or resettled in Turkey (Koçak, 2020; Saleh, 2020; Sarı, 2023). However, this thesis hopes to motivate further research to highlight asylum-seeking and refugee queers' experiences as part of the queer/lubunya movement and doing activism in digital spaces.

While this thesis turned its focus onto networked queer activism and spaces of resistance in their online-offline entanglements, the physical part of my fieldwork took place in Istanbul's urban spatiality. In so doing, I highlighted Istanbul's crucial role in queer resistance, not only in Turkey but transnationally as a major urban centre of queer struggle. It remains key, however, to problematise urban/rural divisions in transnational queer studies, as queer movements are largely defined by their urban spatial political surfaces from a US- and Eurocentric gaze (Doderer, 2011). The remaining issues of representation regarding urban/rural divisions in queer movement cultures and the change in their conditions with the emergent digital spaces remain to be explored. Whereas some scholars have focused ethnographically on rural experiences of the digital (Burns, 2024; Liliequist, 2020), there needs to be more explorations in Turkey and the other contexts from the Global South. Researchers focusing on queer studies in Turkey, for instance, could delve

further into how lubunya resistance is experienced in rural Turkey with today's digitally networked resistances.

I focused on digital technologies in this study for their capacities to afford networked political actions, not only as the digital surfaces of human-to-human interaction but also with their own agential role through human-machine interaction and in facilitating lubunya resistance tactics. With the ambition of contributing to the interdisciplinary field of Gender Studies in analysing queer technocultures, I propose further research could investigate the role of algorithms and AI both as inducing bias and as technologies for resistance. While social research focuses on phenomena like these more extensively in their oppressive and polarising role, approaching algorithms and AI from a queer resistance perspective can be beneficial to ascertain how those technologies may also become emancipatory. Such research would be of value in examining queer counterpublics further as refracted publics, not only exploring digital spaces as echo-chambers or digital closets, but in their potential to contribute queer knowledges of resistance.

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Appendix 1 - *Glossary*

This glossary includes only the Lubunca terms that are mentioned in this thesis and aims to provide the readers with simpler meanings of these terms. More detailed descriptions can be found in footnotes.

Please note that Lubunca is a queer vernacular/argot from Turkey with more than 400 words; and some of the terms keep a level of secrecy and are not included in this glossary or the thesis.

Alıkmak – to do, to make (auxiliary verb); to flirt

Gacı – woman

Gacıvari – feminine

Gullüm – joy, to have fun (collectively)

Koli – sexual partner

Kolileşmek - having sex

Lubunca – vernacular/argot used by the lubunya community in Turkey

Madi, Madilik – mischief, throwing shade, trouble, difficult situations

Paparon - police

Şugar – beautiful/handsome, cute

IN A TURBULENT ERA marked by rising anti-genderism and right-wing populism, how do queer movements resist and how do they reclaim their spaces? Whose collective memories are preserved, and whose queer futures are imagined? What are the impacts of digital technologies in these resistance cultures?

Queers, or *lubunya*, in Turkey navigate a complex landscape of (in) visibility, surveillance, and repression. Against the backdrop of volatile political dynamics marked by the rise of rightwing populism and deepening neoliberalism, the lubunya movement continues to expand notions of sexual citizenship, asserts its right to public assembly and to resist spatially. From a situated analysis of Turkey's lubunya movement, this PhD-thesis explores resistance practices from the streets to the digital platforms and seeks answers to anticipate the future of transnational queer resistance. With help of assemblage theory, the PhD-thesis challenges the dichotomy between online and offline activism, by illuminating how multiple subjects, spaces and affects come together to sustain lubunya resistance in the face of political and epistemic violence.

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