



# IFAIR

Young Initiative on Foreign Affairs  
and International Relations e.V.



## *Queer Village*

*Kyle Khandikian, Eleni Diker, Selim Gezer, Öykü Gürpınar*

*Work Shadowing in Istanbul, 19 – 23 June 2017*

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**Young Initiative on Foreign Affairs and International Relations (IFAIR) e.V.**

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# Queer Village

## Kuir Köy | քուիր գիւղ



Report - Work Shadowing  
19-23 June, 2017  
Istanbul, Turkey

Kyle Khandikian (Armenia, PINK Armenia), Eleni Diker (Turkey, BoMoVu),  
Selim Gezer (Turkey, DD), Öykü Gürpınar (Turkey, BEKS)

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## About the Project Organizers

**KYLE KHANDIKIAN** (*PINK Armenia*) is a Salvadoran-Armenian-American, LGBTQ activist, writer, and folk dancer based in Yerevan. Originally from Los Angeles, Kyle moved to Armenia in search of community and eager to work with others on issues of human rights and social justice. He is a current member, volunteer, and former project coordinator for *PINK Armenia* (Public Information and Need of Knowledge NGO), a community-based LGBT+ non-governmental organization based in Yerevan that serves and supports the needs of Armenia's LGBT+ community, promotes LGBT+ persons' human rights protection, and advocates for positive changes in public policy around LGBT+ issues in Armenia.

**ELENİ DİKER** (*BoMoVu*) is working with and for refugees and migrants on the ground since 2012. She is conducting research on migrant and refugee groups and develops project ideas that respond to the needs of disadvantaged groups. She is the co-founder of *BoMoVu* association. *BoMoVu* is the Network of Sport and Body Movement for Vulnerable Groups, an association founded with the aim of enabling sports practitioners, dancers and performing artists to transform their expertise into social value in Turkey, by developing programs that transform sports and fight different forms of discrimination taking place within practices.

**SELİM GEZER** (*Turkey DD*) completed his undergraduate education at Istanbul University Faculty of Law. From high school years working as volunteers in different non-governmental organizations such as *DD*, *TEMA*, *TOG*, *TOÇEV*, *TEGV*. Has operated in corporations. He worked as a researcher and editor in *Ekopolitik* Foundation. Selim is a volunteer and member of *Dinamik Gelişim Derneği* (*Turkey DD*), a non-profit youth organization creating opportunities for the development of young people through coaching, mentoring and trainings, consulting NGOs and newly established companies, and building groups' capacities to create more sustainable development within society in the terms of civil society and economic growth.

**ÖYKÜ GÜRPINAR** (*BEKS*) graduated from Istanbul Technical University Department of Urban Planning and completed her MA in Mimar Sinan University Department of Sociology. Within the framework of her thesis, which focused on the experiences of an Armenian family from 1915 to present, she studied the experience of being an Armenian in Turkey. Besides, she worked as a project assistant for the scientific research project "Ethnic Geography of Turkey" conducted by Assoc. Prof. Şükrü Aslan and Assoc. Prof. Sibel Yardımcı. She also put on a research entitled "The Lost Memory of Anatolia: A Monographic Study on Erzincan's Pokr Armıdan (Küçük Armutlu) Village from 1915 to

*Present” funded by the Hrant Dink Foundation the History and Memory Research Fund. Started her PhD in MSGSU Department of Sociology, she continues her studies on the representations of the Armenian Genocide in literature, cinema, and contemporary art. Oyku is a member of the Association for the Study of Sociology of Memory and Culture (BEKS), a non-profit foundation established by a group of academics, master and PHD students from Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts, Sociology Department. The aim of the association is to perform studies on the memory of different social groups and trauma cases in recent Turkish history, which are mainly excluded from academic discussions, and to share the results with the public and NGOs.*

### **About the Project**

Queer Village (Turkish: Kuir Köy, Armenian: Բուրիր Չիւր) will be a space for LGBTIQ-identified activists and artists from Armenia and Turkey to meet each other, and together queer the Turkey-Armenia dialogue and peace process using art. In June 2018, LGBTIQ activists and artists from Armenia, Turkey, and their diasporas will meet in Istanbul for one week, where they will use folk dance, song, and body movement practices to critically discuss their roles in the conflict between their nation-states, transcend the borders that exist between them through shared culture and collective memory, and create a transnational solidarity network committed to historical and social justice, and human rights protection in the region. The week-long workshop will culminate in a performance of Armenian and Turkish queer folk culture at Istanbul Pride 2018, followed by a multimedia exhibition of the group’s creations in Turkey and Armenia.

The long-term vision for Queer Village is for it to become a transnational coalition for queer peace activists in the wider region. Queer Village will be a space for dialogue between the activists and change-makers of today whose voices are not included in the Turkey-Armenia dialogue processes. It will be an opportunity for them to reconstruct their shared culture of the past and reclaim their identities. And, it will bridge the struggles against nationalism, closed borders, genocide, homophobia, transphobia, sexism, and patriarchy in Armenia and Turkey, bringing them together.

### **Project Purpose**

The purpose of this project is to (1) introduce queer activists from Armenia and Turkey to one another using shared cultural heritage, (2) create a space for queer voices in the

Turkey-Armenia dialogue process, (3) unite the struggles against nationalism, closed borders, genocide, homophobia, transphobia, sexism, and patriarchy in Turkey and Armenia, and (4) create a transnational solidarity network of queer peace activists.

### **Work Shadowing Goals**

Our work shadowing visit took place during Istanbul Pride Week 2017, from June 19-23. Because Istanbul will host the project in 2018, Pride Week was the perfect opportunity to conduct our shadow visit and to connect with LGBTIQ communities and leaders in the region, who had gathered in the city for pride week. Our goals for the shadow visit were:

- 1) To develop working timelines, divide labor/responsibilities;
- 2) To establish theoretical frameworks (queer theory, memory studies, intersectionality), project methodologies and practices; to find potential facilitators/trainers and scout space(s) for implementation in 2018;
- 3) To meet with potential partners to discuss partnership, funding, and promotion;
- 4) To research folk dance/song in Turkey (Turkish, Kurdish, Armenian), meet with practitioners, teachers;
- 5) To test the project idea and gauge interest with a pilot queer folk dance workshop as part of Istanbul Pride Week 2017.

### **Work Shadowing Schedule**

MONDAY 19 June, 2017

18:00 Welcome - Visiting the Armenian Quarter of Istanbul, Kurtuluş & Feriköy

TUESDAY 20 June, 2017

Meeting @ BEKS

10:00 - 11:00 Introductions

11:00 - 13:00 Queer Village—where we are and what needs to be done

13:00 - 14:00 Lunch

14:00 - 16:00 Introduction to BEKS and theoretical frameworks of Queer Village

16:00 - 17:00 Discussing workshops, facilitators, spaces

17:00 - 18:00 Recap and reflection

WEDNESDAY 21 June, 2017

Meeting with Turkish / Kurdish dance and song practitioners @ Boğaziçi University

10:00 - 11:00 Introductions

11:00 - 13:00 Queer Village—where we are and what needs to be done (continued)

13:00 - 14:00 Lunch

14:00 - 16:00 Discussion: How do we queer folk culture? Workshops, facilitators, spaces

16:00 - 17:00 Preparation for pilot workshop

17:00 - 18:00 Recap and reflection

THURSDAY 22 June, 2017

Meeting @ BoMoVu

10:00 - 11:00 Introductions

11:00 - 13:00 Queer Village—where we are and what needs to be done (continued)

13:00 - 14:00 Lunch

14:00 - 18:00 Body movement practices and preparation for workshop (continued)

18:30 - 20:00 Pilot workshop (see below)

FRIDAY 23 June, 2017

10:00 - 13:00 Recap and reflection on pilot workshop

13:00 - 14:00 Lunch

14:00 - 16:00 Queer Village--where we are and what needs to be done (continued)

16:00 - 18:00 Recap and reflection of shadow visit, develop working timelines, divide labor/responsibilities

### **Pilot Workshop**

#### **“Kochari: In and Out of Context, Transcending Gender”**

The pilot workshop for Queer Village will take place as one of BoMoVu's monthly solidarity meetings. The broader aim of these regular meetings is to tackle subjects that bring people together to think about body movement from a rights-based perspective. This workshop in particular will attempt to create a space for discussion about gender and cultural norms, and create a community of solidarity that communicates through folk dance as a form of body movement. The workshop will be included on

the official 2017 Istanbul Pride Week schedule of events. Event details below.

**Workshop name:** *Kochari: In and Out of Context, Transcending Gender*

**Location:** *Dancentrum*

**Address:** *Harbiye Çayırı Sokak, Kısmet İş Merkezi No: 3 Kat: 4 Elmadağ, Taksim, İstanbul*

**Description:** *Join us as we attempt to queer our folk culture! We will be learning shared folk dances and songs, and along the way, queering them, playing with gender and cultural norms to create a folk culture that reflects us, our bodies, and our desires.*

*One such dance, kochari, is a folk dance with many roots, thanks to contributions from Armenians, Greeks, Kurds, Azeris, and Turks. This fluid and pluralistic dance cannot fit easily within any one national box or identity. We believe that dance can be a form of physical communication between cultures. We also believe that it can be a way for role trans-gender communication. We will experience this with our own bodies in this workshop.*

*This gathering is the pilot workshop of Queer Village, a space for LGBTIQ-identified activists and artists from Armenia and Turkey to meet each other, and together queer the Turkey-Armenia dialogue and peace process through art.”*

**ABOUT THE FACILITATORS:**

*Kyle Khandikian is a Salvadoran-Armenian-American, LGBTQ activist, writer, and folk dancer based in Yerevan. Originally from Los Angeles, Kyle moved to Armenia in search of community and eager to work with others on issues of human rights and social justice.*

*Nil Delahaye has practiced capoeira in Istanbul for several years. After working in the field of migration and volunteering for different causes, she posed to herself the goal to bridge her passion for capoeira with her skills in working with vulnerable groups. She started developing programs that address specific needs for displaced children and then women. Nil is the founder of BoMovu association.*

*Eleni Diker is working with and for refugees and migrants on the ground since 2012. She is conducting research on migrant and refugee groups*



*and develops project ideas that respond to the needs of disadvantaged groups. She is the co-founder of BoMoVu association.*

Link: <https://web.facebook.com/events/1383848151698075/>

### **Evaluation of work shadowing session**

The work shadowing sessions for Queer Village and our pilot workshop for the project were productive and indicative of the great potential Queer Village has if implemented successfully. We were able to stick to our plan consistently throughout the week and meet several of our goals.

Our biggest success and take away from the work shadowing session was the pilot workshop, “Kochari: In and Out of Context, Transcending Gender,” which we were able to organize and implement as an official Istanbul Pride Week event. During the workshop, we attempted to queer three Armenian folk dances taught by Kyle. After the participants learned the dances, they were split into groups and asked to improvise their own dances using the steps learned and this year’s pride theme “What’s Between Us?” as inspiration. We ended the workshop by learning an Armenian folk song, and then asking the participants to write their own lyrics, again sticking to the theme of “What’s Between Us?” Considering that the workshop came together later than we would have liked, attendance far exceeded our expectations, with over 20 people present. The workshop even caught the attention of the Hrant Dink Foundation, who we hope will be a major sponsor for Queer Village.

Other goals met were understanding and critically evaluating the theoretical frameworks of our project (primarily queer theory and intersectionality) and what our approach will be to Turkey-Armenia dialogue as a platform for LGBTQ people. Öykü was very helpful in introducing all of us to key theoretical concepts and facilitating our discussions. We also met several dance practitioners, including members of the Boğaziçi University Folk Dance Club (BÜFK), a queer-friendly folk dance group that frequently performs Armenian and other regional folk dances, and a Kurdish dancer who lead a halay workshop as part of pride week. We were able to introduce Queer Village to them and many others in Istanbul. Based on the responses we received and the number of people who came to the workshop, we think we will not have any trouble finding participants

and partners for Queer Village after we have all our tools and a near-final program ready.

Our teamwork so far has been excellent. We decided to work together on Queer Village because we all believed in the project's mission and in its potential, and since our first meeting in Yerevan the project has been growing and evolving in new and exciting ways. We also are not afraid to challenge each other, which is a huge plus. We all have different backgrounds and experiences, and are approaching the project with different perspectives and expectations, which so far has only added to Queer Village. We are most productive when we are physically together. Our biggest challenge thus far has been staying active and productive when we are not together; it is something that we must work on. We have already committed to monthly Skype meetings, which will likely become more frequent as the project develops further after Berlin.

### **Timeline**

The following timeline outlines our general activities and goals for the rest of the year, and is subject to change. A more substantial timeline that goes into 2018

#### **SEPTEMBER**

- Final "Common Remembrance, Future Relations" meeting in Berlin, Sept 7-10
- Edit and finalize introductory video about Queer Village (to be used for promo, fundraising)
- Meeting with organizers of ["Beyond Borders - Linking Our Stories"](#)
- Begin applying for funding
- Begin developing Queer Village program

#### **OCTOBER**

- Scouting location(s) in Istanbul
- Hiring webmaster for website
- Begin developing trainer / workshop needs and calls

#### **NOVEMBER**

- Hire designer for website and social content
- Finalize calls for trainers
- Begin developing call for participants

#### **DECEMBER**

- Launch Queer Village website and social sites
- Publish calls for trainers / workshop leaders