Enacting the homosexual body: The Turkish military's practice of "proving" homosexuality through rectal examinations

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The practice of rectal examinations in the Turkish military made international news (e.g. *Gaytimes* 2015) when it was abolished in November 2015. Before the amendment, gay men had to endure rectal examinations and provide photographic material of themselves during intercourse to prove their homosexuality. In 2010, one article in the German news magazine *Der Spiegel*, entitled "Porn for the General" (Popp 2010), caused some sensation because it accused the military of storing the biggest gay porn collection in Turkey (Hearn, Biricik & Joelsson 2016, 33). To escape a prevailing homophobia and anti-gay violence in the military, many gay men seek exemption from military service on grounds of their homosexuality which is classified a "psychosexual disorder." Accounts in international media emphasize the humiliating experience of "proving practices." Additionally, they refer to the social stigma surrounding homosexuality in Turkey which materializes in the "unfit report," also called "rotten report," that gay men receive after being discharged. Similar to the "civil death" of conscientious objectors in Turkey (Evren 2012), one informant comments in an *Al-Monitor* article (Gurcan 2015),

> "getting this report means that you disclose and document your gay identity [...] this means social exclusion, loss of job opportunities, no chance of becoming a public employee, increasing snubs and pressure from your social environment."

Even though proving practices have been amended and now military doctors evaluate a person's homosexuality "only" based on his behavior and verbal declaration of being gay, rectal examinations as a proof of homosexuality offer an insightful case to theoretically engage with the question of how bodies are *done* by locating some kind of proof within them. What happens if we, instead of taking the body for granted as the site of the gendered self with sexual desires, attend to how this body comes into being in different constellations? This also points to the question about the means that consolidate prevalent body epistemologies and present the body as a natural fact. To answer these questions, we need to attend to specific contexts such as medical discourses, clinical practice, and people's interactions with science and technology out of which momentarily fixed notions of the gendered and desiring body emerge. By looking at how gay men in Turkey provide and produce photographic evidence of themselves during intercourse and undergo the medical examination of their anal tonus's elasticity (Çinar 2014), I attend to how a specific homosexual body emerges in these proving practices. For this literature-based undertaking, I structure the essay in four stations that are marked by four conceptualizations of different bodies within the broader field of science and technology studies (STS).

#1 The Cyborg – Dissolving body boundaries

Haraway (1991) is concerned with the construction of nature in scientific knowledge production. For instance, she shows how immune system discourses construct biomedical bodies as bounded entities:

> “Bodies as objects of knowledge are material-semiotic generative nodes. Their boundaries materialize in social interaction; ‘objects’ like bodies do not pre-exist as such” (ibid, 208).

Conceptualizing the body as information system, Haraway also indicates the confluence of the once ontologically opposed realms of the organic, technical, and textual. With the cyborg, she accounts for complex entanglements between cybernetic systems that dissolve clear-cut boundaries between organism and machine. Thus, the cyborg as a hybrid between the crafted and the natural opposes the Cartesian divide between mind and body. The cyborg is an offspring of patrilineal capitalism and militarism and yet, it does not originate from either nature or culture. Consequently, Haraway asks us to rework our understanding of the body as a given and bounded entity. Without any identifiable origin and without a bounded body, the cyborg is always partial, contradictory, and incomplete. As a result, it does not have a gender either; it is “a creature in a post-gender world” (ibid, 150).

Currier (2003) questions if the cyborg really achieves to challenge the epistemological framework of identity and unity. By identifying the cyborg as a hybrid between organism and technology, Haraway defines its elements and conceptualizes the cyborg as composed of identities different from one another. In Currier’s reading, Haraway reaffirms a Cartesian body/mind divide by adding up and thereby leaving intact body and technology as distinct categories. Instead, she rethinks body-technology entanglements with the concept of the assemblage. Following Deleuze and Guattari, bodies are assemblages of different elements while simultaneously being constituted as parts of other assemblages. Despite their instability, bodies can emerge as temporarily fixed entities acquiring “localized form, function and meaning” (ibid, 328). Hence, assemblages foreground the process of becoming and the emergence of things by laying emphasis on encounters and events which is in line with praxiographic approaches discussed below.

Halberstam and Livingston (1995) consider unity and identity to be a “lingering nostalgia for a modernist and humanist philosophy of self and other, human and alien, normal and queer” (ibid, 19). Posthumanism disrupts this myth of originality, making the posthuman body “a technology, a screen, a projected image” (ibid, 3). As the body becomes disintegrated in the play between reality and imagination and in the imitation of realness, sex-gender cannot simply be attached to the once bounded unity of the body. Sexuality becomes “a dispersed relation between bodies and things” (ibid, 8). Also, Halberstam and Livingston turn to assemblage theory that approaches difference through multiplicity: “How many races, genders, sexualities are there?

Some. How many are you? Some" (ibid, 9). Currier (2003, 330) explains that multiplicity as difference in kind, as opposed to difference in degree, "is not articulated in relation to a prior unity, identity or central determinate. They are different *in* themselves, rather than being different *from*." With "someness" Halberstam and Livingston attend to the multiplicity of posthuman bodies that do not have fixed boundaries grounded in some natural unity, neither have they fixed genders or sexualities. I will come back to an understanding of multiplicity that is not based on units different from one another in Mol's (2002) analysis of the body as multiple object.

#2 The Body Multiple – Constructed facts, enacted ontologies

In their laboratory study, Latour and Woolgar ([1979] 1986) argue that in order to become a scientific fact, a statement has to be devoid of its temporal qualifications and incorporated into a body of knowledge. They analyze the construction of Thyrotropin Releasing Factor (TRF) by tracing back the competition between two laboratories aiming to prove the chemical structure of TRF. In so doing, they underline the importance of local and temporal contexts and established "criteria of acceptability" (ibid, 121) within which TRF acquires facticity. Latour and Woolgar also take up the debate about difference: Scientists used to distinguish between TRF as a discoverable entity and Pyro-Glu-His-Pro-NH_2 as the chemical representation of TRF's structure. The authors describe the moment in which TRF was established as a scientific fact – the proof of its structure – as a "major ontological change". By then, scientists stopped distinguishing between TRF and its representation and, instead, "were now saying that TRF *is* Pyro-Glu-His-Pro-NH_2" (ibid, 147). In the move from representing/resembling to *being* a stable entity, the two once different things converged.

While Latour and Woolgar attend to practices that result in hard scientific facts, M'charek (2013) focuses on changing relations *between* objects, discourses, and bodies. She looks at race as a relational object that is enacted between entities as both social fiction and biological fact. Her focus on relationality aligns with Halberstam and Livingston who conceptualize sexuality as emerging out of relations between bodies and things. M'charek (2013, 423) further points out that technologies such as DNA sequencing and visual categorizations do not solidify race as a single fact, but "technologies may point in different directions and produce different kind of facts". Thus, race emerges as a fact not of a single body, but between bodies or between bodies and their positioning in space, their clothing, and public prejudice. This focus points out that bodily characteristics gain significance in the relationship and encounter with other social and material factors.

Mol (2002) argues that in the diagnosis of atherosclerosis not just certain bodily features, but the whole body is enacted differently in different clinical settings. Like M'charek, she emphasizes that different technologies do not establish a single fact, but even in one Dutch hospital atherosclerosis is different things. While consulting with patients, doctors enact atherosclerosis as pain while walking, cold feet, and weak pulsation in the legs. Atherosclerosis – like race in M'charek's account – emerges in relation between the doctor, the patient, her symptoms, and the material layout of the consultation room (ibid, 23). In the pathology, in

contrast, atherosclerosis is seen under the microscope as a thickening of the vessel walls. Here, the microscope is not just a neutral tool to make visible a hidden reality, but it brings about another atherosclerosis.

However, these different enactments of atherosclerosis do not necessarily clash for “both practices share a single, common object. They have as their *referent* a single disease, residing *inside* the body” (Mol 2002, 36). Thus, Mol demands to position claims about what reality *is* in local events and practices: the body with atherosclerosis is a thickening of the vessel walls – under the microscope, in the pathology. The homosexual body is a certain degree of the anal tonus’s elasticity – in the medical examination of the Turkish military. And yet, different homosexualities or atheroscleroses do pertain to one body:

> “Atherosclerosis enacted is more than one – but less than many. *The body multiple* is not fragmented. Even if it is multiple, it also hangs together” (ibid, 55).

This hanging together is achieved through different forms of coordination: Atheroscleroses are distributed spatially and temporally, different measurement techniques and diagnoses are added together, the measured values are translated into one another.

Here, we can return to assemblages. Both Mol’s and M’charek’s accounts resonate with a Deleuzian understanding of the body as an assemblage and being constituted within assemblages as temporarily fixed functions and meanings. Yet, the presented praxiographic approaches emphasize the enactment of realities in locally and temporally situated practices and constellations. For Mol, a disease can be enacted as different things, but at the same time those different ontologies can be coordinated and located within one body. The body becomes multiple. This multiplicity – “more than one, but less than many” – is not a difference in degree *from* another entity. Like “someness,” it prevents a return to bounded identities and countable units that allow for distinguishing body from technology. The body multiple is different *within*.

#3 The Cancer Butch – Gendered bodies in (medical) practice

Posthuman bodies find pleasure in disturbing fixed gender categories, according to Halberstam and Livingston (1995, 17): “changing how you walk and talk and dress and who and how you fuck changes your gender as well as surgery.” Latham (2016) extends this understanding. He not only emphasizes the performativity of gender as a social fiction, but investigates “*how* that fiction *works*” (ibid, 351). He uses Mol’s enacted ontologies to analyze how maleness as a multiple object materializes both in trans men’s sexual practices and narratives thereof. Additionally, Latham (2016, 353) resonates with M’charek by presenting maleness as a relational object that “may be co-produced with, or indeed hinge on, sex partner reciprocation.”

As shown above, Mol argues that differently enacted atheroscleroses are coordinated by referring to and being located within one body. She outlines different forms of coordination,

which Latham takes up to describe the coordination of sex-gender enactments. The first mode of (non-)coordination is mutual exclusion of gender identity and bodily sexual practice: for some trans men, being a man and engaging in sexual activity contradict each other. Thus, their bodies engaged in sex and their gender identity clash because they are different *from*, yet comparable with each other. Additionally, Latham points out other forms of coordinating maleness: alignment (enacting surgically modified genitals as a penis), translation (enacting non-human objects as penis or re-signifying anatomy), addition (the validation of maleness through sex partners), and distribution (spatially and temporally separating mutually exclusive sex-gender enactments). Especially coordination by translation illustrates that by enacting non-human objects as male genitals, maleness materializes in narrative-practice:

> "Tommy's 'strap-on' becomes his 'cock': through his sexual interaction *and* his narrative, his male genitals are enacted as real" (Latham 2016, 356).

Comparing Latham's approach with Jain's (2007) article about cancer butch offers additional insights as they approach modified bodies from different angles. Cancer butch tells the story of the politics of cancer and – attached to it – discourses about femininity. Cancer treatments and particularly mastectomy produce the cancer butch body as a queer body by stripping off its breasts, its femininity. Jain positions this queered body within biomedical discourses and the pink marketing of cancer that present the breast-less body as a sign of shame and lost sexuality that must be concealed with prostheses and make-up. Auto-ethnographically the author investigates how her own body and noncompliance with these norms disrupt gender expectations. She becomes a cancer butch by making her body a public event. However, while mastectomy and discourses about flawed bodies produce a not-really-female-anymore body, breast cancer – on the material level of the afflicted breast tissue – confirms the body's femininity in the first place. Literary theorist Eve Sedgwick's becoming a woman through breast cancer exemplifies this claim:

> "the cancer, not the breast (which she already had), offered the defining trauma that constituted her as a woman" (ibid, 504–5).

What does this tell us? First, that medicine produces gendered bodies in a very material sense: doctors cut off cancerous breasts or reconstruct genitalia. However, only in discourses *and* practices these bodies are made sense of and enacted in certain ways. Having their breasts cut off, individuals are expelled from the sphere of inhabiting "normal" female bodies. They are queered. Additionally, the cancer butch emerges in the event of openly presenting her body and positioning it in opposition to body norms. Similarly, Latham argues that transgendered individuals are not just produced as deviant in clinical discourses. In the practice of enacting surgically modified genitalia or non-human objects as penises and in the interaction between sex partners, maleness and male bodies emerge.

As a result, a focus on assemblages and enacted ontologies should not obliterate the important work done on how homosexuality has been brought into existence as the "deviant Other" in

medico-scientific discourses (Foucault 1978; Terry 1995). Thus, a turn to ontology (Kohn 2015) should not make us turn our backs to epistemologies. Rather, I propose that a perspective combining the emergence of bodies in practice and the positioning of bodies within discourses can offer fruitful insights.

#4 The Homosexual Body – Rectal examinations in the Turkish military

In his analysis of conscript to the Turkish military, Biricik (2012) positions gay men's strategies to be exempted and receive the "rotten report" within the nation-state's propagation of hegemonic masculinity. Biricik conceptualizes medical examination as a practice of surveilling "proper" male bodies and expressions of masculinity by sorting out deviant bodies and labeling them "rotten." He further shows how gay men make use of this fixed hegemonic masculinity by adopting the "medicalized notion of deviancy" (ibid, 96) in their gender performance during examination. The strategies include wearing women's cloths, using gay slang, and injecting hormones to grow breasts.

Biricik positions his analysis in a discourse-centered tradition by looking at the pathologization of the "deviant Other." What can the above outlined STS approaches add to the presented case with their focus on the emergence of bodies as relational objects within heterogenous assemblages and within (narrative-)practices? The cyborg and posthuman bodies showed that in the entanglements with technology and in everyday acts the body is not a given entity, but its boundaries are in a constant process of becoming. Thus, instead of taking for granted bodies as entities, I ask how the body (and not just any, but a *homosexual* body) emerges in the Turkish military's medical examination. A second question would concern the nature of homosexuality: How is it established as a provable fact?

Let us start with the latter question. Following Latour and Woolgar ([1979] 1986) on the construction of scientific facts, homosexuality becomes a stable fact in the military hospital through its incorporation in a body of knowledge. According to a *BBC* article (Azizlerli 2012), homosexuality becomes a "psychosexual disorder" in reference to a document by the *American Psychiatric Association* from 1986. Additionally, Latour and Woolgar argue that a "major ontological change" occurred when the chemical formula for TRF *became* TRF. How, then, does a person's claim of being gay transform from a statement into a fact? To be proven as a fact the person has to comply with established "criteria of acceptability" which include an effeminate gender expression, the engagement in same-sex intercourse, but also characteristics of the body. If the claim of being gay and the military's criteria do not conform, the man can be asked to provide proving material. *Der Spiegel* cites an informant who reports being kept in the psychiatry for two weeks. Since the rectal examination had not proven his homosexuality, he was sent home to produce photographic evidence. Doctors additionally use these photographs as evidence of not "faking" medical reports (Biricik 2012, 94), if counterproof suggests that the man's homosexuality was not that much of a stable object (for instance, if he marries a woman shortly after the examination). Hence, homosexuality acquires facticity in the context of the Turkish military hospital according to established standards. Nevertheless, the status as a stable fact may be contradicted by new "discoveries."

Homosexuality is also a relational object that emerges within an assemblage of different bodies, discourses, and objects. Bodies are moved in certain ways, dressed in women's cloths, adorned with jewelry, painted with make-up, shaved and modified with hormones to meet expectations about the effeminate gay (Biricik 2012). Additionally, certain parts and characteristics of these bodies are measured and evaluated. For instance, "the doctor may ask the applicant to squeeze his anal muscle" (ibid, 93) to determine his control over it. Similar to M'charek's account, the materiality of certain body features such as control over or elasticity of the anus acquires importance in relation to other entities and discourses. An elastic anus makes the homosexual. Similarly, cancerous breast tissue made Eve Sedgwick a woman. Bodies, like the breast-less or the racialized one, additionally acquire meanings within discourses. And so does the homosexual body; it emerges within a homophobic military environment. All these factors, material and semiotic, contribute to the emergence of homosexuality.

But wait. *One* homosexuality? Against the backdrop of Mol's multiple ontologies, I should clarify that I am talking about homosexuality *in the Turkish military hospital*. But even within this institution and despite being constructed as a stable fact, homosexuality is not one single object. What is it then? Homosexuality is "elasticity of the anal tonus" (Çinar 2014), "loss of anal muscle control" (Biricik 2012, 93), or growing breasts. Like atherosclerosis it is located within the body. Additionally, homosexuality emerges in the practice of being anally penetrated which is made visible and proved in photographs, like the microscope makes visible thickened vessel walls and proves atherosclerosis. In another instance, homosexuality is performed as an effeminate gender expression underpinned by clothing, make-up, and language. All these homosexualities do not represent a single truth, i.e. a person's gayness. Homosexuality is enacted as different objects in different constellations. And yet, these homosexualities do not contradict each other. Mostly they are coordinated quite well, because they have as their common referent the homosexual body and are translated into one another. They are "described as being linked, as being, indeed, aspects of a single deviance" (Mol 1999, 78): homosexuality is a psychosexual disorder, which materializes in an effeminate gender expression, which implies pleasure in being penetrated, which causes modifications of the anus. What if the coordination of these homosexualities is disrupted like the cancer butch disrupts narratives of femininity? What if a homosexual narrative-practice does not align with the military's "criteria of acceptability"? What if the examined person is too masculine, his anus not elastic enough?

For the purpose of coordinating differently enacted homosexualities, the Turkish military established standards of what proves homosexuality such as a certain degree of the anal tonus's elasticity or visual material that shows the person being anally penetrated. However, like in Latham's (2016) study of trans men's narrative-practices, differently enacted objects can be mutually exclusive. Even if enactments of homosexuality are coordinated by translating them, locating them within the body or distributing them spatially and temporally, it can happen that different ontologies clash. A man may appear "too straight," his anus too tight or he may refuse to provide visual proof. These clashing ontologies may have political consequences as enacted objects interfere and hang together with other realities, for instance with the work of Turkish LGBT[1] organizations advocating against the military's practice of proving homosexuality. Thus, in homosexuality we may find a form of "ontological politics" (Mol 1999)

in which differently enacted homosexualities are both entangled and may clash:

> “What ‘multiplicity’ entails instead is that, while realities may clash at some points, elsewhere the various performances of an object may *collaborate* and even *depend on* one another” (ibid, 83).

Conclusion

I want to come back to the four bodies that marked the stations of this essay: Haraway’s cyborg, Jain’s cancer butch, Mol’s body multiple, and the homosexual body (in the Turkish military). With the cyborg, Haraway (1991) asks us to abandon our understanding of human bodies as bounded entities. The cyborg is a hybrid that does not allow for distinguishing between technology and organism. It has no origin, no stable identity, no unity, and no destiny.

> “The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust” (ibid, 151).

And still, the cyborg came into being in specific constellations. It is “the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism” (ibid).

Also, the cancer butch is an offspring of military technologies. Treatments for cancer like radiation and chemotherapy drugs were tested and used for military purposes (Jain 2007, 524). But unlike the cyborg that lives in a “post-gender world,” the cancer butch has a gender even though it is stripped off its femininity. Her body is queered in medical procedures and discourses into a not-really-female-anymore body. And her body is bounded. It bears the scars of losing its breast, but Jain, the cancer butch who accepted her body’s destiny, disturbs the norms of society through her difference. Her body is *different from*, while the cyborg as a body-technology assemblage is no longer able to differentiate its parts. It is *different within*.

The homosexual body is also different things within the Turkish military. Like the body multiple in which differently enacted atheroscleroses are located, it becomes multiple in different practices of proving homosexuality. And yet, the homosexual body is not fragmented as different homosexualities are translated into one another. Like the cancer butch, the homosexual body is made a queer body; enacted as one. Unlike the cancer butch, it strives for its queer status formalized in the “rotten report”. Comparable with the cyborg’s confusion of organism and technology, the homosexual body is also queer in the broader sense of dissolving boundaries. It is a penetrable body, a body that loses control over its anal muscle, that injects hormones. Its permeable boundaries make it what it is. And yet, what it *really is* cannot be determined once and for all. It is different in rectal examinations, in gay men’s performance for the doctors and during the production of proving photographs. And certainly, it is different outside the military hospital. As another offspring of militarism, the homosexual body does not stay within the hospital. It disseminates into society through the nation-state’s propagation of

the ideal citizen and in the materiality of the “rotten report.” Outside of the military, it clashes with other realities.

In this essay, I provided a literature-based approach to thinking about the emergence of gendered bodies within heterogenous assemblages consisting of practices aiming at proving homosexuality within the body, performances of the body, and discourses about homosexuality within the Turkish military. Ethnographic research could provide additional insights into the subjective experiences of the actors who are involved in the different contexts of proving homosexuality.

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Bio statement

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[1] Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender