

Curious Steps: Feminist Collective Walking and Storytelling for Memory, Healing, and Transformation

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How are silences in social memory reflected in the spaces of the city? How can we read the relation between gender, urban space, and memory through the stories of people inhabiting the city in different times and places? How does collective urban walking and storytelling open up space for people whose stories are systematically excluded from mainstream historical narratives? With these questions in mind, in 2014 a group of scholars and students at Sabanci University in Turkey took the initial steps towards designing Istanbul's first "Gender and Memory Walks" while preparing for the Women Mobilizing Memory¹ working group meeting to take place in Istanbul. The academic coordinator of *Curious Steps*, Ayşe Gül Altınay, who sowed the first seeds of the programme, had drawn inspiration from similar feminist city walks taking place across the globe, such as in Budapest led by historian Andrea Petö,² in Bochum by Linda Unger of the feminist archive collective *ausZeiten*,³ and in Santiago led by Soledad Falabella Luco⁴ as part of the previous Women Mobilizing Memory working group meeting held there in 2013. There were also several domestic sources providing great inspiration, including the Militourism Festival (2004–2006) organised by an antimilitarist group of conscientious objectors drawing attention to the "militarist" sites of Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir with creative "antimilitarist" performances, and the opening of the Women's Museum of Istanbul⁵ in 2012, a virtual and multi-lingual museum dedicated to showcasing the silenced history and significance of women in the city

1 <https://www.socialdifference.columbia.edu/projects-/women-mobilizing-memory>. Accessed 3 August 2022.

2 <https://women.danube-stories.eu/2017/04/27/women-in-the-labyrinth-of-budapest-bus-tour-by-prof-andrea-peto-and-budapest-walkshop/>. Accessed 3 August 2022.

3 <https://www.auszeiten-frauenarchiv.de/guided-womens-walking-tour-of-the-city-for-women-and-men-2-2-2-2/>. Accessed 3 August 2022.

4 <https://www.socialdifference.columbia.edu/faculty-/soledad-falabella-luco>. Accessed 3 August 2022.

5 <http://www.istanbulkadinmuzesi.org/en>. Accessed 3 August 2022.

since its very founding over 2000 years ago. Guided by such great inspirations, in 2014 Istanbul's first feminist walking tour was organised in the Beyoğlu district with the collaboration of students and faculty from Sabancı University and activists from Karakutu, an NGO also organising memory walks. These first steps were taken with the participants of the Women Mobilizing Memory working group.⁶

These initial steps then led to the birth of the *Curious Steps* programme, coordinated by Sabancı University's Gender and Women's Studies Center of Excellence (SU Gender),⁷ which brings together diverse groups of people to collectively explore and experience urban space with a gender lens through walking and storytelling. In Turkish, the name of the programme is *Cins Adımlar*, 'adımlar' being steps and 'cins' alluding to multiple levels of meaning, including kind and species, but also peculiar, curious, and queer. Cins is also the root of the terms 'cinsiyet' (sex) and 'toplumsal cinsiyet' (gender). The adjective 'curious' was chosen for the English name of the programme for similar reasons, as it makes references both to feminist curiosity and being queer. *Curious Steps* walks are organised today in three different Istanbul neighbourhoods (Beyoğlu, Kadıköy, and Balat), with over 1,200 people taking part in over 50 walks (2014–2022). The programme has employed and continues to expand upon a growing repertoire of interventions to accomplish several interrelated goals, including: drawing attention to the silencing of women's and LGBTQIA* lives, contributions, and struggles in the city; making visible the nationalisation and militarisation of public spaces; introducing forms of alternative memorialisation; co-witnessing and co-resisting with memory activists; exploring feminist and LGBTQIA* struggles connected to space; making visible sites of gendered violence; exploring the gendered memories of recent cases of urban transformation; exposing the problems of the marginalisation of women and LGBTQIA* in other rights struggles; and drawing attention to multiple layers of dispossession that mark public space.⁸

Curious Steps continues to grow to this day. In 2018–19, a small project was implemented for deepening, enriching, and diversifying stories told as part of the walks. Some of the stories already being told were strengthened through archival and qualitative interview research. New stories were also added to the repertoire, including women and LGBTQIA* people re-making the city at present. Overall, a greater emphasis was placed on creating a diversity of representations in stories based on cultural/ethnic group, gender identity, age, class, profession, and religion. In recent years,

6 Abiral, Bürge, Ayşe Gül Altınay, Dilara Çalışkan, and Armanç Yıldız. 2019. "Curious Steps: Mobilizing Memory Through Collective Walking and Storytelling in Istanbul". *Women Mobilizing Memory*, edited by Ayşe Gül Altınay, María José Contreras et al., New York: Columbia University Press.

7 <https://sugender.sabanciuniv.edu/en>. Accessed 3 August 2022.

8 Abiral et al., "Curious Steps".

Curious Steps has also begun incorporating new layers of history and media of expression into its repertoire. Due to the very significant change in Turkey's global position as a country of immigration and asylum over the last decade, the *Digital Story Map of Migrant Solidarity in Istanbul* project (2019–2020) was developed with a focus on the interrelations of migration, gender, memory, and space. The recently launched web documentary entitled *Buluşan Adımlar (Steps of Encounter)*,⁹ mapping different solidarity initiatives in Istanbul with and by migrants, aims to open up an inclusive digital space that challenges divisions of 'hosts' and 'guests' and makes visible efforts to co-create communities of solidarity. Last but not least, two digital walks were organised during the pandemic,¹⁰ which have created the grounds for reconsidering understandings of walking, storytelling, and memory-making in a digital age.

Following this brief introduction to the story of *Curious Steps*, this essay presents the methodological sensitivities of the Gender and Memory Walks of Istanbul, together with a selection of two stories from Beyoğlu: the first reflecting the dynamic connection between the individual memory(ies) of the storyteller(s) and the collective memory of the space; and the second showing how different methods such as oral history contribute to deepening the layers of urban (hi)stories.

Why We Walk and Tell Stories

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Built around models of experiential and experimental pedagogy, *Curious Steps: Gender and Memory Walks* offer participants an opportunity to engage dynamically with the many spatial and temporal layers of the city and to become part of a process of alternative urban knowledge production through their mere presence in space. Through collective walking, we position ourselves as a moving group in the public space, which is sometimes perceived as a magnet of curiosity. Most people ask questions like "What are you doing here?"; "Is this a course?"; "Is this a tourist group?". They sometimes listen to our stories being told and make contributions. In this way, the Gender and Memory Walks offer a temporary intervention in public space to commemorate the lost stories of people who made great contributions to urban culture and society. And the stories invite participants, as well as bystanders, to witness and acknowledge past traumas and their effects on contemporary times. As Judith Butler expresses in

9 https://www.bulusanadimlar.com/#Acilis_Sayfasi. Accessed 3 August 2022.

10 The first digital walk took place as part of the International GEARING Roles Conference on Leadership and Gender in Research and Higher Education on 9 November 2020 (see: <https://gearingroles.eu/reflections-gearings-second-annual-conference/>), and the second one during the WOW—Women of the World Festival Istanbul on 6 March 2021. <https://www.wowistanbul.org/en>.

a recent interview¹¹ in another context, collective walking/gathering challenges power structures through non-violence, which rather than being a form of passivity is an active and dynamic force that transforms both the experience and workings of power. Hence, for us as *Curious Steps*, collective walking is a medium for creating a resistant and resilient pose in the everyday urban context. Also, our walks provide an opportunity for participants to experience the space directly through their senses of movement, sight, hearing, and smell. In this way, the space itself becomes an object of knowledge, not just through the stories told, but also through the personal and collective senses embodied.



FIG. 1: *Curious Steps: Gender and Memory Walk*, Kadıköy, 2016. Credit: Ayşe Gül Altınay, Curious Steps Visual Archive.

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During the walks, we pay attention to telling stories that are excluded from conventional narratives about Istanbul's urban space and its public. And we have a critical approach towards history-making practices that affirm and impose the nationalist and patriarchal ideologies of the state that purposefully aim for the erasure of particular life histories. Yet, storytelling for us goes beyond what is actually told, as we see it also as a medium of community formation, healing, and transformation. Public storytelling is a traditional art form that has been practiced predominantly in the geographical area of present-day Turkey by diverse cultural groups to pass on the wisdom of human experience to future generations. It has also been used for forming communities through sharing experience, creating affective bonds and intimate relationships among people.

As *Curious Steps*, we work with volunteer storytellers, some of whom join us after taking part in one of the walks. The volunteers initially receive training from us on oral history and storytelling methods. They choose themselves what stories they wish to tell and how to tell them, with guidance

11 Butler, Judith, and Simon Critchley in conversation about Butler's new book, *The Force of Nonviolence: The Ethical in the Political*. *The People's Forum NYC*; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTsd40tj3R8&t=3s>. Streamed on 7 February 2020.

from us if needed. In this way, our walks do not consist of stories that have already been produced with pre-determined plots, beginnings, and endings. Rather, we encourage storytellers to write their own stories, which remain open to development and change through time and also include the linkages between their own stories and memories of the city and the other ones being told. That way, we seek ways of connecting different histories and memories to one another, and to the present. And by engaging with the art of storytelling, our endeavour is to open up a space for dialogue and interaction on how to co-create a better future and a better story that makes sense for all.

How We Choose Our Sites and Stories

The sites that we visit on our walking routes in *Curious Steps* rarely include sculptures, graveyards, monuments, statues, museums, or the like, which are most often conceived as sites representing and commemorating persons or events historically marking the city. Rather, we search for layers and details of the city that are not easily recognised by a passer-by, like street and apartment names, abandoned buildings, or places that have no cultural and historical significance in predominant narratives of the city. For example, in Kadıköy, we venture into a small side street named after Dilhayat Kalfa, who took on important administrative roles in the Ottoman state and was the first Muslim woman to make significant contributions to Turkish classical music. We also stop in front of the *Bakla Tarlası Apartmanı* (the Bean Field Apartment), where we tell the story of Mihri Müşfik Hanım (Lady Mihri Müşfik), who was a prominent woman painter and worked for the involvement of women in fine arts faculties in Turkey. While the apartment has no historical significance, we know that there were bean fields in Kadıköy when Mihri Müşfik lived in that neighbourhood. The place and time are the two important components of a story. In our walks, the place is physically there, although it is transformed by urban planning, policies of the state authorities, or social and cultural developments or changes.

Even when we do include sites specifically built for commemorative purposes on our walks, we go well-beyond the conventional story associated to such places. For example, in Istanbul's notorious Galatasaray Square, located in the Beyoğlu district, there is a monument that was erected in 1975 to symbolise the 50th anniversary of the Turkish Republic. During our walks, we stop at this monument, but rather than telling the story of the Republic or of the person who constructed the monument, we tell the story of Maryam Şahinyan, an Armenian and Turkey's first woman photographer who, through her studio located in what is now Galatasaray

Square, witnessed and documented the transformation of culture and society in great detail over five decades from the mid-1930s up until 1985. Her archive is a unique inventory of the demographic transformations occurring on Istanbul's socio-cultural map after the declaration of the Republic. Here on this spot, we also tell the story of the Saturday Mothers/People, a group of women seeking justice for their forcibly disappeared children and relatives who met at Galatasaray Square every Saturday at noon for 15 years, starting in 1995. It was one of the longest running peaceful protests in the world, ended forcefully in November 2020. In this way, *Curious Steps* invites participants to look beyond what is visible and represented through sharing stories reflecting different layers of urban time and place. With all these different elements of collective walking, storytelling, and site selection combined, as argued elsewhere,¹² feminist walks such as *Curious Steps* offer both the possibility of mobilising silenced memories and making visible creative mobilisations of memory through a gender lens.

In what follows, we would like to share two stories written by the current organisers and the storytellers of the *Curious Steps* programme. Özge Ertem tells the story of Narmanlı Inn, one of the stops of the Beyoğlu walk. Being a story already told by *Curious Steps* volunteers before her, Özge brings new life to the story, following the traces of invisible non-human protagonists and residents of the space, city, and the story: the cats. This version of the story was first told during the pandemic in the format of digital walks, hence it merges digital representations of the space and the protagonists into storytelling through a creative use and juxtaposition of photographs. It encapsulates the ways in which *Curious Steps* merges through the feminist gaze the past and present, public and personal, the human and non-human, and it shows how the stories told continue to evolve with the changing life of the city and the new forces infringing upon it. İlayda Ece Ova tells the story of the Hayata Sarıl Restaurant, drawing on an oral history interview carried out by herself with the restaurant's founder, Ayşe Tükrükçü. This is one of the new stories added to the *Curious Steps* Beyoğlu route in an effort to diversify the stories told and focus on the present moment of history-making through a gender lens. As opposed to the glamour and consumption ascribed to this place in popular memory, this story reflects the "other" Beyoğlu from the perspective of homelessness. As with the Narmanlı Inn story, it also touches on the impact of neoliberal economic policies in the locality, going hand-in-hand with increased policing. By its very methodology, it also sets a strong example of the transformative power of oral history and storytelling, wherein the story that one chooses to tell can also give voice to greater optimism regarding the future, irrespective of the pain of the past.

Walking Slowly Around the Lost Home: Narmanlı Inn

Since 2014, Narmanlı Inn has been the second stop of *Curious Steps*' Beyoğlu route. It is one of those spaces where "witnessing" becomes an interspecies act of the gender walk. We remember not only the story of the famous painter and engraver Aliye Berger (1903–1974) who lived and worked there, but also the cats of Narmanlı Inn. We remember *them*; and we remember *with* them. We witness the history of the building, the story of Berger and her studio, the cats who used to live there and were gradually displaced in 2015, with a final blow in 2016. The demolition of the historical Narmanlı Inn building started physically in the name of "restoration" in 2016 and was completed in 2017. The family that had taken care of the inn was displaced; the cats, living sheltered in the beautiful courtyard, were expelled from the inn and made homeless. *Curious Steps*' act of walking and storytelling at this stop includes both the history of the inn and its destruction. The story does not end with this destruction; however, it follows the traces of the historical inn by following the steps of the few cats who have remained (not in the courtyard anymore but outside, across the street). Thus, what is lost is remembered not only to commemorate but also to remember caring for those who still live in the area (even in decreasing numbers and diminishing visibility): the street animals of Beyoğlu and the trees, the parks, the memories of an historical cultural and intellectual hub, and a vibrant urban space with all its diversity.

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FIG. 2: Narmanlı Inn, Beyoğlu, 2016. Turkish translates to "Private Property! Entering is Dangerous and Forbidden". Credit: Ayşe Gül Altınay, Curious Steps Visual Archive.

When the *Curious Steps* walks started in Beyoğlu in 2014, for the first few years it was a common occurrence that some of the participants would feed the cats of the inn while listening to Berger's story at this stop. At that time, it was still possible to enter the inn as it was not yet surrounded by fences and signs saying "Private Property! No trespassing!". When these signs were then put up in the yard, storytelling in this space became a simultaneous act of recording and witnessing a loss.

The story usually started with the building. The participants looked at the inn from outside and talked about its history, which dated back to the early nineteenth century. Built in 1831 as the Russian embassy building, the inn also included a Russian prison. Its diplomatic and social functions intensified as a space of encounter with the arrival of Russian refugees following the First World War. It was used by Russian trade and consular offices until 1930s.¹³ One of the turning points of Narmanlı Inn's story took place in 1933, when the Narmanlı brothers bought the building. This family rented the rooms of the inn as studios, work spaces, and residences to artists, authors, publishing houses. Aliye Berger was one of them.¹⁴

The participants of the walk then slowly entered the marvellous courtyard, which was home to beautiful trees with purple blossoms, wisteria, and cats walking around and taking naps under the trees. The participants usually fed the cats accompanied by Mithat *Bey*, the caretaker of the courtyard, while listening to Aliye Berger's story and imagining her studio in the building. Thus, in this part of the walk, the participants focused on Berger's story.

Aliye Berger came from an art-loving upper-class family that supported her to pursue her passion for painting and later engraving. It was not easy for young women to follow careers in the arts. The first official school of arts for women, The Faculty of Fine Arts for Women [*Inas Sanayi-i Ne se Mektebi*], was opened in 1914 while its counterpart for men had been opened in 1882. With her elder sister also being a painter (Fahrelnissa Zeid), Berger became familiar with painting in her teen years and started to paint herself. She had a good, private educational background gained at French colleges and many opportunities to meet artists and to travel during her childhood and adolescence years. Not only her strong and colourful life as a woman artist, but also her love story challenged social norms. She fell in love with her music teacher, Hungarian musician Karl Berger, at the age of 21 and lived with him, while they got married only 23 years later, just 6 months before he died. After his death, Berger, then in her mid-40s, went to London with her sister and attended

13 Günal, Asena, and Murat Çelikkan. 2019. "Narmanlı Inn". *A City That Remembers: Space and Memory From Taksim To Sultanahmet*. Istanbul: Truth Justice Memory Center, 292–93.

14 "Aliye Berger (1903, Istanbul–1974, Istanbul)," *Curious Steps*. <http://cinsadimlar.org/aliye-berger/>. The original text in the *Curious Steps* booklet was written and the story was told by Derya Acuner.



FIG. 3: Aliye Berger at her studio/home. SALT Research, Yusuf Taktak Collection. <https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/41404>. Accessed 17 August 2022.

the workshop of artist John Wright. Engraving became her main passion. After three years, she returned to Istanbul. Her first solo exhibition took place in 1951, and her work was also exhibited in Europe.¹⁵

After giving some details about Berger's story (and referring to the booklet if participants want to know more about Berger), the walk highlights the connection between Berger and the Narmanlı Inn. Her room at the Narmanlı Inn in the 1950s and 1960s was one of the places that inspired not only her art but also provided a cultural and intellectual hub in Beyoğlu. The Narmanlı Inn created a community, a network of painters, artists, photographers, writers who lived there and those who frequently visited. Writers and poets Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar and Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu, journalist Neş'et Atay, the Armenian newspaper *Jamanak*, sculptor Dr. Firsek Karol, the Andrea Bookstore, and D Group

exhibitions all shared the space in the inn in different years.¹⁶ The cats were also part of the community as permanent residents of the courtyard.

The participants are invited to imagine the space through the stories about inn residents and their guests. They become guests to the courtyard and to the memory of Berger's colourful studio full of life until they encounter another layer attached to the story: the assault of gentrification. The memory of Berger's studio and the inn community is then transformed into the memory of a forced exile in the same city, a harsh intervention into the story by an aggressive urban renewal project. Here, the story takes a new turn: the part about destruction and loss begins.

In 2014, when the first walk took place, plans for the restoration of the building were going on, but construction work had not started yet. In 2001, 15% of the shares of the inn were sold to another real estate investment company, Yapı Kredi Koray, for restoration purposes. The project then became a controversial issue between the investors, owners, and NGOs opposing the project. The heirs of the Narmanlı family won the trial they had opened against the company in 2008 and took back their shares. Then, in 2013, they sold the inn to two businessmen, Mehmet Erkul and Tekin Esen, who negotiated its restoration with architect Sinan Genim.¹⁷

Meanwhile, thanks to the Gezi Park resistance¹⁸ and ecological urban rights movements, NGOs and civic platforms were much stronger. Beyoğlu Kent Savunması [Beyoğlu City Defense Platform] struggled hard to protect the historical and cultural heritage of the Narmanlı Inn, demanding that it should not be a shopping mall or a shopping boutique but stay as a communal place like it used to be, with its cats, beautiful trees, numerous rooms to be rented again to art initiatives, artists, writers, bookstores, and art workshops.¹⁹ Yet, under the term "restoration", the historical inn was demolished and rebuilt as an artificial shopping area with coffeeshops, a kitsch "Museum of Illusions", all the trees cut down, and more than 50 cats evicted together with the inn's caretaker family.

The sources used for the *Curious Steps* walks can be summarised as such: "official histories and archives (often to talk about their silence), intimate archives (in the form of oral histories, memoirs, and private collections), and the personal memories of storytellers and participants."²⁰ In most recent stories told about the Narmanlı Inn by the author of

16 Günal and Çelikkın, "Narmanlı Inn", 292–93.

17 Sarıçayır, Ecem. 2014. "Narmanlı Han 57 Milyon Dolara Satıldı" [Narmanlı Inn Was Sold For 57 Million Dollars]. *Arkitera*, 21 January. <https://www.arkitera.com/haber/narmanli-han-57-milyon-dolara-satildi/>. Accessed 25 April 2021.

18 This refers to the protest and resistance that started against the government's plans to demolish Gezi Park near Taksim Square and grew into a country-wide protest movement with accelerating police violence in June 2013.

19 "Beyoğlu Kent Savunması: Narmanlı Han Kamulaştırılsın" [Beyoğlu City Defense: Make Narmanlı Inn A Public Place!]. *Sendika.org*, 24 January 2016. <https://sendika.org/2016/01/Beyoglu-kent-savunmasi-narmanli-han-kamulaştirilsin-323979/>. Accessed 25 April 2021.

20 Abiral et al., "Curious Steps", 85.

these lines in the context of *Curious Steps* walks, this time in the digital space due to the pandemic,²¹ the last source, the storyteller's personal memory, added yet another layer to the story: the gaze of those cats after the eviction.

Our digital walk around this stop starts just across the restored inn, looking at the photo of a cat used in a twitter post by the Minister of Health, Fahrettin Koca, on 26 May 2020.²² In this post, Koca announced that the curfew due to the COVID-19 pandemic would soon be over. The picture of the cat showed the caption: "We are slowly returning." The cat was looking sternly in a direction a bit to the right side of Istiklal Avenue. The photo does not show where the cat was looking, we just see the cat and its eyes focused on something. The storyteller asks the participants of the digital walk: "What is this cat looking at?" The participants of the digital walk try to imagine the avenue, the cat's position on the street, the focus of its eyes, and the reply comes easily. The cat was looking at the Narmanlı Inn, the home it had lost; it was one of the evicted Narmanlı Inn cats.

Then, the participants follow the storyteller through photos taken inside the Narmanlı Inn in the 1960s, photos of Aliye Berger and Ayla Erduran, the violin player who visited Berger in her studio. The photo archive of the SALT Research Center in Istanbul has a great collection of these photos taken by photographer Eliza Day,²³ showing the two (three with the photographer) women chatting, laughing, and Erduran playing the violin on the balcony of Berger's studio, while passers-by watch her from the street. Looking at these photos, the participants of the digital walk, the evicted cat, and the passers-by in 1960s join each other almost on the same level of memory. The memory of the cats and of Narmanlı Inn as a place of friendship between the three women and of a social art community come together. A question is brought up: are there any remaining places of art communities like the one that once existed at the Narmanlı Inn, especially created by women and queer people in Beyoğlu and Istanbul?²⁴ Another question is whether remembering the laughter and almost hearing the music through the photos helps bring the Narmanlı Inn back to life, if only for a moment, and if the answer is yes, what happens when we remember? These questions accompany us on the walk.

21 See footnote 10.

22 Koca, Dr. Fahrettin. 2020. Twitter post. 26 May, 11:10 p.m. <https://twitter.com/drfaheerinkoca/status/1265374812375068673?s=20>. Accessed 3 August 2022.

23 Maksudyan, Nazan. 2017. "Arşivden Çıktı: Eliza Day Bu Hikâyenin Neresinde?" [Came From The Archive: Where is Eliza Day In This Story?]. *SALT Blog*, 22 July. <https://blog.saltonline.org/post/158702922474/arşivden-çıktı-eliza-day-bu-hikâyenin>. Accessed 25 April 2021.

24 Here, we also remember the punk sub-culture created in Deniz Bookstore at the Narmanlı Inn in the 1990s. Deniz. "Deniz Kitabevi" [Deniz Bookstore]. *Türkiye'de Punk ve Yeraltı Kaynaklarının Kesintili Tarihi, 1978-1999* [An Interrupted History of Punk and Underground Resources in Turkey, 1978-1999], edited by Sezgin Boynik and Tolga Güldallı. İstanbul: BAS, 2007, 299-303. I am grateful to Deniz Özgür for the reference. For reflections about high and 'elite' cultural circles in Beyoğlu from a late-Ottoman bureaucrat-caricaturist's perspective, see Bahattin Öztuncay and Özge Ertem (eds.) 2017. *YOUSSOUF BEY: The Charged Portraits of Fin-de-Siècle Pera*. İstanbul: ANAMED.

We slowly leave Berger's studio, come across the few cats (through photos) still wandering in and around the courtyard, follow them while they pass in front of the sculptures placed in the courtyard by the restorer: the sculptures of Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu, Aliye Berger, and cats! The cats of the Narmanlı Inn were evicted, most of them got sick and were lost, not more than 10 remained, but there are cat sculptures in the courtyard... Ironically, the sculptures stand just opposite the Museum of Illusions.

The participants leave the inn, continue to follow the cats and the storyteller across the street until arriving at the few cat homes set up in front of an old building. The shopkeepers of Beyoğlu usually feed the few remaining homeless cats there, while some are given shelter in the garden of the Swedish Consulate. The former spot has a view of the Narmanlı Inn; this is where Süleyman Akova, an elderly man, once came every day to feed the cats and sit with them for a few hours while he was providing weighing services to people with his small scales. He stopped coming to feed them before the pandemic; and Mithat *Bey*, another person who had been taking care of the cats and also of the inn (before it was demolished), died during the pandemic.

There are still shopkeepers and volunteers who feed the cats, and recently there is also a female municipal employee, who together with the volunteers takes care of the animals in Beyoğlu. Unless the municipality takes an active position, it is impossible for any volunteer to sustain especially the medical care required for the animals. Even though what is done is not enough, the employee's responsive attitude to the needs of the volunteers helped turn the feelings of being on their own a little in a positive direction. This also makes her part of the Narmanlı Inn's story in the *Curious Steps* gender walk as a female municipal employee whose position is crucial for taking care of the cats in the present. This is also an opportunity to talk about the responsibilities of official public institutions and municipalities as they respond to the needs of the city's human and non-human residents.

Then Narmanlı Inn cats still look at the building. They were evicted, yet they still look at their former home, walk and live around it. The participants of the *Curious Steps* walk are invited to stop once more and look at the Narmanlı Inn together with the cats, from the latter's position. Together we look at Berger's balcony where Ayla Erduran once played the violin, and we come back to the cat's position and think about other cats of the Narmanlı Inn, one-eyed Korsan (Pirate) for example. Korsan lost one eye before the pandemic, and we were told that he was taken in by a volunteer afterwards; however, we have not been able to confirm this yet. Sadly, Korsan is not around anymore.²⁵ Juxtaposing the pictures of Korsan and other cats with the photos of the Narmanlı Inn, which is transformed into a kitsch mall-esque courtyard, evokes various feelings in all of the participants. In the

25 Korsan had unfortunately died during the pandemic.

context of the walk, we try not to identify them, but to just feel and realise how they accompany us while we continue our walk through a continuously transforming Beyoğlu... With few Narmanlı cats accompanying us in corners, near shops, and side streets.

Walking Around a Home to the Homeless: Hayata Sarıl Restaurant and Ayşe Tükrükçü

On 15 February 2017, Ayşe Tükrükçü and her friends founded the Hayata Sarıl (Embrace the Life) Association to take the first steps towards opening the restaurant she had been dreaming of. After years of sex work, severe health problems, and homelessness, she had joined a group of volunteers in Beyoğlu who distributed free soup to the homeless in the neighbourhood every night. Realising that giving away food to homeless people was only a temporary solution, she decided to open a restaurant where they would serve food to the customers in the daytime like any other restaurant and distribute free food to the homeless in the evening using the revenue generated from the restaurant. The more transformative part of this idea was that homeless people would be trained in the art of cooking, receive psychological therapy, gain experience in doing kitchen work, and after several months be recruited in restaurants, hence offering the possibility of not being homeless or jobless anymore. When asking any Istanbulite, the Hayata Sarıl Restaurant may not be among the first places in Beyoğlu to come to mind. However, for Istanbul's homeless, Hayata Sarıl is a vital hub in the city. And for *Curious Steps*, it is vital to tell the stories of both the Hayata Sarıl and Ayşe Tükrükçü while walking through Beyoğlu, because they are an inseparable part of the locality's current history-in-the-making.

Hayata Sarıl Restaurant is located on Kurabiye Street, just behind the well-known French Institute, whose front steps are used by many Istanbulites as a meeting point before venturing off into the bustling life of Beyoğlu. Kurabiye Street, like many such side and back streets of Beyoğlu, contrasts starkly with Istiklal Avenue, one of Istanbul's main tourist attractions that is littered with shiny gold-coloured nameplates, touristy restaurants, and is always jam-packed. It once was a lively living space for transsexual workers and LGBTQIA*s, while today it is a place of low-quality hotels and has become the back-door dumping site of some restaurants on Istiklal Avenue, with a few cafés and restaurants remaining that are known to old Beyoğlu regulars. Hayata Sarıl was located next to the cosy vegetarian restaurant

Zencefil and the Muaf pub, both popular meeting points for leftist people and groups. Having been rooted in this locality for several decades, the restaurant's founder, Ayşe Tükrükçü, maintains strong relations of solidarity with these neighbours, along with many other shopkeepers and residents in the area.

Why open a soup kitchen/restaurant in Beyoğlu? Ayşe Tükrükçü tells the story in her own peculiar way: "I was living at the lower end of Beyoğlu, in Tarlabası, so I knew the neighbourhood. I also knew this area because I was making and distributing soup in Cihangir. When I was homeless myself because I wanted to disappear... So today is Sunday, 5 million people pass along Istiklal Avenue in 24 hours, nobody will notice me among those 5 million. My chance of getting lost is higher and feeding (oneself) is slightly different here. There were many more places like Burger King, McDonald's back then, you could sit in the places around Gezi Park. You know those Burger King, McDonald's restaurants that you don't like, I do. The waiters do not serve you there, you get your own menu—or you don't—, and only you know whether you did or not. Then you can go upstairs and either eat (the food), sit there for hours, or doze off. They won't interfere, even though that's changing slowly now; but I wish it wasn't. For instance, now you cannot (enter) the toilets without the password on the receipt you get, that was not the case in our times. So, the homeless can live slightly differently here. Finding shelter, for instance, (was possible in) the parks. The entrance fronts of the banks on Istiklal Avenue were so open in the past, but after the Gezi incidents, and arguing that there is always trouble on the 1st of May, they closed them off. The guys are right, the banks are right, I'm not saying they're wrong. The business places are right as well, there's always an incident, a window is broken, this or that is damaged, it is eventful all the time. And when they don't want to have these repaired, again and again, they have to install pull-down shutters. They use the place efficiently in their own way; however, they reduce the area for the homeless, there's less concrete area to sleep on at night, in the rain."

When, through these words, Ayşe Tükrükçü depicts Beyoğlu from the perspective of someone who is homeless, she brings to our attention that there is a class dimension to even the simplest act such as walking. The fact that thousands of people walk down Istiklal Avenue each day becomes a precondition for survival. This crowd might be deeming Beyoğlu unattractive for middle and upper-class visitors, while the very same crowdedness creates ideal conditions for satisfying basic needs such as eating food and having a place to sleep or have a wash, without being scared away. She also touches upon the fact that mass protests like the Gezi events or Labour Day celebrations on the 1st of May have been instrumentalised as security concerns against homeless people living in Gezi Park or around Beyoğlu as a whole.

One can imagine that walking through a unique historic neighbourhood such as Beyoğlu, once a ritual of civility for the middle and upper classes, now a mode of habitation for

the poor and ostracised such as Arabs, Kurds, homeless, LGBTQIA*s, is a different experience depending on who you are. Moreover, whether for the purpose of transiting through, passing time, going shopping, going for a night out, or taking part in *Curious Steps* walks in Beyoğlu—each mode of walking produces different experiences in terms of how safe, easy, welcoming, or desirable one feels. Given this, it is not possible to think of a restaurant like Hayata Sarıl as a place that embodies all the encounters that happen in this neighbourhood. Yet it was a deliberate choice on our part to tell Hayata Sarıl's story during the Beyoğlu route as this neighbourhood is a significant site for understanding the impact of neoliberal economic policies on the day-to-day lives of residents and workers in this area.

Ayşe Tükrükçü is a woman whose life story has attracted a lot of interest, she has given many interviews, delivered public speeches, and a biographical book is written about her. However, these accounts often start with a particular moment in her personal story, which is the years when she was engaged in sex work. When as *Curious Steps* we did an oral history interview with her, we had the chance to hear new parts of her life story by shaping the interview around the Hayata Sarıl Restaurant. The oral history methodology already has a transformative effect as it aims to form a more democratic way of writing history, and in the specific case of Ayşe Tükrükçü, the space-based way of conversation broke the mould of Ayşe Tükrükçü's self-narration centred around being a sexual violence victim. Instead, she emphasised the focus of her work, her strong criticism of the state policies towards the homeless, and her dreams to change the cycle of violence against the homeless in Turkey. Having worked in the field of homelessness for years, she highlights that Istanbul is still seen as a destination of emancipation for many people; however, when arriving in Istanbul without having found a job, they quickly find themselves homeless, and institutional mechanisms are very insufficient in finding recruitment and accommodation for the homeless. She is particularly concerned with the vicious cycle of homelessness: homeless people are not given jobs because they are not clean or do not have proper clothes and because they do not have jobs, they stay homeless. Thus, her next goals are to establish a free laundry and shower facilities and ultimately, she wants to build a comprehensive rehabilitation centre. In this way, the story of the Hayata Sarıl Restaurant is an immense source of power and optimism for Ayşe Tükrükçü for the many more steps she plans to take in the future.

New Steps...

Having been inspired by a multiplicity of resources and themes, the *Curious Steps* team continues searching for new stories, exploring new routes, and asking new questions. On 15 December 2021, the team organised a Beyoğlu walk within the scope of the *Beyoğlu Senin (Beyoğlu is Yours)* project, implemented by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. The project brings together various groups and initiatives who conduct strategic planning projects for Beyoğlu. *Curious Steps* walks contributed to drawing the attention of public policy makers and Beyoğlu strategic planners to the district through a gender lens and making visible the urban transformation and the forgotten cultural and historical values and sites. In addition to that, the *Curious Steps* team curated a new Beyoğlu route in 2022, in collaboration with the Meşher Art Gallery, Istanbul. The walk includes a selection from the stories of women artist whose works were shown in Meşher's exhibition *I-You-They: A Century of Artist Women*, curated by Deniz Artun with the intention of unravelling the names, the art, and the stories of many female artists who have left powerful marks on art history in Ottoman and republican times, and yet could not find the space in public memory which they very much deserve.

As we do during our walks, we would like to end this text with questions rather than answers: What do the cats try to tell us by appearing in the pictures of the Narmanlı Inn taken at different times? Who remembers the smell of the wistaria and locust trees, which no longer exist in its garden? Who knows the taste of the vegetable soup that was cooked out of solidarity in the Hayata Sarıl Restaurant? By contributing to the documentation of urban culture, politics, and ecology, programmes like the *Curious Steps* programme foster many inspiring questions and new discoveries on gender relations and history in the present. And by presenting an alternative to hetero-normative history-making and learning practices that mostly underestimate the wisdom of oral traditions, neglect the significance of cultural memory, and are unaware of the affective aspect of human experience, collective walks like *Curios Steps*, which are accompanied by storytelling grounded in queer feminist methodology, expand our awareness to remember, to move, to resist, and to act in a variety of forms with authenticity and uniqueness, with freedom and hope.

