

Legato in Turkey

Literacy, Media, and Global Sexualities

In summer 2003, while collecting data for this research project in Istanbul, Turkey during the globally celebrated Gay Pride Week, I joined a screening of *Stonewall* (1995), a feature film about the 1969 riots at the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, New York City. For many, the Stonewall riots marked the beginning of the gay rights movement in the United States. The screening took place at the headquarters of Lambda Istanbul, an LGBT¹ advocacy organization, on the fifth floor of a building tucked away on a bustling side street in Beyoğlu, a crowded, labyrinthine district of Istanbul. A sturdy cast-iron door, on which—before the doorbell was activated—people knocked fiercely so that those inside could hear, opened that day into a room full of white plastic chairs neatly organized in rows facing a TV and a VCR that played the film in English, with Turkish subtitles. The room was brimming with people who watched the film as they ate, among other items, delicious *dolma* (stuffed grape leaves) and *börek* (savory pastry) ordered for the occasion. Most of the attendees had learned of the screening through announcements on various community media, including the mailing lists of Legato² (*Lezbiyen-Gay Topluluğu* [Lesbian and Gay Association])³. As an Internet-based collegiate student group, Legato engaged in activism from the mid-1990s to summer 2008 to establish officially recognized LGBT student clubs, similar to those in U.S. institutions of higher education, in Turkish colleges and universities.

This moment is a fitting opening for this book's examination of grass-roots literacies, lesbian and gay activism, and the Internet in Turkey because it exemplifies the many community literacy events co-organized by Legato.

As a literacy event⁴, the screening exposed participants to multiple representations of homosexuality, community, activism, and discourses of gender and sexuality, through an audiovisual text that exercised, in this case, their sexuality-related literacy. In addition, the screening strengthened attendees' community literacy and bolstered their participation in Legato, a collegiate Internet-mediated lesbian and gay student association, and Lambda Istanbul, a noncollegiate LGBT advocacy organization.

Founded in 1993, Lambda Istanbul was one of the two major non-collegiate LGBT advocacy organizations established in Turkey in the first half of the 1990s. The other, Kaos GL ("kaos" is the Turkish spelling of "chaos"), was founded in 1994 in Ankara. Both organizations are still active and influential today, and they have been strongly engaged in creating an LGBT community and advocating for LGBT rights in Turkey. The inception of Legato in the second half of the 1990s can be traced to efforts by Kaos GL to recruit college students to initiate activism on college campuses in Ankara. These efforts included literacy events that were eventually replicated by Legato on university campuses across Turkey, such as film screenings, discussion groups, and initiatives and demonstrations criticizing negative representations of homosexuality and demanding recognition for lesbian and gay student groups. Consequently, in this book, I focus on Legato from the perspective of literacy and explore the centrality of the rhetorics of sexuality to its collegiate, Internet-mediated lesbian and gay activism in Turkey.

The following overview covers the period from Legato's inception in 1996 to Kaos GL's September/October 2010 publication about collegiate lesbian and gay activism and illustrates Legato's origins and history as an Internet-mediated collegiate group. Legato's development was inextricably intertwined with not only the local LGBT advocacy organizations and their legacy of community organizing, but also the Internet, which was essential to its existence for two main reasons: (1) The Internet enabled Legato to become a national organization that spread across Turkey from its birthplace in Ankara; and (2) due to a lack of official recognition and support from universities, Legato was a largely Internet-based student group, with a Web site and a number of online groups. Therefore, the overview focuses on important developments in collegiate activism and the use of the Internet.

Legato Overview⁵

By the mid-1990s, the Turkish LGBT population had formed subcultural institutions in Turkey's two largest cities, Istanbul and Ankara, and Kaos

GL in Ankara was engaged in significant local social and political activities involving lesbian and gay university students. The first Legato group was founded in 1996 when several students who met at the Kaos GL meetings decided to organize LGBT-related social activities at Middle East Technical University (METU), one of Turkey's most competitive and prominent universities. First called "Kaos METU" because of the group's affiliation with the advocacy organization, the group later changed its name to *Lezbiyen-Gay Topluluğu* (Legato) METU.⁶ Although Legato METU maintained its connections with Kaos GL, the name change was intended to emphasize that it was a distinct, student-focused organization. This particular Legato group and the other Legato groups that followed it were unofficial student organizations that were not sanctioned by their respective schools.

Inspired by Legato METU, in April 1997, Halega (*Hacettepe Lezbiyen-Gay Topluluğu* [Hacettepe Lesbian and Gay Association]) was established at Hacettepe University, another prominent university in Ankara. However, according to Legato's online statement,

Since digital technology was not as widespread in Turkey at the time, the biggest problem was to reach people. In the following years, the meetings and activities of these groups gradually tapered off, since almost all founders were seniors and graduated soon after they started their activism. What needed to be done was to contact and connect with new students and gradually transfer organizational responsibilities to them in order to maintain continuity. (Legato Members)

These initial obstacles associated with connectivity and continuity were detrimental to the emergent student movement; as a result, the on-campus activities of Legato METU and Halega at Hacettepe eventually ceased.

Following these initial attempts to establish and maintain informal lesbian and gay student groups on their college campuses, several graduates of Hacettepe and METU established another local—but this time, exclusively gay male—Internet-based group called "Gay Ankara." Gay Ankara resurrected Legato as the Legato Project in 1999 and spearheaded the introduction of Legato to cyberspace through the use of *Yahoo! Groups*. At the inception of this effort, on June 28, 2000, twenty-three online groups were created for LGBT students at twenty-three universities. Some of these groups were set up before any students at the targeted schools had expressed interest, with the expectation that someone might want such a group at a particular university.

Throughout the remainder of the year, Legato spread from Ankara to other cities across the nation, including Istanbul, the cultural and financial capital of Turkey. In fall 2000, Legato Boğaziçi was established in Istanbul. Following the lead of student groups in Ankara, Legato Boğaziçi became a highly active group and set an early example for groups at other schools in Istanbul by holding regular meetings, organizing film screenings and other events, and creating its own Web site. As increasing numbers of students heard about Legato through word of mouth and e-mail, they joined and interacted through the mailing lists, the most popular function of online groups on *Yahoo!*. Eventually, students in the same schools started meeting in person; in turn, students in the same cities started meeting informally on university campuses, at coffee houses, and, eventually, at noncollegiate local LGBT advocacy organizations, such as Lambda Istanbul and Kaos GL.

While offline interactions proliferated, two important events in the history of the burgeoning Turkish collegiate lesbian and gay movement occurred: the first was an interview with *Milliyet*, a national newspaper, in December 2000, which, according to student activists of the time, “raised consciousness in many homosexual students at different schools and led to more organizing offline and online in the form of more mailing lists and individual group websites” (Legato Members). The second important development took place on December 20, 2000, when the established Legato mailing lists were combined into an additional mailing list called “Legato *Ortak Liste*” (“common list” or “shared list” in Turkish, referring to the intercollegiate mailing list). At the time, there were twenty-seven Legatos at twenty-seven universities across the country, and this mailing list connected all of the individuals in those groups under one name as one group. This helped connect the rapidly increasing number of Legato members and affiliated universities. There were 355 Legato members at sixty-one schools by October 2002.⁷

In the spring of 2002, the Legato Web site (<http://www.e-legato.org>) was launched. The site publicized the group’s efforts, providing both members and nonmembers with information regarding Legato’s goals and history as a collegiate lesbian and gay student group as well as more general LGBT issues, by means of FAQs (frequently asked questions) and other specialized sections. Legato’s online expansion through mailing lists and its Web site further fueled its offline growth. By March 2003, there were 418 members at sixty-seven schools, and by the end of summer 2003, there were 857 members at eighty-three colleges and universities. This growth also diversified Legato’s media production; for example, in summer 2003, Legato released a print “fanzine” (fan magazine) in Istanbul and distributed

it to its members. In chapter 2, I analyze the fanzine from the perspectives of visual rhetorics and literacy, focusing on representations of local queer identities and homosexuality in Turkey.

After summer 2003, when I conducted interviews for this project, Legato continued to maintain a hybrid presence, recruiting members online and organizing social activities on college and university campuses. In recent years, two particularly important developments have taken place. First, Internet-mediated student organizing bore its intended fruit in 2007, and Legato's original goal of establishing an offline collegiate lesbian and gay student organization finally became a reality: Bilgi University, a private college in Istanbul, allowed the founding of *Gökkuşluğu LGBT Kulübü* (Rainbow LGBT Club) on its campus (Safoglu and Zihli). LGBT student groups and community advocacy organizations across the nation perceived this as a major victory, but it elicited mixed responses from administrators at other universities. When Bilgi announced that it had permitted the formation of an LGBT student organization in order to ensure human rights–related freedoms on campus, some university administrators responded that they would consider such a request from their student body, while others claimed that such a request would not fit their criteria for acceptable student organizing or that their students were interested in science or sports facilities or libraries rather than such organizations (Biliroglu 6). These responses revealed the extent of, and the future obstacles to, the remaining identity work as it related to university life for this segment of Turkish society.

Second, and most recently, the September/October 2010 issue of *Kaos GL*, the eponymous bimonthly magazine of Kaos GL (first published in 1994, *Kaos GL* is one of the first and the longest running of the LGBT publications in Turkey), examined the status and future of collegiate lesbian and gay activism. In its call for submissions for this special issue, *Kaos GL* announced that Legato is no more. Unfortunately, similar to *Sappho'nun Kızları* (Daughters of Sappho) and Gay Ankara, two activist groups that had preceded it, Legato's activities have ceased. A search of the *Google Groups* Web site, to which the Legato mailing lists were moved in 2006, reveals that individual school mailing lists still exist but have been largely inactive since 2008. As for the Legato Web site, which was most recently located at <http://www.unilegato.org>, it is no longer accessible. I discuss the recurring organizational challenges of *Sappho'nun Kızları*, Gay Ankara, and Legato and the importance of community literacy, including uses of digital media, for sustainable lesbian and gay activism in chapter 4. *Kaos GL*'s decision to take stock of the collegiate movement drew attention to the continuing importance of Legato's legacy of Internet-mediated collegiate lesbian and

gay activism. I contributed an article about Legato to this issue of *Kaos GL*, and in chapter 5, I refer to the magazine as I discuss the direction of collegiate activism since Legato's discontinuation.

The preceding overview of Legato frames my discussion of literacy, sexuality, and the accompanying media, including the Internet, in the rest of this book. As I analyze individual Legato members' exposure to and engagements with Euro-American lesbian and gay identities through traditional and new media from the perspective of rhetoric and literacy, I illustrate the continuing significance and specific outcomes of Legato's more than a decade of collegiate activism as part of the ongoing global dissemination of lesbian and gay identities and transnational grassroots LGBT activism in Turkey. Studying Legato in this manner will benefit scholarship on LGBT and queer rhetorics by expanding its purview to a Middle Eastern, subcultural, and activist young-adult population; in addition, Legato's story, told from the perspective of literacy, offers an alternative view to the current scholarly discussions of global and local sexual identities.

In the rest of this chapter, I contextualize Legato and its activism in the ongoing scholarly discussions regarding the globalization of lesbian and gay identities. In addition, I discuss transnational rhetorics of sexuality and literacy as the two analytical frames that inform my discussion and presentation of information about Legato in this book. I finish the chapter with a statement of my research methods and a description of the remaining chapters, which build on these discussions as they examine different facets of Legato and literacy in Turkey.

The Globalization of Lesbian and Gay Identities, Transnational Rhetorics, and Literacy

The film screening and the avowed mission of establishing lesbian and gay student clubs demonstrate that Legato and the noncollegiate LGBT advocacy organizations in Turkey follow a Euro-American model of identity politics that was developed to eliminate negative representations of homosexuality that have existed in religious, medical, and legal discourses in Europe and the United States since the nineteenth century. Thus, multiple rhetorics (i.e., multiple discourses as systems of thought and representation using language) regarding homosexuality have existed since the invention of the homosexual as a personage in the second half of the nineteenth century (Foucault). The globalization of lesbian and gay identities and their ongoing adoption in diverse regions of the world gave rise to further rhetorics

regarding these identities. In this section, I focus on scholarly responses to this development and discuss my study of Legato from the perspective of rhetorics and literacy.

The centerpiece of the Euro-American model of sexual identity politics is a seemingly universal identity category that globalization has spread across the world in recent years. As Altman confirms, “The very idea of a universal homosexual category—reflected in the language of an international gay and lesbian movement—is thus a product of globalization” (416). Scholars within and outside lesbian and gay studies have criticized this complex phenomenon, first and foremost, for the assumed universalism and essentialism perceived to be central to these identities⁸ and their misleading application to same-sex desire and practices in other cultures. For example, as early as the beginning of the 1990s, Alonso and Koreck stated, “The familiar Anglo categories of sexual orientation—homosexual, bisexual, heterosexual—are culturally specific rather than universal or natural and cannot be applied to northern Mexican and Chicano populations without misrecognition” (110), while, in a similar manner, Whitehead warned, “Cross-cultural investigations of homosexuality have too often been used to support various interpretations of the Western homosexual; thus, studies which posit an underlying identity between the Native American berdache—gender-crosser—and the modern ‘homosexual’ only serve to obscure the berdache’s meaning within Native American culture” (498). In these early debates, scholarship on the rhetorics of sexuality involved investigations into the contested meanings and interpretations of identity categories and the assumptions of universalism and essentialism with regard to culturally and geographically diverse sexual desires and practices.

Later critiques of the globalization of lesbian and gay identities built on this critique of assumed universalism and essentialism to draw attention to the imperialistic and neocolonialist implications of the deployment of these identities in post-colonial contexts. For example, according to Ferguson, “the very *concept* of an international lesbian culture is politically problematic, for the most likely model under which it could come into existence is a cultural imperialist one, of Western lesbian liberation movements importing our notions of the proper values for a lesbian culture of resistance onto other societies” (64), while Bustos-Aguilar criticized gay ethnographers for their imperialistic attitudes toward same-sex populations in Latin America. Most recently, Massad described the deployment of lesbian and gay identities in the Middle East as yet another instance of Orientalism and neocolonialism and criticized “the Gay International,” his term for the LGBT human rights organizations operating in the region, for “inciting” Western-style

(i.e., lesbian and gay) discourses of sexuality in the Arab world.⁹ With the addition of the post-colonial perspective, scholars advanced a culturally imperialistic view of lesbian and gay identity categories, further contesting their assumed universalism and essentialism.

These critiques of lesbian and gay identities in diverse global contexts are warranted to the extent that these identities are imposed from the outside in support of certain personal and political agendas the researchers quoted so far emphasize as part of their critiques; nevertheless, the wholesale approach of such critiques fails to fully explain the self-sponsored adoption of these identities by international populations—such as Legato—that emerged in national contexts—such as Turkey—that largely avoided being colonized by European imperialism.¹⁰ In addition, as Habib notes in the case of lesbian identity in the Middle East, “In the application of the term ‘lesbian’ to women who were eroticized by other women to the point of preference of this over heteroeroticism, the term is not intended to efface individual or intercultural or transhistorical differences, but is rather intended to denote the lowest common denominator of homoerotic experience” (*Female Homosexuality* 41). Although Habib thus affirms the need to investigate how the categories of “lesbian” and “gay” are inflected in diverse international contexts, she makes a significantly different point, rejecting the universalism and essentialism associated with these identity categories: the categories of “lesbian” or “gay” no longer are a Euro-American monopoly, and it is the responsibility of the researchers who study global homosexual formations to contextualize these rhetorically capacious categories beyond what she calls “the lowest common denominator of homoerotic experience.”

Therefore, in this book, I argue that the perspective of transnational rhetorics of sexuality, with special attention to multiple global and local representations of homosexuality, is particularly suited to investigating the complex discursive dynamics of the deployment of lesbian and gay identities by individuals and groups in global contexts. Rather than assuming that the so-called imposition of LGBT identities from the outside would inevitably and automatically lead to actual, uniform LGBTs in all contexts, I utilize the perspectives of the transnational rhetorics of sexuality and literacy to investigate how Euro-American representations are circulated, consumed, reacted to, and utilized for the production of local lesbian and gay representations and subjectivities as part of the Legato population’s LGBT community activism in Turkey.

Scholars who advocate a transnational approach to the study of sexuality also point out the need to inquire into the multiple meanings of lesbian and gay identities in global contexts. For example, in his study about

Filipino gay men in the Philippines and New York City, Manalansan argues, “The term ‘gay,’ as a category of analysis, is multiply inflected across various cultural and political locations—even within a single group. In particular, Filipino gay men . . . deploy multiple formulations (hegemonic as well as counterhegemonic) as they declare affinities and differences in response to global gay and lesbian agendas” (426). In a similar vein, Puri also emphasizes “the differences between what ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ mean from one context to another,” stating, “I use these terms within quotes to suggest that even though these are the political terms avowed by various groups, they may not necessarily connote the same meanings” (436). What distinguishes the transnational approach, however, is that it resists the homogenizing influence of globalization by focusing on national specificities as well as continuities. According to Puri, the transnational approach is “a method that is critical of nations as a unit of analysis and is, instead, attentive to the links, similarities, and power differences that exist across cultural settings within and across nation-states” (436), and the study of the categories of “lesbian” and “gay” through a transnational perspective will reveal the continuing influence of nations and nationalism:

Tracing, rather than assuming, the meaning of categories such as lesbian and gay in their cultural contexts would be especially useful to understand how these sexual identities are shaped by national context and, at the same time, invoke political models of resistance that are not limited to the incentive nature of national culture. In effect, exploring the conditions and meanings of sexual identities would be about not only understanding the possibilities of these politicized identities but also their attendant limitations . . . what might be useful is to re-examine the meanings of the categories of sexual identity, their meanings and ramifications, and their possibilities and limitations across disparate settings. (Puri 439)

Similar to Puri, Richardson and Seidman also acknowledge possibilities, as well as limitations, and draw attention to the collective use of the categories of “lesbian” and “gay” for political purposes as unifying, if not unified, concepts. They emphasize the need to “deploy political identities as necessary signifiers of political subjects, a location from which to articulate social and material concerns” in multiple transnational contexts (11).

How, then, should transnational studies of sexual identities be structured? An exemplary scholarly work that takes a transnational approach is

the aforementioned study by Manalansan about Filipino gay men and their multiple inflections of global gay and lesbian agendas. Problematizing the cultural production, circulation, and reception of the Stonewall riots and the U.S. gay and lesbian movement in the transnational contexts of the Philippines and New York City, Manalansan concludes,

The articulations of [local queer identities] and gay in the different spaces represent various engagements in various locations. The local/national and international/transnational are implicated in one another in many ways, on the levels of both everyday life and political mobilization. In the shadows of Stonewall lurk multiple engagements and negotiations. Conversations about globalizing tendencies of gay identity, politics, and culture are disrupted by local dialogues of people who speak from the margins. These disruptions need to be heard. (438)

Manalansan documents these marginalized voices and their disruptions by using participant interviews as well as textual analyses of writing by Filipino gay men, comparing and contrasting different articulations of Western lesbian and gay identities and politics in the context of the Philippines.

Although Manalansan attends mostly to textual modes of production, circulation, and reception, the advent and global spread of computer technologies and the Internet certainly changed the ways in which lesbian and gay representations and the gay rights movement are culturally produced, circulated, and received in international contexts (Murray; Altman; Wakeford); as a result, it is necessary to examine the role of digital media and the Internet in the dissemination of lesbian and gay identities. Given its increasing international reach, the Internet has been criticized as the very embodiment of, and therefore a figure for, globalized, hierarchical relations of power between different countries and cultures (Jameson; Selfe and Selfe; Schiller). Although it is important to acknowledge this criticism, the overwhelming message of unopposable Westernization and globalization obscures the role of the Internet in local LGBT populations' agency while forming social movements, such as the LGBT rights movement in Turkey. Therefore, Binnie, for example, argues that researchers should pay attention to local LGBT populations' agency in engaging with the Euro-American identity categories through media and cyberspace, and Grewal and Kaplan call attention to "consumption and engagements with media and new technologies as empowering practices that create new subjects that

trouble the model of rights and citizenship” (671) as appropriate topics for a transnational mode of study.

In her seminal bibliographic essay about “cyberqueer” research, Wakeford surveys existing scholarship on how computer technologies have changed the way lesbians and gay men find each other and associate in such diverse international contexts as Finland, the United States, Taiwan, and South Korea. Her main critique of cyberqueer research concerns the following:

As a whole researchers have not paid attention to the ways in which Internet interactions are changing the politics of social movements, or even the ways in which social movements themselves are constituted. Even though there has been an interest in how intra-group discussions frame the constituency and norms of the participants, there has been little work looking at the implications of on-line activist resources for local actions. (139)

By emphasizing the intersections between online technologies and political movements, Wakeford, together with Binnie and Grewal and Kaplan, adds another important variable that should be researched as part of the transnational approach to the study of lesbian and gay identities in global contexts. According to the discussion so far, the study of the transnational rhetorics of sexuality can consist of, among others, attention to multiple meanings of identity categories; their possibilities and limitations for political resistance; national specificities (similarities as well as differences); and textual, as well as digital, modes and new media.

In my study of Legato from the perspective of transnational rhetorics of sexuality, I apply the related perspective of literacy to study the role of these multiple variables in Legato’s complex deployment of Euro-American lesbian and gay identities in Turkey. Literacy, defined as the control or mastery of a discourse, which is likened to an “identity kit” (Gee 526), is directly connected to rhetoric, the study of discourses as systems of thought and representation through language. Despite the fact that literacy, including the process of acquiring it, is central to rhetoric and therefore should also be central to the perspective of transnational rhetorics of sexuality, in existing scholarship about transnational contexts, the perspective of literacy is largely the missing link between the discourses of sexuality and the practices of those identifying as LGBT. Thus, my focus on literacy, together with the media-infused discourses of sexuality and gender, in this study about Legato provides the missing conceptual tools to investigate the indi-

vidual and collective rhetorical agency and power (or lack thereof) that are necessary to generate, disseminate, and, at times, oppose representations of homosexuality in culturally and geographically diverse contexts.

So far, only a few monographs (Malinowitz; Gonçalves; Alexander) have attempted to bridge literacy and the studies of sexuality in the context of the United States, by arguing that literacy is central to sexuality (more on this in the next section). These monographs largely frame the discussion of sexuality in rhetoric and composition in the context of the U.S. writing classroom and aim to illuminate the processes of composing from the perspective of sexuality. However, the limitations of this particular context, including the omission of students' ongoing engagements with new media outside the classroom and the absence of any comparisons with another international movement from the perspective of literacy, diminish the scope of the literacy-based study of the rhetorics of sexuality and its potential contributions to the ongoing transnational discussions of lesbian and gay identities I refer to in this chapter.

In debating how to theorize a "transnational queer rhetoric," Champagne argues, "What is required is the development, inside and outside the university, of a particular kind of transnational literacy" (160), yet the specific contours of this literacy still remain elusive. As an instance of the ongoing globalization of lesbian and gay identities and politics, Legato presents an opportunity to move the perspective and study of the rhetorics of sexuality and literacy—with specific attention to multiple literacies and discourses of sexuality as inflected by traditional and new media and the social institutions of religion, family, and the state in the Turkish context—toward delineating its transnational inflections. As I investigate Legato from the perspective of transnational rhetorics and literacy, I analyze the rhetorical appeal and utility of Euro-American lesbian and gay identities for the local activist population in Turkey, highlighting the rhetorical functions of these identities in resisting and revising local dominant discourses of sexuality in global contexts. In this manner, I resituate lesbian and gay rhetoric using a transnational literacy-based perspective and reconceive it as a transnational practice¹¹ of grassroots community literacy.

In the next section, I focus on literacy as an analytic frame that will illuminate the rhetorics of sexuality, including rhetorical agency and rhetorical power, in the case of the LGBT population in Turkey; specifically, I present a set of preliminary connections between the study of literacy, Legato, and its collegiate activism, to be analyzed in detail in the rest of this book from a transnational perspective.

Literacies and Sponsors: Sexuality, Community, and Technology

In their 2001 survey of the study of literacy, Cushman et al. draw attention to the “social turn” in literacy studies: “a research orientation to look beyond the individual to the social, cultural, and political contexts in which people lead their lives. A good deal of scholarship on literacy published in the past few decades illustrates this social turn” (3). This research orientation galvanized the scholarly investigation of literacy in multiple directions. Literacy, earlier defined simplistically and devoid of context as the ability to read and write, was redefined as the mastery of or fluent control over discourses as specialized uses of language in specific social contexts, and as such, it was shown to be ideological. According to this view, literacy is inherent in societal power relations and is an instrument of social control that is exercised through a variety of discourses; thus, it is potentially dis/empowering (Street; Gee). In addition, literacy was studied in multiple social contexts, such as schools, workplaces, communities, subcultures, and technological environments. Attention to literacy in these contexts revealed that there were many distinct types of literacy (e.g., print; visual; technological/electronic/digital; community; and, most recently, sexual), hence “literacies.” My study of Legato using the perspective of literacy joins and extends this ongoing scholarly work on literacies, as I theorize Legato using the concepts of “sexual literacy” (Alexander), “community literacy” (Peck, Flower, and Higgins), and “sponsors of literacy” (Brandt, “Sponsors of Literacy”).

In her study of five LGBT students’ experiences at the Speaker’s Bureau of the Stonewall Center (an LGBT resource center at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst) as they were trained to speak to student groups on campus, Gonçalves refers to the Bureau as a “sponsoring institution.” Applying Anne Herrington and Marcia Curtis’s use of this concept, Gonçalves defines a sponsoring institution as “a place or discourse that fosters rhetorical and personal growth, which . . . helps them to ‘further important personal goals . . . [and is] a way of joining with others and linking private with public interests’” (15). Viewed from this perspective, Legato was also a sponsoring institution, albeit a different, grassroots kind, that supported its members and enabled them to link their sexuality, a seemingly private interest, with an identity and a community seeking recognition and rights, a public interest. Specifically, Legato conducted its sponsorship by disseminating sexual, community, and digital rhetorics and literacies.

I borrow the term “sexual literacy” from Alexander, who theorizes sexuality in connection with literacy and demonstrates the centrality of literacy to the rhetorics of sexuality, whether queer or not, in this manner:

Sexuality—or the varied ways in which narratives of intimacy, pleasure, the body, gender, and identity become constructed and disseminated personally, socially, and politically—is itself a complex literacy event, evoking narrations of self, connections with others through complex discourses, and political formations mediated through ideological investments *sexual literacy* [is] the knowledge complex that recognizes the significance of sexuality to self- and communal definition and that critically engages the stories we tell about sex and sexuality to probe them for controlling values and for ways to resist, when necessary, constraining norms. . . . sexuality [is constructed] in our culture as a dominant—and often dominating—set of tropes and narrations that organize desire, intimacy, and identity. Development of a sexual *literacy*, then, is development of fluency with the very *narrations* through which so much cultural and political work is accomplished, and through which our identities themselves are often achieved. (1, 5, 19)

Alexander’s emphasis on storytelling—that is, narrations of the self—and a set of tropes as central components of sexual literacy are especially relevant here because “coming out” narratives and the tropes of “the closet” and “coming out” have been cornerstones of the post-1970s Euro-American lesbian and gay male existence and the accompanying rhetorical practices of lesbians and gay men.¹² My study of Legato in this book shows that as the collegiate extension of the Turkish LGBT movement, Legato translated and disseminated Euro-American social-constructionist discourses (rhetorics) of sexuality and lesbian and gay identities through multiple discursive activities in online and offline venues and that Legato’s education of its members in sexual literacy, as part of this process, promoted this particular rhetorical mode of narrating the self who emerges as gay or lesbian using the tropes of “the closet” and “coming out.”

Legato’s dissemination of sexual literacy, however, depended on another type of literacy: community literacy. Drawing on their study of community literacy at the Community Literacy Center (“a community/university collaborative between the Community House and The National Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy at Carnegie Mellon”; Peck, Flower, and

Higgins 573), Peck, Flower, and Higgins define community literacy as “a search for an alternative discourse” (575) and “action and reflection—as literate acts that could yoke community action with . . . strategic thinking and problem solving” (573). In their view, community literacy has four key aims: (1) supporting social change; (2) maintaining genuine conversations among the involved parties to solve problems; (3) bringing a strategic approach to these conversations to develop new strategies and solutions; and (4) conducting an inquiry that acknowledges past difficulties and examines conflicts, assumptions, and practices different community partners bring to collective practices (575–76). Finally, Peck, Flower, and Higgins acknowledge that the forms of community literacy are “experimental, provisional, problematic, and, in our experience, generative” (587). This observation regarding community literacy, together with its definition and key aims, applies to Legato and the manner in which it promoted community literacy to form, as well as expand, lesbian and gay student communities in its particular social context.

The first two Legato groups in Ankara had difficulty maintaining continuity on campus due to the graduation of their members. To address this issue, Legato members created online groups on *Yahoo!* for individual schools first, and later, they created an intercollegiate online group to connect Legato members at different colleges across the nation and to better promote Legato’s cause nationwide. As membership increased in these online groups, there was considerable debate regarding how to channel online membership into offline activism, leading to other forms of experimentation, including the creation of specific online groups for those interested in activism and the coupling of such group membership with mandatory, regular face-to-face meetings. In this manner, the Internet and the accompanying practices of creating online and offline communities were central to the community literacy that would also prove to be “experimental, provisional, problematic, and generative” in the case of Legato.

Compared to the Speaker’s Bureau in Gonçalves’s study; the first-year composition programs referred to by Alexander; and the Community Literacy Center analyzed by Peck, Flower, and Higgins, however, Legato presented an entirely different sponsoring institution: It was a grassroots student effort and was dependent on technology for its existence. As such, its access to financial, political, and technological resources was limited compared to other sponsoring institutions and discourses that competed for its members’ attention. After the graduates of the first two Legato groups in Ankara created online groups to keep in touch, Legato’s expansion to other colleges in Turkey took place independently of Kaos GL, and the emerging

new groups in different locales were run by individual students who found out about Legato online. In this manner, individuals self-sponsored and sponsored others in their immediate environments, helping each other gain sexual, community, and related digital literacies. The grassroots success of Legato was made possible by the Internet and continued to depend on new media. This dependence on technology on both the individual and collective levels draws attention to the importance of community and of computer literacy. Although computer literacy has been variously defined and studied as digital, electronic, and technological literacies in multiple social and international contexts (Hawisher et al.; Selfe et al.; Hawisher and Selfe), this study of Legato in Turkey offers an alternative view by focusing on digital literacy, together with sexual and community literacies, as part of a grassroots, activist collegiate social movement.

To further illustrate the nature and the accompanying challenges of Legato as a sponsoring institution, it is necessary to consider the complexity of the concept. Brandt offers an intricate definition of literacy sponsors:

Any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way . . . it is useful to think about who and what underwrites occasions of literacy learning. . . . Sponsors are a tangible reminder that literacy learning throughout history has always required permission, sanction, assistance, coercion, or, at a minimum, contact with existing trade routes. (“Sponsors of Literacy” 166–67)

In this definition, Brandt reminds us that there are multiple sponsors competing for learners’ attention. Consequently, literacy learning is ideological, laden with sponsors’ conflicting agendas, and potentially both empowering and controlling. However, to render the agency of literacy learners in the face of possibly overpowering sponsors, Brandt also introduces the concept of “literacy appropriation”:

The uses and networks of literacy crisscross many domains, exposing people to multiple, often amalgamated sources of sponsoring powers, secular, religious, bureaucratic, commercial, technological. In other words, what is so destabilized about contemporary literacy today also makes it so available and potentially innovative, ripe for picking, one might say, for people suitably positioned. (“Sponsors of Literacy” 179)

Ironically, then, it is this multiplicity of sponsors, domains, and discourses that creates the favorable conditions for appropriating, reappropriating, and perhaps even misappropriating literacy for specific purposes in any given social context.

The perspective of multiple sponsors with conflicting discourses and agendas and literacy appropriation shed further light on Legato's role as one of many sponsors of literacy in the Turkish context at the time, as well as its inception in connection with the deliberate re/misappropriation of sexual, community, and digital literacies. For example, for Legato members, lesbian and gay sexual literacy was a recent addition to their preexisting repertoire of (hetero) sexual literacy, with its familiar script of heterosexual courtship, marriage, and reproduction as regulated by the discourses and institutions of, among others, nuclear family, religion, and the state. Lesbian and gay sexual literacy provided Legato members with the language and the conceptual tools to critique heterosexism, the social institutions that uphold it, and the underlying biological views of gender and sexuality. As a result, Legato's, and other LGBT advocacy organizations', dissemination of lesbian and gay sexual literacy demonstrates one means of reappropriating sexual literacy to introduce and establish a social constructionist view of gender and sexuality in Turkey. The manner in which Legato spread from Ankara to other parts of Turkey to become an Internet-mediated, independent collegiate association presents another important instance of literacy reappropriation, in this case that of community and digital literacies.

Legato first began as a student organization that would work in conjunction with Kaos GL, but its launch into cyberspace and resultant emergence in other parts of the country inevitably rendered it an independent student-run organization. By utilizing digital media and the Internet, Legato groups and group members reappropriated Kaos GL's community literacy to become independent themselves, at times contradicting the initial goal of activist visibility on and off campus. Similarly, as individuals sought Legato and other LGBT groups and resources online by using, for example, search engines, they reappropriated their digital literacies to cultivate a new, critical (i.e., lesbian and gay) sexual literacy. In addition, as Legato members self-sponsored and sponsored other individuals around them, they reappropriated the community literacy for their local purposes, and thus, it became increasingly difficult to unify Legato's discourse as an organization. This led to multiple, sometimes contradictory, voices regarding the mission and goals of Legato groups.

Finally, from a different perspective, these reappropriations of literacy constitute misappropriations. From the perspective of the Turkish state, the

reappropriation of digital literacy to find and form lesbian and gay student communities was clearly an instance of misappropriation. For example, digital literacy has increasingly been highlighted in the Turkish Ministry of Education's annual reports and mission statements as part of the overarching goal of national education, to create an educated and computer-literate workforce capable of competing globally (in nation-states, such a workforce, not to mention citizenship overall, has always been cast as heterosexual by default; hence, some university presidents' insistence that their students are interested in science, not lesbian and gay student clubs). Even from the perspective of some seasoned activists, the Internet (and digital literacy) came to symbolize a damaging instance of misappropriation of sexual and community literacies because it provided newcomers with access to friendship networks, thus enabling them to express their sexual orientation without engaging in social activism and offline visibility. In this manner, literacy emerged in the case of Legato and other LGBT advocacy groups in Turkey as a contentious, unpredictable phenomenon that was crucial to community building and social activism.

My discussion thus far illustrates that Legato's beginnings, history, and specific makeup as an Internet-mediated activist group provide an opportunity to study and examine the specific manifestations and intersecting applications of sexual, community, and digital literacies as part of transnational rhetorics of sexuality. Although these literacies certainly empowered the Legato population, a close examination of Legato members' literacy practices in the rest of this book reveals the push and pull of various sponsors and their overlapping, as well as conflicting, agendas impinging on individuals' lives. Among these sponsors of literacy in the lives of Legato members were the noncollegiate LGBT advocacy organizations Kaos GL and Lambda Istanbul and the state, arguably the most powerful of all sponsors. Although homosexuality technically has never been illegal in Turkey, and Turkey is a predominantly Muslim country with a secular state governing the country and its people through secular, rather than Islamic, laws, some troubling developments have emerged as LGBT advocacy organizations have become increasingly visible in the last two decades. For example, the Ankara Governor's Office sued Kaos GL in 2005 and the Istanbul Governor's Office sued Lambda Istanbul in 2008, arguing that these organizations' objectives are "against the law and morality" (Human Rights Watch; in the case of Lambda Istanbul, the court ruled that the association be closed on "procedural grounds," and the ruling was reversed upon appeal, while in the case of Kaos GL, the prosecutor dropped the charges). In addition, in 2009, the Fourth Religion Council organized by the Department of Religious Affairs

announced that homosexuality is “a sexual behavioral deviation” and that “it can never be accepted” in Islam (Kaos GL, “Diyanet”), while Selma Aliye Kavaf, then State Minister of Women and Family, announced, “I believe homosexuality is a biological deviation, a disease. In my opinion, it is something that needs to be treated” (Bildirici). I discuss these and other attitudes toward homosexuality in more detail in chapters 2 and 3, but their brief mention here—coupled with the continuing policing of sexuality in relation to same-sex marriage and immigration in the United States and elsewhere—should suffice to emphasize that the policies of the nation-state and multiple (e.g., medical, religious, and legal) discourses impinge on everyday rhetorical practices regarding sexuality; therefore, a transnational literacy-based perspective is imperative in order to fully examine and understand the dynamics of rhetorics of sexuality in global and cross-cultural contexts.

My discussion of literacy has thus far addressed it mainly as an analytic frame that helps shed light on Legato’s transnational rhetoric of sexuality, but I have also provided glimpses into literacy as a subject, such as a force in society (e.g., heterosexual literacy with attendant gender norms, sexism, and homophobia) and an individual resource or practice (e.g., the access to and the ability to use computers for social activism). These multiple senses of the term stem from and help foreground literacy’s pervasive and permeating presence in human lives, including those of Legato members, and I continue using them throughout this book as I analyze Legato, demonstrating how they relate to different kinds of rhetoric in specific chapters. The following chapter descriptions preview different uses of the term “literacy” from the particular standpoint of each chapter.

Methodology and Chapter Descriptions

Grassroots Literacies: Lesbian and Gay Activism and the Internet in Turkey conducts its inquiry on three levels: It examines cultural rhetorics (i.e., discourses) about homosexuality, their representational constraints, and visual rhetorical interventions by local lesbian and gay populations; it interrogates why and how Euro-American lesbian and gay identities and the tropes of “coming out” and “the closet” are deployed in lesbian and gay activism in Turkey; and it investigates the centrality of literacy and media to these rhetorical processes, proposing a new, literacy-based approach to studying transnational rhetorics of sexuality in cross-cultural and international LGBT communities. In support of these multiple objectives, I use a multifaceted research methodology that includes qualitative (interview-based) research.

This multifaceted approach enables attention to the multiple contexts and ethnic, national, sexual, cultural, gender, and class-related dynamics of the literacy experiences of the Legato members who participated in this study.

Scholars such as Brandt (“Accumulating Literacy” and “Sponsors of Literacy”), Hawisher et al., Selfe et al., and Pandey (“Literate Lives” and “Researching (with)”) advocate the use of qualitative methods, such as interviews and ethnographies, to explore formations of literacy. As part of my study, I also interviewed individual Legato members about their literacy practices. In addition, Kirsch (“Methodological Pluralism” and “Ethical Dilemmas”), Kirsch and Mortensen, and Cushman emphasize that qualitative studies of literacy should be *for* research participants, not just *about* them. I sent the transcripts of the interviews to those research participants who requested them. I also published an article on Legato, “*Üniversiteli Eşcinsel Oluşum: Kimlik Farklılıkları, Sosyalleşme ve Politikleşme*” (“The Intercollegiate Homosexual Movement: Identities, Socialization, and Politicization”) in the September/October 2010 issue of *Kaos GL*. In this article, I shared some of the results of my research on Legato and collegiate activism with the wider Turkish LGBT community.

Eleven people, seven males and four females aged 20 to 27, participated in this study. At the time of the interviews in 2003, they were living in Istanbul and were current or former students who were highly involved with Legato as activist leaders during their undergraduate studies. I found the participants for this study through e-mail correspondence and face-to-face contacts.¹³ During the interviews, which ranged in length from ninety minutes to three hours, I asked the participants a number of questions (see Appendix A) about topics ranging from their first exposure to local and global representations of homosexuality through media to their ensuing participation in grassroots community literacy events, such as lesbian and gay reading groups, film screenings, organizational meetings, conferences, and demonstrations. In chapters 2, 3, and 4, I present participant responses in the third person and include portions of text translated directly from the transcribed interviews, which I conducted entirely in Turkish. The participants’ first-person statements are placed in double quotation marks. All names used are pseudonyms. The following chapter descriptions provide further information about my use of qualitative data. In chapter 3, I return to the discussion of methodology from the particular perspective of that chapter.

Chapter 2, “From Queer Empire to Heterosexual Republic: Modernity, Homosexuality, and Media,” focuses on the rhetorics of gender and sexuality in Turkey and how they were disseminated, reinforced, and contested in