

northwest

A Pride with No Feathers

Native Portlander recounts experiences at Turkey's anti-homophobia march

by Mija Sanders

As the Portland waterfront becomes a tribute to taking pride in being part of a sexual or gender minority, could we be taking our freedoms for granted? While thousands gather to watch a parade and lend visibility to the fight for marriage and equal treatment under the law, queers in other corners of the world, like Turkey, fight simply to exist.

Chaos Gay Lesbian—a queer nongovernmental organization in Ankara, Turkey—held its annual international anti-homophobia conference May 16. Much like Portland Pride, the conference is a place to celebrate sexualities, march in the street, have political discussions about gay rights and party. But imagine a Pride parade with no music, no leather, no chaps, nor feathers nor wands nor whips, no Dykes on Bikes, no mayors, no children, no commercial advertising. In this city with a population of 4 million, 100 people march with the passion of a thousand.

Turkey's queer community is facing "systematic violence," according to Human Rights Watch.

The structural oppression that sexual minority organizations are experiencing can be observed through the actions taken by the governor of Istanbul.

As of May 29, a Turkish court has ordered the Lambda Istanbul Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transvestites Solidarity Association to close down because the group's title violates public morality laws, but the case will continue to the Supreme Court of Appeals. Additionally, Turkey suffers from a continued lack of visibility on the part of gays and lesbians, transphobia within the community itself and a continued lack of political activism, stemming from fear. Many point the finger at the AKP, Turkey's ruling conservative Islamic Justice and Development party, for coming down hard on gay visibility. Trans people say random violence on the part of the police is on the rise.

I participated in the anti-homophobia march in Ankara, finding myself at the tail end of the march, pushing my way through a tight mass of riot police, squeezing past their machine guns to join the shouting voices ahead. Jumping into the

fray between statueque trans women shouting for an end to transphobia, lesbians shouting for a voice and young men holding hands, shouting alternating chants for gay recognition, I clutched my camera, taking in the historic moment. Although outnumbered and nearly overwhelmed by the teams of police escorting our every move, the group continued to gain volume with its voices and rainbow flags, which, for the first time on Ankara streets, outnumbered Turkish flags.

During the march I met fellow foreign activists from Mexico, Holland, Sweden and Italy. A swarm of media cameras raced after us, filming gay European Union Member of Parliament Michael Cashman, who held the leading banner. The march ended 45 minutes later at Ataturk Boulevard, where police instructed marchers to walk away in groups of 10, asking participants to dismantle banners and flags.

The pride I felt at the march in Ankara nearly



Gays and allies march with the passion of a thousand in Ankara, Turkey.

brought me to tears. I felt joyous for marching not only for myself but for my Turkish friends—for everyone who has no voice—to show the Turkish government we simply exist. The march inspired participants to imagine a world where everyone demands their human rights from their governments, even in Turkey.

If the idea of belly-dancing in true Turkish fashion with the queer women of Anatolia appeals to you, or you'd like to sit with Turkish queers in the hamam, smoking from hookahs and sipping chay while overlooking the meeting point of two continents, then pack your bags lightly. Leave the leather chaps at home, throw a rainbow flag over your shoulders, and board the plane to Turkey's next Pride. ☺

Mija Sanders is a Portland writer living in Istanbul.

the clear choice for your window needs **503.643.3887**

Winner of the Oregon Energy Trust Rising Star Award!

EnergyTrust of Oregon, Inc.

clear choice windows & doors inc.

Wood, Fiberglass & Vinyl Windows • Sustainable Products
Certified Installers • No Sub Contractors • Free Estimates

licensed • bonded • insured oregon lic# 152050 washington lic# CLEARCW923BW

www.clearchoiceconstruction.com

Peak Performance²

Deborah Betron, CRB, GRI
PABA Co-founder
Deborah@BridgetownRealty.com
503.239.6446 503.287.9370

Scott Werner, GRI
ScottW@BridgetownRealty.com
971.322.9399 503.287.9370
www.ScottWernerRealtor.com

BRIDGETOWN REALTY
Portland's Largest Gay Owned Real Estate Company Since 1979

Dentistry In The Pearl That's Something To Smile About!

Dr. Viseh Sundberg

\$74 New Patient Exam and X-Rays

\$49 New Patient Basic Cleaning (exam required)

\$59 Children's Exam and Cleaning (new patients 12 & under)

\$99 Professional Home Whitening (exam required)

\$299 In Office 1 Hour "Zoom" Tooth Whitening (exam required)

SUNDBERG CENTER FOR DENTISTRY
(503) 546-9079
222 NW 10th Avenue
www.sundbergdentistry.com