Sex Under Intimate Siege: Transgender Lives, Law and State Violence in Contemporary Turkey

by

Aslı Zengin

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Anthropology
University of Toronto

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2014

Abstract

My doctoral research is about the production of marginalized sexualities through both the exercise of power and resistance to it. Focusing on legal codes and regulations surrounding sex reassignment surgeries (SRSs), sex work, hate crimes targeting trans people, and state officials’ (juridical actors, police, doctors, forensic medicine people) legal and extralegal relations with trans people in Beyoğlu, Istanbul, I scrutinize the transformation of trans lives into the microphysical domain of state power for the symbolic and material production of sexual and gender difference in Turkey. I also analyze how trans people respond to this process in their everyday lives.

Starting with the queer history of Beyoğlu, and trans people’s everyday experiences of spatial discrimination, marginalization and displacement by the police, capital owners, landlords, and neighbours since the 1960s, I investigate how myriad forms of everyday violence shape trans people’s political and intimate subjectivities. The construction and deployment of “transsexuality” as a medico-legal category is also part of this violent process. I elaborate on the work of this category to discuss how medico-legal actors of the state evaluate transsexuality, and hence, one’s “true” sex, and open trans people’s bodies to violent proximities and intimacies.
Overall I argue that the categories of sex and gender are integral to the formation and intimate workings of Turkish state power as the state seeks to govern and regulate not only bodies and sexuality, but also subjects’ intimate conduct and desires.

The second part of my dissertation focuses on trans people’s responses to these relations of violence, including the making of transgender community – a form of family and trans activism. In many cases, practices that are understood culturally as essential family duties (i.e. providing emotional and financial protection, caring for the body at death) are re-claimed by the trans community, replacing the assumed role of the family and announcing the community as “the real family.” I discuss family as one of the most contested intimate sites in transgender people’s lives, a site that is intimately intertwined with an ethics of care in the face of everyday violence. Arguably another expression of this ethics of care is trans activism in Istanbul. By looking at how trans people organize and mobilize around hate crimes, police violence and state control over SRSs, I scrutinize trans people’s definitions of and struggle for queer justice in institutional spaces, as well as the street.
Acknowledgments

It would have been impossible for me to complete this program without the support of several people. First and foremost I would like to express my special thanks and appreciation to my co-supervisors Holly Wardlow and Naisargi Dave for their constant support of my Ph.D. study and research. Without their motivation, inspiration, respect, patience, and guidance, I could not imagine having as rewarding an academic experience as this one. Their challenging questions and critical feedback pushed me to think about and analyze my research material in novel ways. I am especially grateful to Holly for supporting me not only academically, but also financially by providing me with research assistantship positions over almost five years.

Besides my co-supervisors, I would like to express appreciation to my thesis committee member, Andrea Muehlebach, for her continuous encouragement and insightful feedback. She never stopped believing in my research project and inspired me with her motivation whenever I needed it. I and many other friends in the department have greatly benefited from her strong enthusiasm and support.

Special thanks to Michael Lambek for serving on my dissertation defense committee and also for providing his guidance and encouragement through the Dissertation Writing Workshop. His mentorship has been of tremendous help and I owe him my deepest gratitude. There are many other faculty members, who deserve my sincerest thanks: Janice Boddy for her close reading of my dissertation; Girish Daswani for motivating me to start with my write-up in the first Dissertation Writing Workshop that I was part of; Donna Young for being generous with her time, motivation, and support during my time as a pre-doctoral fellow at the Center for Ethnography at the University of Toronto-Scarborough; Heather Miller for her particularly understanding and encouraging Graduate Directorship service; and Krista Maxwell, Amira Mittermaier, Valentina Napolitano, and Christopher Krupa for their encouragement and inspiration at different times throughout my program.

I have also gained significant critical insight through my conversations with established scholars in the field of anthropology. I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Don Kulick, who served as my external examiner at my oral defense. His engaged reading of my
thesis and challenging feedback inspired me to rethink through my data in exciting ways. The
graduate master-classes with Henrietta Moore and Elizabeth Povinelli and the Association for
Queer Anthropology Workshop with Tom Boellstorff have been significantly influential in
shaping some of the theoretical and ethnographic discussions in my thesis. I also had the great
opportunity of being on the same panels with Ellen Lewin, David Valentine, Mary Weismantel,
and Evelyn Blackwood. I am grateful for all their feedback and keen engagements with my
research.

This thesis would not have come to a successful completion without the financial support
that I received through grants, fellowships, and awards over the course of my Ph.D. study. I wish
to thank the University of Toronto Graduate School Fellowship, Lorna Marshall Doctoral
Fellowship in Social and Cultural Anthropology, Ontario Graduate Scholarship, Melissa J.
Knauer Award for Feminist Research, Fellowship in Ethnographic Writing at the Center for
Ethnography at the University of Toronto-Scarborough, and Association for Feminist
Anthropology Dissertation Award for their financial assistance.

I consider myself exceptionally lucky for having old and new friends from Turkey, who
have also been academic migrants in Toronto. My first and foremost special thank is to Seçil
Dağtaş, whose friendship started the day I started my undergraduate degree in Istanbul and has
extended to Canada with our entry to the same Ph.D. program in Toronto. Her sisterhood and
academic support has meant more to me than I could express in words. Besides Seçil, several
other friends from Turkey, Özlem Aslan, Ümit Aydoğmuş, Burak Köse, Tuğçe Ellialtı, Aziz
Güzel, Neşime Kahraman, Hülya Arik, Begüm Uzun, Ayşegül Koç, and Nora Tataryan, have
made me feel at home in our priceless long conversations and shared times in Toronto. I deeply
treasure their friendship.

During my graduate study, the support that I received from across the ocean has been
exceptional. Each time I visited Turkey, I was welcomed with unconditional love, care, and
motivation by my beloved friends, Öznur Şahin, Senem Erdoğan, Başak Albayrak, Işıl Töngel,
Elif Çelik, Ceren Yartan, Cemre Baytok, Hazal Halavut, Zeynep Özdal, Ali Paşaoğlu, Zeynep
Atay, Öyman Başaran, Esra Demir, Sertaç Şehlikoğlu, and by my former professors at Bogazici
University, Nazan Üstündağ, Nükhet Sirman, Şemsa Özar, Ayfer Bartu Candan, and Meltem
Ahıska. Thanks to my doctoral research and dissertation writing, new friends have joined my life. I wish to express my indebtedness to Gülkan, Zeliş, Nurgül, Demet, Ebru, Ece, İlksen, Kerem, Ecem, Marta, Ceylan, Esen, Sema Semih, Begüm Başdağ, Pınar, Kannya, Ali Arıkan, Alp Biricik, Firat Firat, Yasemin Öz, Berfu Seker, Leman Sevda Darıcıoğlu, Cenk Özbay, Feyza Akınerdem, and Selda Tuncer for their contribution to the joy, laughter, and support in my life.

My time at the University of Toronto has introduced me to wonderful friends from across the world, without whose support and love it would be extremely difficult to survive in a cold city such as Toronto, let alone complete my doctoral program. My heartfelt thanks to Vivian Solana, Daniella Jofre, Deepa Rajkumar, Melanie Richter-Montpetit, Andrew Paruch, Alejandra Gonzalez, Nima Maleki, Timothy Mwangeka Makori, Janne Dingemans, Shihoko Nakagawa, Jacob Nerenberg, Columba Gonzalez Duarte, Anna Kruglova, and Rastko Cvekic, for making Toronto a second home for me by filling my life with their care, fun, enjoyment, assistance, and support. I would also like to extend my warm thankfulness to Zoya, Meghana Rao, Prasad Khanolkar, Jaby Mathew, Sude Beltan, Doruk Babaoğlulu, Lucy Angus, Nelson Lai, Noa Schaindlinger, Malini Sur, Tania Tabar, Lilian Abou-Tabickh, Nishant Uphadhyay, Preethy Sivakumar, Nadia Hasan, Mai Taha, Zach Anderson, Amy Buitenhuis, Katie Mazer, Sara Suliman, Corey Ponder, Duygu Kaşdoğan, Ezgi Doğru, Ege Edener, Naoko Ikeda, Fabienne Doiron, Emily Rosser, Jana Kappeler, and Victor Kappeler, and my friends from the department, Dylan Gordon, Behzad Sarmadi, Glen Chua, Kate Rice, Sharon Kelly, Laura Sikstorm, Chantelle Falconer, Hollis Moore, Sardar Saadi, Nermeen Mouftah, Kori Allan, Christopher Little, Leah Shumka, and others in the Dissertation Writing Group for making my graduate experience memorable and collegial. I owe my warmest appreciation to Andy Hilton for his great editing skills. Without his labour, this thesis would not be in its present articulate form.

Thank you Aaron Kappeler for your invaluable support while inhabiting maybe the most arduous times of our lives. Writing our dissertations and completing the same program at the same time had its own advantages and disadvantages. Words are not enough to express my deepest gratitude for walking this post-fieldwork graduate life together and receiving your wholehearted motivation, criticism, sympathy, reassurance, consideration, assistance, and love.
My parents made my graduate life possible by providing their decades-long emotional and essential financial support. Their values and sense of morals have played a great role in shaping me into who I am, and how I relate to the world and people around me. I am grateful to them. My brothers, Atakan and Ibrahim, have always emotionally supported me with my research and life decisions. Their unconditional love, tenderness, esteem, and care make me feel highly privileged in life. I have the utmost gratitude for their presence in my life.

I owe a solemn debt to all the trans people I met over the course of my doctoral study, most of whom I became friends with. I am grateful for the trust they granted in sharing with me their lives, stories, joys, and sorrows. I can only hope that this thesis will live up to their trust by contributing to the betterment of the violent conditions trans people face in Turkey and across the world.
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PROLOGUE

if only ze/we didn’t die for a while

they are afraid of our laughter. had I read this note somewhere else before? perhaps I had. since
we experience the same troubles, we are all alike. our complaints, our revolts, our anger
resemble one another. we are always up against the wall, as we talk about all this. and we might
have said similar things before. that’s true: somebody else might have said exactly the same
thing before me.

those days when our friends actually don’t die, so to speak, those days when we think
about who is next to die, we do what they call everyday politics. so our politics is a bit different
from that of others. we have less debate sitting around the table than madilik and güllüm.¹

night, morning, noon… we always receive calls, saying “let’s go.” either to demos or hospitals
or stands² or parties or protests or funerals, or funerals, or funerals…

we frequent graveyards quite often. depending on their wills, we either water their graves
with rakı³ or pray for them. as they wished we pray, even if we don’t believe in god or religion.
almost everyone’s will is already drawn up, since we rarely die a natural death. we sleep with at
least two men to save our shroud money,⁴ three men to pay for the imam. our families usually
don’t attend our funerals. rejected children are always alone.

to reclaim funerals from the cemetery for the anonymous, we fight with men, tear them
into strips. they are usually men. they are the men with sticks, as we know of, and they hit us. we
hit back too. meanwhile, some journalist will take our pictures and print them on the newspaper
the next day. our hands are fists, and the title is ready: “transvestite terror at the cemetery! no
more respect even for the dead.” our fathers, without a clue about our situation, look at these

¹ “madilik” and “güllüm” are idioms from Lubunca, a vernacular or lexicon used among queer people in
Turkey. The former refers to various behaviours and speech acts that insult and/or hurt people, and hence,
that are considered of malicious nature (Savcı 2013:100); the latter denotes a set of fun activities,
conversations, and good time spent among a group of people (and thus has communal connotations).

² Tables standing as part of political demos, protests or campaigns.

³ Popular alcoholic drink.

⁴ Islamic convention requires the corpse to be buried naked and wrapped in a white shroud.
pictures in disgust, and tell our mothers to serve them some more tea as they read their newspapers.

we come back home from that jungle. and we booze and booze and booze... we wake up the next morning by hoping that our subconscious does not anticipate another “let’s go!” call. we hope, we hope, we hope... that is why they are afraid of our laughter. for sure, i read this somewhere. they are scared because we don’t go crazy but can still smile in the face of all this sorrow. i guess i read this sentence somewhere else too.

ulaş sona

5 This piece was written and published in a Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgender-Queer-Intersexual (LGBTQI) website immediately after a transgender sex worker woman of 46, Seçil, was murdered by her male client in July 2012. The original piece (in Turkish) can be found at http://www.kaosgl.com/sayfa.php?id=11808.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Ali died on September 26, 2013 when he was 40 years old. He passed away from this, our, his friends’ lives, at midnight in an Istanbul hospital, a year after he had learned that he had ovarian cancer. Being diagnosed with cancer was a particularly cruel fortune since it was just when he made his final decision to detach from his vagina that he found out his ovaries had taken his entire body under control. Upon his diagnosis, the doctors decided to treat his cancer first and indefinitely postpone his sex reassignment surgery (SRS) to such time as he had completely healed from the cancer. Unwillingly consenting to his doctor’s judgement, Ali prioritized his surgery for cancer and was shocked to discover that he had carried, in his words, “a tumour the size of two heads,” a mass that he always considered a natural part of his large belly.

When I met with him again over the summer of 2013, Ali had shrunk to half his former size after the removal of the tumour and chemotherapy. I tried hard, but could not hide my worried expression. We were sitting by the water at one of those well-hidden and breezy balıkçıs (fish restaurant) in the famous Golden Horn area, straight out of the most well-attended Trans Pride of the last three years. Although Ali had started to spend most of his time at home due to

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6 In my dissertation, I use only Ali’s original name and employ pseudonyms for my other informants, as Ali was a well-known public trans activist and gave me his consent to use his real name in my writings.

7 The (Istanbul) Trans Pride is different from the (Istanbul) LGBT Pride, which has been going on for several years. The latter usually takes place approximately ten days after the former, and both Pride organizations are supported and attended by almost the same group of people. The reason for organizing a separate Trans Pride Week is to raise awareness with regard the problems specific to being trans in Turkey. The first Trans Pride was organized when I
his lack of energy and other side effects of the chemotherapy, that day he could not pass up the chance to attend the Trans Pride in Istanbul. He was a dedicated activist fighting for the rights of trans people, particularly those of trans men, who have gained recent visibility and noted recognition in the Istanbul queer scene over the past few years, mostly as a result of the collaborative political work of Voltrans, a trans initiative formed by three trans men, including Ali.

On that summer evening, as Ali and I talked about his health situation, he stressed how it was difficult for him to go to a gynaecologist in the first place. He could not even remember the last time he had visited one, as he strongly avoided such visits since seeing a gynaecologist was, in his words, an indirect affirmation of one’s self as a woman. He reported that this reluctance was common among trans men and could lead to all kinds of risks in cases of serious health issues, like his. In Ali’s case, he was tremendously late to have very much chance of recovery, but to his other trans men friends he repeatedly underlined the importance of not avoiding gynaecological examinations.

When I first met Ali in 2009, he called himself “Aligül,” a gender-mixed name that he created with a friend to reflect his identification as a gender-bender. Years ago, some other friends from feminist circles had met him as Ayşegül, the common, strictly female name he was assigned by his family at birth. In retrospect, his adoption of “Aligül” was clearly reflective of his sexual identity in transition, since a few months prior to his death he decided to drop the

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8 The word “gül” means “rose,” and is used for a female name as in English.
feminine part of his name and asked to be called “Ali.” The shortening of his name soothed him and maybe even provided him with a symbolic SRS, as he would not live long enough to have his “female” organs—his vagina and uterus—removed, as he strongly desired during his last few years of life.

When diagnosed with cancer at the gynaecologist’s office, Ali was, in fact, there to commence the second surgical phase of his sex reassignment process. He had had a double mastectomy a little while previously. For the past few years until then, he had been using an elastic bandage to wrap around and repress his breasts, pinning the bandage edges to keep it together. Initially, his almost flat-looking chest made him glad; however, he never saw it as a long-term solution, especially after having heard stories of ‘rotten breasts’ due to continuous bandaging. His concern was not so much about his breasts slowly rotting, but rather a worry about the complications this might cause for his breast removal. He had heard that mastectomy would become more painful and difficult. Thus, he did not long continue to wrap his breasts and had the surgery when he had managed to save enough money.

When his SRS was suspended and he was hospitalized because of the cancer, his father, who had always denied and could never come to terms with Ali’s sexual identity, provided for the financial costs of his treatment. During his hospitalization, Ali finally managed to get his father to call him by his new (final) name, and helped to reconcile him with the fact that he had a son, not a daughter. His story of gaining his father’s recognition was one of the most thrilling and touching stories that he shared on his blog, a space that he had created in 2009 to talk about his trans experience and the problems of trans people in general. When I talked to one of my

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9 http://hikayeci.livejournal.com/
friends upon Ali’s death, he told me that Ali’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersexual (LGBTQI) and cis gender feminist friends accompanied and took care of Ali throughout the duration of his cancer treatment, and Ali’s father addressed them as Ali’s real family and the people who really knew him, the people who were most intimate with him.

Ali’s father’s case is rare. As evidenced in the following chapters of this study, the more usual story is one of abandonment and disowning of transgender children by their natal families. Ali’s story also depicts something more noteworthy: the prevalence of sexual difference and its attributed rules, norms, and values in the organization of a particular form of social life that prevented Ali from seeing a gynaecologist for years. His story is thus also one of institutional and non-institutional foreclosures of possible lives, bodies, and desires that, well, could have been otherwise.

The conditions of a transgender life in Turkey are significantly shaped in the face of stigmatization, injury, and death. Violence that shapes transgender lives takes the forms of “structural violence” (Farmer 2004) or “terror as usual” (Taussig 1989) that are manifested in trans people’s everyday life experience of death, murder, ferocity, and atrocity in Turkey. Violence finds its expressions also in the legal categories of “hate crime” and “honour killing,” and takes form of “a multitude of small wars and invisible genocides conducted in the normative social spaces [of public institutions]” (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois 2004:19). An example for the latter form of violence was embodied in Ali’s cancerous and dying body as a result of the delayed diagnosis due to his marginalization by gender inequality and sexual injustice prevailing in official institutions.

As Ulaş’s poignant piece (above, Prologue) eloquently articulates, being a trans person in Turkey means a life shaped by several forms of death and abandonment. Ulaş, a gender-bender
zirself, wrote this piece a day after Seçil was found dead in her house in Antalya with her throat slit. Seçil’s death joined the statistics of transgender murders, representing one of the 73 such incidents between 2002 and July 2013 (LGBT Blok 2013). Manifestly, and despite the LGBTQI organizations’ solid efforts and protests to raise awareness about and reaction to these deaths, hate and violence continue to shape transgender lives in Turkey, making daily life a struggle that is often filled with fear of death.

During my fieldwork in Istanbul, conducted over several periods during 2009–12, I participated in numerous protests against trans murders organized by Lambda Istanbul and Istanbul LGBTT, two major LGBTQI organizations in the city. To date, however, there has been no material change to remedy the insecurity and vulnerability of trans lives. Trans people still keep being killed, and the words and cries against this violence remain alike, as in Ulaş’s moving piece. In that sense, there is a keen vitality to Farmer’s (2004:307) urge for an ethnography that not only “relies on conversations with the living,” but also “look[s] at the dead and those left for dead.”

Although civilians, and in most cases, trans women sex workers’ clients commit many of these killings, LGBTQI people, through their campaigns and demonstrations, hold the state responsible, since the state’s security forces and judicial institutions show so little interest in finding, let alone punishing the criminals. The state turns a blind eye to these deaths, and thus

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10 In English, the gender-neutral pronouns “ze” and “zir” are used as third-person singular references instead of “she/he” and “her/his,” which are strictly gendered.

11 Kaos GL, an Ankara based LGBT organization (below), states the number of transgender deaths as 70 for the period between 2002 and July 2013 (LGBT Blok 2013). However, even in the two months after the release of this information, there have, to my own knowledge, been three more killings of transgender women.
implicitly condones or at least accepts them. The role of state institutions and actors in shaping trans lives is not limited to this legal realm of investigations pertaining to transgender deaths. The state is strongly present in trans lives at many levels, varying from sex reassignment processes to police control and violence. Therefore, this dissertation is, to a certain extent, an ethnography of the state. It examines the workings of state power through the lenses of trans lives.

Besides contributing to the ethnographic studies of the state, this dissertation looks at the conditions of transgender lives, as shaped at the intersection of violence and intimacy. Taking (my native) Turkey as case study (and concentrating on Istanbul, the country’s cultural epicenter and largest city in the region), I examine how these violent intimacies are moulded in socio-cultural relations with myriad institutional and non-institutional actors, ranging from medical experts to legal authorities, from the police to trans people’s landlords, from their natal family members to their neighbours, from their LGBTQI to non-LGBTQI friends, from their clients to their lovers and partners, and from non-LGBTQI activists to total strangers. Focusing on these relations and transgender lives in Turkey allows for an examination of various accounts and cases of both obliteration and formation of affinities, proximities, sentiments, care, and desires in an environment shaped by multiple forms of violence and regimes of power. I examine the ways in which violence in myriad forms (i.e. deaths, casualties, injuries, brutalities, hate crimes, social exclusion, marginalization, etc.) destroys lives and relationships as much as it plays a constructive force and role in making new worlds and creating new relationships, selves, and subjectivities. As Feldman (1991) contends, violence is productive and formative; it moulds people’s understanding of themselves and what they fight for. It is part of people’s everyday existence, “a human condition,” (Schepet-Hughes and Bourgois 2004), and it is “not something external to society and culture that ‘happens’ to people” (Robben and Nordstrom 1995:2).
Hence, violence also forms and shapes how transgender people respond to the conditions of their lives, as well as how they relate to one another. Among all the existing forms of violence that play a significant role in trans people’s lives, my research allocates more space to the specific role of state violence, and trans people’s myriad responses to different forms of state violence due to the strong presence of the state in their everyday lives. So first, some notes on my theoretical approach to the state.

**State as Socio-Politico-Cultural Form**

The state is historically present in all aspects of Turkish life, with “statism” (albeit with an essentially economic meaning) itself one of the guiding principles of Kemalism (*Atatürkçülük*) in the establishment process of the Republic. The state as socio-politico-cultural entity—or network of institutions, or expression and agent of hegemony—is sharply focused in the Turkish context. However, the state in Turkey means more than that; it gains its definition not only through the composition of manifold institutions or construction of hegemony, but also through subjective processes, lived experiences and embodiment of state power in everyday life social relations.

My formulation of the state owes a great deal to the long-established critical theories of the state that problematize its conceptualization as something distinct from society (Gramsci 1971; Althusser 1972; Foucault 1980, 1988, 1991, 1995), and as reified, empirical object (Abrams 1988). I build my notion of the state upon the recent anthropological studies of the state that approach it as a form, “the presence and content of which is not taken for granted but is the very object of inquiry” (Aretxaga 2003:395), and that problematize its understandings as a uniform, autonomous, fixed, bounded entity, institution, or thing (Das and Poole 2004; Sharma...
and Gupta 2006). As much as strictly tied to the production and distribution of specific ideologies and material resources, and the operation of transnational processes, state formation is, at the same time, a cultural process (Sharma and Gupta 2006). In other words, what people understand by the state, what kinds of meanings and values they attach to it, and how they speak about it are also shaped by cultural processes. State formation incorporates moral and ethical norms and values (Gramsci 1971; Muehlebach 2012); affective and psychic dynamics (Taussig 1997; Rose 1998; Aretxaga 2001, 2003; Navaro-Yashin 2002, 2012); and sensual and emotional dimensions (Berlant 1997; Stoler 2002). As Begona Aretxaga (2003:395) stresses, subjective dynamics are key to the understanding of the state as a form in its relation to people and movements, and without such subjective experience, states do not exist at all. Through their countless everyday encounters “with its institutions and personnel, with the form and content of official discourses, with carefully scripted public performances,” David Nugent (2010:684) argues that people learn (or unlearn) the state. The lived experience of these encounters, while establishing phenomenological grounds between state administration or its “proxies,” paves the way for the state to come into being and gain particular forms of presence (Krupa 2010:321).

Thus, in my dissertation, I am particularly interested in this subjective, embodied experience with “the state” and state power. Scrutinizing various aspects of this experience in trans people’s everyday lives, I examine the state’s role in the (re)production of sexual difference, marginalized sexualities, and gender identities, or, more specifically, of transgender lives, subjectivities and bodies. Overall, my analysis of state power is organized into the state’s discursive strategies in respect of defining and reproducing gender and sexual norms; its governance of violence, controlling and regulating transgender lives and bodies at legal and medical levels in relation to the category of “transsexuality”; and, last but not least, traces and
effects on trans people’s lives, bodies and relations that are products of their subjective experience of state power.

Indisputably, along with the institutions, actors, discourses, and practices of the state, trans lives are also shaped by a multiplicity of other “institutional” actors, discourses, and practices, such as the family, religion, and cultural codes, to name a few. Here, however, I am particularly interested in examining the workings of state power in trans lives in relation to other social and cultural dimensions. In other words, I analyze the state’s transformation of transgender lives into a microphysical domain of power for the symbolic and material production of sexual and gender difference and the dominant gender and intimate regime in Turkey.

Turkish citizens have been assigned differently coloured ID cards based on sex (blue for males and pink for females) since 1976, and hence, for trans people, it has been a significant concern to change their ID cards from blue to pink, or vice versa. There had been no legal regulation surrounding the transsexual identity or SRSs in Turkey until 1988, when Bülent Ersoy, a famous trans woman singer, won her seven-year-long legal struggle to change her official sex record from male to female, gaining the right to a pink ID card (Chapter 5). The legal code, introduced with her case, remained unaltered until the change of the government in 2002 with the inception of the period of office of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP). AKP brought several alterations to the legal system, including modifications to the Civil Code. With these changes, the sex reassignment process was put under rigorous medico-legal control and institutional supervision. In order to have SRS and change their ID cards, today, trans people are required to undergo one-and-a-half or two-year long psychiatric evaluation, various medical tests, and sterilization. One’s age, marital status and reproductive status are significant legal conditions to receive a new ID.
This medico-legal path to pink or blue IDs involves the constant evaluation of trans people’s gender role performance and bodily configuration by various institutional actors (i.e. therapists, doctors, forensic medicine people, juridical authorities) according to the dominant categories of sex and gender in Turkey. In other words, the state, before issuing a new ID, insists that trans people search for ways to prove their “true” sexual identity and modify their bodies accordingly. The entire sex reassignment process, including the issuance of new IDs, is based on genital reconfiguration, and requires trans people to reconstruct their genitals accordingly with the gender that a person successfully passes, thus rendering a particular production of bodily materiality obligatory. Institutionally, there is little room for ambiguous or ambivalent gender and sex. The state is active in producing and deploying medico-legal projects that constantly strive for disambiguating the ambiguously sexed and gendered bodies, and recruiting them as unambiguous heteronormative national subjects. This project involves multiple processes, including the production and promotion of “good” relationships, “proper private and public spaces,” and the very relationship between them. Spaces, people’s bodies, and relationships are, in very violent ways, made more sexually legible and less ambiguous by the state. While examining all these processes and the relations between them through the lenses of transgender lives, this dissertation suggests an understanding of state power that is based on the formation of violent intimacies. In other words, I look at the exercise and organization of state power at the intersection of violence and intimacy, and analyze how state violence conditions particular intimacies or establishes intimate conduits between the state and its subjects. To do that, I draw on the existing literature on the relationship between state and intimacy, and contribute to such theoretical discussions by developing an understanding of the intimacies of the state or intimate state power.
The Intimate Workings of State Power

States have long been involved in the lives of their subjects at an intimate and sexual level, transforming the so-called “private sphere” into a core political context (Foucault 1991; Berlant 1997, Stoler 2002, Aretxaga 2003, Povinelli 2006). The primary domains of this (political) socialization range from requirements related to marriage and childbearing/rearing through regulations around reproductive health and sexual lives to assumptions and expectations about gender identity and related behaviours. Or, under neoliberal economic circumstances, states might mediate certain intimacies for the marginalized by encouraging them to use their unwaged affective labour in exchange for social belonging, utility, and good feeling (see Muehlebach 2011). As Nancy F. Cott underscores, “no modern nation ignores the intimate domain, because the population is composed and reproduced there” (2006:470). Indeed, with the modern emergence of the demos as (supposed) sovereign, this (apparently) reflexive concern is only heightened. With the implementation of legal strategies and regulatory practices, the so-called sphere of the private emerges as the locus of constantly evolving forms of state power that determine what kinds of intimacies (sexual and family relations)—indeed who—will be legitimate. In this way, socialization takes the form of the state power operating through the establishment of intimate and sexual links to the lives and bodies of its individual citizens.

From Ann Stoler’s (2002) meticulous work, we learn that the Dutch colonial state in Indonesia owed its “success” to the effective production of the boundaries between rulers and ruled through the micromanagement of domestic arrangements, affective ties, and sex. Scrutinizing how the colonial population conducted their private lives, that is, “with whom they cohabited, where they lived, what they ate, how they raised their children, what language they
chose to speak to servants and family at home,” Stoler illustrates the sites of the intimate as the
tense and charged domains of colonial power (2002:3). Hence, the colonial state’s mission was,
in part, to instill “the proper distribution of sentiments and desires” (Stoler 2006:2).

The relationship between sentimentality, intimacy, and state power is integral not only to
the workings of colonial power, but also to the logic of contemporary state practices and
organization. Lauren Berlant, in The Queen of America Goes to Washington City (1997),
elaborates the changes in the definition of US citizenship over the past twenty-five years, a
definition informed by an increasingly intimate meaning in relation to its ties to a more private
(personal, familial, and sexual) morality. A patriotic traditional familial model has begun to
predominate the relations of the “public sphere” through the promotion of a strong connection
between the intimate domains of the quotidian and the survival of the nation. Citizens are
expected to love their nation in the same way they do their families and are led to believe that
their family lives directly affect the future of the nation. Accordingly, politics has come to be
understood by citizens more in terms of privatized and individualized duties. The calculation and
valuation of national membership at the affective level, or the sentimental formation of the
collective national “we,” is tied to the construction of the emotional content of citizenship, or
national identity, through specific institutional pedagogies and discourses (see also Pateman

Widely acknowledged and respected investments in heterosexual romance and the
making of a nuclear family represent one dimension of this sentimental “we.” Undoubtedly, this
sentimental “we” is conditioned vis-à-vis the construction of affective “others” since the
production, distribution, and promotion of this sentimentality is subject to various calculations
and negotiations as shaped by race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and class. Sara Ahmed
(2004:117) stresses how the determination of who is considered “we” is effectively shaped by the movements of affect across bodies and signs, marking individual and collective bodies with the very effect of the “surfaces” and boundaries.

By way of example, Ahmed argues that the specific emotions of hate and fear circulate among people and stick to some bodies more than others, thus creating zones of intimacy among those who become proximate with each other in their alikeness, while establishing relations of distance with the others, deemed as dangerous or strangers. The mediation and formation of these intimacies always has a violent spatial component, through which certain bodies are made “out of place” or “made into strangers on the shape and skin of everyday life” (Antwi et al. 2013:4). In that sense, violence, or more precisely, the threat of violence posed by the figure of the stranger and his/her unfamiliar life or body, creates and conditions certain intimacies among people based on similarity and familiarity. In my own research, the formation of intimacies based on similarity or familiarity is strongly mediated not through the relations with regard to the figure of the stranger but to those people with ambiguously sexed and gendered bodies, displacing transgender people from the visual field of public life in various violent ways.

The dynamics and conditions of these proximities and familiarities between the “we” are also shaped by people’s investments in similar normative “good life” scenarios. The dominant formulations of what makes a life a good life present themselves as the desired norm through institutional discourses and practices, as well as in social relations under contemporary capitalism. This good life, a concept widely elaborated in Berlant’s more recent work, Cruel Optimism, is a combination of conventional moral, intimate, and economic fantasies such as romantic love, national culture, upward mobility, and family life (2011:2). The fantasies of “good life” open a gulf between the constrained realities of the actual lives of the majority and
the ideals that the “good life” presents (with the ordinary hope that these can be realized).

Thus, for example, one may be idiomatically exhorted to “get a life,” which gains meaning, among other things perhaps, but crucially, in relation to the achievement of “sexual intelligibility via the couple and the family, or national culture, or upward mobility,” which themselves deny the possibility of a life lived otherwise (Berlant & Prosser 2011:182). What is fundamental to this good life scenario and to all the material and immaterial gains associated with it is the promise of happiness that is “used to redescribe social norms as social goods” (Ahmed 2010:2)—hence life becomes reified into something that we even can get.

The “good life” scenarios in contemporary Turkey are strongly shaped by the intertwinment of the hetero-reproductive family, steady and well-paid employment, university education, upward social mobility, and patriotism. The mediation of these good life scenarios and attempts to live up to their standards impinge on people’s lives and bodies at different levels. Hence, my descriptions of trans lives in this dissertation take place in the face of their negotiations and contestations with these “good life” scenarios that are imposed by many different actors, including state actors, along with others from relatives and lovers to strangers and passers-by who in some way figure in their social life. An understanding of trans people’s lives and the contexts in which they are conditioned necessitates both a general elucidation of the sites of the dominant intimate regime and life in Turkey (see Chapter 2) and particular demonstration of how exclusion, domination, and discrimination against trans people are played out through intimate contacts, relations, and conducts.

The discussion of intimacy presented here has several dimensions. At one level, I examine how the lives of transgender people in Turkey are shaped and affected by the dominant intimate regime of the hetero-reproductive family life. The definition and regulation of sex and
gender at the state level go hand in hand with the state’s construction, privileging, and
destruction of specific intimate worlds and intimacies based on an understanding of society
grounded in particular notions of this hetero-reproductive family. The state, through its legal,
economic and political regulations and practices, promotes a social environment within which
certain intimate bonds are stigmatized, sanctioned, or dissolved, while others are encouraged.

But my analysis of intimate state power goes beyond the mere focus on state regulations
and discourses on the family. I share Stoler’s understanding of the intimate “through and beyond
the domestic and through and beyond the management of sex” (2006:4). I scrutinize sexual
relations, forms of bodily contact, and tactile relations as sites in which to examine the
governance of the intimate in violent terms. Within this domain of governance, the state deploys
violence both to destruct and create intimacies and intimate worlds, by dissolving certain
intimate bonds (such as a reproduction ban for transsexual individuals) while encouraging others
(such as economic, e.g., taxation, promotions supporting the heterosexual family form). In the
formation of this social environment, specific notions of hegemonic masculinity in Turkey play a
significant role and help the state to gain a particular definition, or, in Aretxaga’s words, act as a
“male body politic” (2001:1). Aretxaga’s formulation assists further inquiry into a particular
organization of the Turkish state that is not only entrenched in patriarchy, misogyny, and
heteronormativity, but acts from this position with a penetrative role, becoming violently
intimate.

The sex reassignment process that trans people have to undergo to remake their bodies
and their desirous selves also sets the stage for constructing, what Aretxaga (2003) calls,
“terrifying forms of intimacies” between the state and transgender people’s bodies, as integral to
modern disciplinary practices and rational technologies of control. The dominant categories of
sex and gender gain definition through the formation of violent intimacies between state actors and transgender people in different stages of sex reassignment process. Obligatory sterilization, for instance, is one of these violent intimacies. In addition, following SRSs, forensic scientists insert an instrument into trans women’s vagina to verify its depth. In fact, intimate forms of state contact with trans people’s bodies go beyond the medical settings further into trans people’s everyday lives in their interactions with the police. Since the majority of trans women in Turkey are involved in illegal sex work to make a living, the police use specific laws regarding prostitution to justify certain punitive and violent practices that establish intimate contacts between the police and trans people’s bodies. For example, trans women sometimes bribe police officers by offering money or sexual services. The incidents of being beaten with batons under detention are other forms of violent proximities and interactions that are established between state actors and trans bodies. By focusing on these violent proximities and forms of contact, my dissertation promotes an understanding of intimate state politics as made possible by the mediation and government of violence at the intersection of state power, trans people’s bodies and senses of selves, their sexualities, and institutional gaze and touch.

I agree with Stoler (2006:14) that “To study the intimate is not to turn away from structures of dominance, but to relocate their conditions of possibility and relations and forces of production.” Such a focus on the intimate, moreover, encourages appreciation of a host of sensory experiences: “sound, smell, taste; the ways bodies and objects meet and touch… zones of contact and the formations they generate” (Pratt & Rosner 2006:17). Yet I would also add that examining these intimate details provides one with analytical lenses beyond carnal contacts and interactions by bringing forth affective ties, forms of conduct, encounters, phenomenological experience of space and embodiment, and various notions of care. This dissertation, in short, comprises an attempt both ethnographic and theoretical aiming to weave all these facets and
multiple stories into a single account of trans lives in Turkey.

**Ethnographies of Transgenderism**

While crafting a single account of trans lives in Turkey, my work also engages with the ethnographic scholarship on transgender lives in non-Western contexts. Critical ethnographic work on transgenderism in non-Western contexts shows that there are many varied ways in which sex, gender and sexuality relate to one another. For instance, Don Kulick’s groundbreaking ethnographic work *Travesti* (1998) explores the everyday life of Brazilian *travestis*, who approximate female physical characteristics through cosmetic practices, hormone ingestion, clothing and hairstyles. However, they avoid removing their penises and do not consider themselves to be women, instead identifying as homosexuals—that is, males who desire men and shape themselves according to men’s desires. In a similar vein, Evelyn Blackwood (2007) talks about *warias* in Indonesia, transgender people with male bodies who act like women and are involved in sexual and intimate relations with men; Tom Boellstorff (2004) suggests that they exemplify a male femininity. In the Thai context, Megan Sinnott (2007) and Ara Wilson (2004) examine the complex associations between sexuality, sexual identity and gender by focusing on the *tom* figure. *Tom* can be viewed as a Thai transgender term used for addressing female-bodied people with masculine identities, whose gender is hence considered to be masculine. Toms are understood to be attracted to *dees*, who are feminine women desiring or dating toms. Sinnott shows how *tom* and *dee* identities are mutually constructed through desirous and sexual relationships involving each type, and how these desires for (and sexual practices with) each other are assumed to be natural outcomes of their gender, not their sexed body (Sinnott 2007:123).
In spite of their significant contribution to criticizing Western conceptualizations of sexual dimorphism, some of the ethnographic literature on non-Western sexual and gender diversity was problematic in that it legitimated the appropriation of non-Western stories and histories of gender and sexual diversity in reductionist, idealized, and romanticized ways. The inadequacy of the two-gender framework in some non-Western sociocultural contexts pushed anthropologists to invent a new category, “third gender,” to describe gender diversity. This category brought fascination with those societies that are ethnographically presented as less inhibitive and more tolerant and approving of gender diversity, compared to Western societies (Towle and Morgan 2002; see Besnier 1994; Herdt 1994; Nanda 1994, 1999; Roscoe 1994). Some transgender groups which have been categorized as “third gender” in the academic literature include the New Guinean Sambia, a group whose young male members perform fellatio on older ones and eat their semen (Herdt 1994); the Omani xanith, a gender that is considered neither woman nor man but has characteristics of both (they have male genitals and are described as effeminate and impotent) (Wikan 1977); Native American two-spirit people (also known as berdache\textsuperscript{12}), who are male-bodied and claim those roles, behaviors, dress and functions that are usually attributed to women (Roscoe 1994); and the Indian hijras, who are born as males but undergo emasculation operations (the removal of genitals without the replacement of a vagina) and act and dress up like women (Nanda 1999a).

During my fieldwork, a few of my trans informants claimed that they fell under the category of “third gender,” but the majority expressed their sexual identity either through dichotomous gender identities (i.e. strictly men or women) or through local and transnational

\textsuperscript{12} Berdache was first used by European observers in the 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} to address those Native North American people with alternative gender roles, and it means “male prostitute,” “kept boy,” or slave. Due to its derogatory meanings, it has been widely replaced by the word “two-spirit” (Nanda 1999a:131).
gender variant terms, such as “gacı,” “dönme,” “lubunya,” “travesti,” “trans,” “trans kadın,” and “trans erkek.” (See the next section). Hence, I avoid categorizing this diversity under the general category of “third gender.” I also agree with much of the criticism directed towards the employment of this category. For example, Evan B. Towle and Lynn Marie Morgan (2002:477) note that “the ‘third gender’ concept lumps all nonnormative gender variations into one category, limiting our understandings of the range and diversity of gender ideologies and practices.” Likewise, as Jack Halberstam (1998:28) indicates, “‘thirdness’ merely balances the binary system and, furthermore, tends to homogenize many different gender variations under the banner of ‘other.’” Even within a single society, transgender identities may vary, defy generalizations and go against the grain of the local mainstream representations (Besnier 1997).

Moreover, the “third gender” category also has the shortfall of depicting trans lives within the sole framework of sexuality and gender. A variety of processes, including social, political, cultural, religious, and material relationships, hierarchies, transactions, and representations, play a significant role in constituting and shaping local trans lives and their sense of self and personhood. For example, in Indonesia, local values of marriage, kinship, and modernity significantly shape waria subject position (Boellstorff 2004, 2005); in India, hijra identity is formed within a domain of sexuality and its articulation with class, religion, kinship, and hierarchies of respect (Reddy 2005); in Tonga, fakaleiti/leiti is molded at the convergence of flows of material sources, sex, stereotypical representations, and prestige (Besnier 1997); and in the Southern Philippines, the gay/bantut population of Jolo should be understood by taking into consideration the colonial and post-colonial situation, discourses of nation and the state, and cultural and religious identities (Johnson 1997). Though sex/gender may be the most important of those factors that shape trans lives and selves, it remains a reductionist approach to describe trans lives and selves only along this axis, ignoring the other material and symbolic dimensions
of life that are articulated with sex, gender and sexuality. My ethnographic work on trans lives in Turkey contributes to this body of literature, and prioritizes an “analysis [that] should center on the meanings, ideologies, disputes, and practices that situate gender dynamics in specific historical and cultural contexts” (Towle and Morgan 2002:471). Depicting trans lives in Turkey, I specifically examine how gender variance and sexual difference are formed, shaped, experienced and regulated within the intersection of multiple processes, including medicine, jurisprudence, state regulation, local notions of family, economic transformations, spatial dynamics and myriad forms of violence, such as structural, physical, and symbolic.

At the same time, I am aware that these local understandings of gender, sex and sexuality are far from untouched by transnational flows of Northern (understood also as Western, global, modern) scientific, medical and political discourses and practices. These discourses and practices travel across local contexts, informing particular understandings of transgender and transsexual identity. As Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia Wieringa (2007) argue, cultural location and global connectedness are in a dynamic and complicated relationship, preventing one from approaching gendered and sexual subjectivities as either simply local, or wholly determined by Northern discourses and practices. Rather, queer subjectivities “reproduce and reconstitute the specific discourses, knowledges, and ways of understanding the world of their particular locations” (Blackwood and Wieringa 2007:8). Thus, in my work, I also look at how the local is shaped in a transnational context, in interaction with medical discourses of transsexuality, Western LGBTQ terminology, and political and legal discourses of hate crimes and human rights.
Terminologies, Categories, Identities

One aspect of transnationalism is the role of international human rights discourses in the proliferation of “diverse” categories for labeling distinctive types of sexed/gendered beings, and sexual behaviour, identity and/or rights. Some of the local terminology of LGBTQI movement in Turkey “dubs” (Boellstorff 2003, 2005) Western categories of sexual identity, mimicking, yet animating them in a distinct fashion. This occurs most obviously at the level nomenclature: thus the terms “lezbiyen,” “gey,” “biseksüel,” “transseksüel,” “travesti,” “trans,” and, very recently, “kuir” or “queer.”

Turkicized forms that are essentially phonetic equivalents to the English but following the language rules of Turkish, these words incorporate similitude with the transnational discourses of sexuality. They form a sense of community at the global level, but at the same time gain a life of their own by producing difference, which situates them in a “grid of similitude and difference” (Boellstorff 2005:84). As Boellstorff underscores in a more recent work, “the similarity in terminology might mean similarity in identity, or it might not. It is an empirical question and thus depends on (1) careful listening that comes from actual research, and (2) how we determine what counts as ‘similarity’” (Boellstorff 2013:173) The case of “kuir/queer” exemplifies some of these issues.

The word “kuir” renders “queer” in Turkish, which does not include the letter “q” (or “k” for a “kw” transliteration of the letter “q”), nor uses long vowel sounds (the English “ee”). To that extent the choice is unproblematic, one is English and the other Turkish (or, there is one word, with two spellings). In using the English, however, Turks are making a host of references and cultural claims related to things like, for example, (imagined) international (or Western) norms and aspirations, while using the Turkish does things like reject elitism (because of the
association of English with high status/class); Kurds in Turkey, in contrast, (whose language does include the letter “q”) are operating within a different set of socio-cultural values, so might prefer “queer” as a nationalist statement (rejecting Turkish) or just because it is more “natural” (closer to their first language). At present, the issue remains unsettled and neither of these, “kuir” or “queer,” can be said to have gained a confirmed ascendency.

The queer activists with whom I worked during my fieldwork constantly negotiated the specification of sexual identities and the rapidly changing discourse on sexuality in their everyday lives. They mediated, modified, and shaped the categories “borrowed” from the West along with the local queer terms, especially “gacı,” “dönme,” “lubunya,” “eşcinsel,” and “ıbne.” Fundamentally, in respect to the issue of transnational categorization, the cultural, social and political practice in Istanbul’s queer world show that queer people approach sexual identity “as something [they] build and protect, rather than as a static category to which they either do or do not belong” (Hirsch et al. 2013:92). Simple translation becomes particularly fraught, therefore, and I do seek to avoid it here.

Similar to the Brazilian local term for trans people (Kulick 1998), “travesti” has been widely used to refer to trans people in Turkey. So far, it has been only used for trans women, and when used among trans people, indicates a strong emphasis on (lack of) surgical status, drawing a distinction between non-op and post-op trans people (that is, “travesti” is used to name trans people who have either had no surgical intervention in their bodies or had “incomplete” sex reassignment surgery). Lately, however, it has been overused and tremendously exploited. Gaining common currency in the 1990s and early 2000s to epitomize trans people as perverts, spreaders of HIV/AIDS, thieves, and terrorizers of society, the term “travesti” was used especially by the mainstream media to degrade and trigger violence against trans people. Hence,
its current usage has transphobic connotations, and employed thus as pejorative/derogatory, it has become avoided among trans people.

The story is the opposite way around in the case of the word “dönme,” which has been recently reappropriated by trans people and integrated into colloquial parlance, similar to “queer.” Originally, “dönme” meant “convert,” and was historically used to denote people who changed religion, especially crypto-Jews under the Ottoman Empire who became Muslims in the seventeenth century (Baer 2010). The current use of the term among trans people has no religious implications (at least none that are obvious or conscious), and merely signifies conversion from one sex to another. From the local lexicon, however, I found “gacı” and “lubunya” to be more commonly used than “dönme.”

Both “gacı” and “lubunya” have more comprehensive meanings than “dönme” to the extent that they refer to the feminine gender. In other words, whether one has undergone any degree of SRS or not does not impact on one’s identification as gacı or lubunya. Indeed, trans people might address also some gay men as “gacı” and “lubunya,” depending on the level of men’s feminine gender role performance. To a certain extent, the local categories of gacı and lubunya embrace trans people, gay men with feminine gender, and those who occupy a liminal position between the two. There are also specific local terms of gays in social life, including “eşcinsel” and “ibne,” the latter popularly used for pejorative purposes yet, again, reclaimed by gay people to address one another. Whereas “ibne” is widely used for gay men (and occasionally for trans women), “eşcinsel” is more umbrella term, standing for both gay men and lesbian women (although the gay meaning predominates, making it rather similar to “homosexual”).

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13 From the root dön, meaning turn (known in English through “doner kebab”).
When it comes to lesbians, the historically employed local terminology, such as “kadın sevici” (woman lover) and “zürafa” (giraffe), no longer have current circulation and have largely been replaced by “lezbiyen” and its colloquial derivation “lezzo.” Mainly straight people used this out-dated vocabulary to refer to lesbians.

By bringing these local terms to the reader’s attention, my intention is not, as pointed out by some scholars (Brown et al. 2010:1570), to recover the “authentic” sexual and gender vocabulary or try to safeguard the “traditional” terminology from the global discourses of sexual identity, and thus, to replicate a “self-romanticizing” gaze (although neither do I assume to deny any value in such localizing and protectionist practices). Thus, although I distinguish in my usage between the “foreign” and “native” according to discursive application in my text, I do not endeavour to maintain a sharp, rigid, or in any way purist division. Rather, my intention is to highlight the coexistence of both the local and the global terms for sexed and gendered practices, identities, and bodies, and draw notice to their relations and simultaneous deployments in the everyday language, as it is really used. I cannot claim, for instance, that “gacı” was used more often than “trans,” or that “transseksüel” had less currency than “lubunya” as a generalization. On the contrary, I do affirm that all these terms are part of the same linguistic tool kit, with variations in practical usage dependent on a wide and evolving variety of factors.

Here, I would make the point that the “borrowed” terms, such as “trans” or “transseksüel” have more institutional and political value; they have a more formal register, and are thus more commonly used as written forms. The local thus becomes colloquial. For example, when one of my informants visits a doctor or lawyer, they do not use “gacı” or “lubunya.” Not only would they defer to the medical setting and the professional world of doctors and other health workers,
but it would not make much sense to claim medical or legal services from the state with these terms, since no assistance is available on the basis of quite what they name.

My primary selection of terminology has been shaped by these types of considerations. In reporting linguistic interactions and exchanges, I try to be attentive to my informants’ choice of words to talk about themselves, their lives, identities, and bodies, as well as those of other trans people and queer people. When the local terms were used in our conversations and interactions, I kept to the original, without modification. I have also deployed the local words “gacı” and “lubunya” when I describe or talk about more informal and intimate settings, interactions and encounters. I do attempt to be “authentic”, therefore, to address the vernacular, but that is why, also, I use “trans” as an umbrella term to address people who passed or were passing through (varying degrees of) gender/sex reassignment processes and/or who identified themselves as transseksüel, trans, travesti but still considered themselves under the general category of trans.

I also want to say a few words about my choice of terminology and use of personal pronouns. In this respect, Turkish is a gender-neutral language, there being only one term for third-person reference, with suffixes added for the plural and other (accusative, dative, ablative, and genitive) noun cases. Hence, no matter how much I try to do justice to the original meaning of words and their embedded cultural values and significations, there is a significant and inescapable layer of incommensurability between the Turkish and the English languages in this particular regard. Similar to other scholars who also worked on transgenderism in languages that use single term for third-person singular reference (Blackwood 1998 in Boellstorff 2004), I sometimes deploy “ze” for “he/she”, and “zir” for “her/his”. I am not concerned to make a strongly ideological point here, however, and prefer to casually accept the gender dichotomy of
standard English, with, for example, feminine forms along with “trans woman” when referring to someone self-identifying as “gacı” and “lubunya.”

**Self-Reflexive Phenomenology**

One of the premises of this dissertation is to depict trans embodiment as formed and shaped within the intersecting social worlds of violence and intimacy in which natal family members, state officials, medical and juridical authorities, property owners, and LGBTQI friends are main actors. Here, as I examine trans people’s bodily experience and their embodiment to discuss their everyday subjective material reality, I also find it important to reflect on my own body and embodiment in the fieldwork. To do that, I avoid those understandings of the body that reduce it to a mere passive instrument, and instead, deploy a phenomenological approach.

The publication of Marcel Mauss’ *Techniques of the Body* in 1934 represented a pioneering step in placing the body at the center of cultural analysis. As he asserts, “The body is man’s [sic] first and most natural instrument” (1973:74). Despite the explicit instrumentalism of the body in his approach, Mauss introduced the concept of “the techniques of the body” to analyze bodily actions—such as eating, washing, running, sitting, child-rearing, and sexual activity—to demonstrate aspects of embodied knowledge specific to culture and the social. In this respect, bodily practice can be deemed a meaning-ascribing power.

Mauss’s approach to cultural analysis constituted the beginning of a long-term (and still ongoing) dialog between phenomenology and anthropological theory. Phenomenology provides a framework to delineate our actions as sources of knowledge production about the world. In this respect, intensions, feelings, and emotions that we manifest through our bodily techniques take a
worldly and material form, so phenomenology postulates a cogent way out of the Cartesian duality (the strict separation of mind from body and elevation of the former over the latter). As Michael Jackson (1983:329) points out, this split and hierarchization led the human body to be made into “an object of understanding, or an instrument of the rational mind, a kind of vehicle for the expression of a reified social rationality”. In this view, the body becomes something that is not mind, “implicitly defined as unruly, disruptive, in need of direction and judgment,” and thus something “nonhistorical, naturalistic, organicist, passive, a connection with animality and nature that needs to be overcome” (Grosz 1994:3).

Elizabeth Grosz also underscores the traces of Cartesianism in contemporary conceptualizations of the body, first, as an object for natural sciences that has instrumental functions and is merely a physical thing (especially in medical settings); second, as an instrument, tool or machine that is interpreted via metaphors (as something possessed, property, something that can be appropriated—for example, by the patriarchal system of universal male right); and third, as a signifying medium, a vehicle for expression that the subject can use to express her or his interiority (with tattoos, jewelry as well as clothes, etc.) (Grosz 1994:9). All these formulations have a tendency to negate the body as passive or unproductive, an objectifying approach invoked by the state’s medico-legal institutional configurations and representations of trans bodies. Trans people’s bodies are objectified in many ways, including—especially—through state violence, in the form of police policies and behaviour on the streets (Chapter 4), for example, or measures taken related to the sex reassignment process (Chapter 5).

The goal of this dissertation, however, is not only to examine the state’s instrumentalizing and objectifying medico-legal processes with regard to trans people’s bodies, but also to contest this reductionist approach, siting its ethnography in the reclaiming of
corporeality from inanimate, passive, or static representations. From a phenomenological perspective, the body is never secondary to mind (on the contrary, the mind is always embodied). Phenomenologically, the body represents our subjective material reality, that which mediates people’s “being-in-the-world” (Merleau-Ponty 2002). Following Merleau-Ponty, I approach social reality as a bodily process.

For Maurice Merleau-Ponty, one’s body immediately apprehends the ongoing situation. He sees the body as “the vehicle of being in the world” and to have a body means “to be interwoven in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and be continually committed to them” (Merleau-Ponty 2002 [1945]:94). Our bodies might be objects for others, but they are at the same a lived reality for ourselves, as subject. But “it is never simply object nor simply subject,” as Grosz explains Merleau-Ponty’s thinking, since the body “is defined by its relations with objects and in turn defines these objects as such—it is ‘sense-bestowing’ and ‘form-giving’, providing a structure, organization, and ground within which objects are to be situated and against which the body-subject is positioned” (Grosz 1994:87).

How one relates (oneself) to the world in general dynamically filters and is filtered by subjective perceptions of everyday life. Everyday perception thus becomes the main concern. One’s body skilfully copes within the constant flow of sensory experience to gain its optimum grip on the situation. We become conscious of the world through the medium of our bodies in the realm of the physical: “things are the prolongation of my body and my body is the prolongation of the world, through it the world surrounds me” (Merleau-Ponty 1968:255). Hence, the body itself is the very maker of the subjective material reality.

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14 The flip side to the dumbing of the body, as it may be dubbed, being the dematerialization of the mental (thus Western philosophy’s “mind/body problem”).
From this perspective, if I am to approach my fieldwork experience and its subsequent textual products as part of my subjective material reality, then it is possible (and also necessary) to describe the entire ethnographic research as an account of the researcher’s embodiment. Attempting to avoid the production of a problematic distinction between the disembodied researcher and the embodied informant through my writing, it is incumbent on me to consider how my body was constantly interpreted, read, and attributed certain meanings beside and among trans bodies, and how these dynamics shaped my sense of my body and fieldwork as an embodied process.

On one of my first fieldwork days, Sedef, Ece, Esra (my key trans women informants from Istanbul LGBTT) and I were preparing to go home after a long session when they asked me to walk with them until Taksim Square (where I was to take the bus home). It was a Friday evening, which meant people from all over the city would be arriving, making for the center for the night’s entertainment. Ece and I walked together with Esra and Sedef following behind. Then, Ece took my arm. In Turkey, taking someone’s arm is a common sign of intimacy, and I was surprised to find myself being drawn into this physical contact so quickly. As we walked along the street arms held tight, I began to ask some questions, addressing her as “Duygu,” the name with which she had introduced herself when we first met. She made a face and said, “Don’t call me ‘Duygu’ anymore; my real name is ‘Ece’! ‘Duygu’ is my sex-worker name.”

Drawn into this intimacy and walking with the three trans women sensitized me to the heaviness of the gaze and the questioning looks at our bodies. It was my first experience of exposure to such intense scrutiny coming from all different directions on the street. Growing up in Turkey as a young woman had familiarized me with a particular style of harassing heterosexual male gaze in public life, but this was strange, more intense. The looks were sexual
as much as judgmental, causing a powerful sense of bodily self-consciousness as I walked, a feeling of limitation and confinement made by being stared at. The words of another trans friend resonated in my mind:

You feel at ease nowhere! You feel comfortable at home, but you become bashful outside. As if you are a beast passing near them. You see how they move their shoulders, mouths and heads to signal each other to mark you. This attitude destroys a person psychologically. Yet they don’t understand that we are living under the same sky and breathing the same air. They don’t know that we’re human, too.

The word ‘human’ stuck in my mind. Were they judging something about gacıs’ humanness? Were they judging me because I was walking with three trans women? The intensity of the gaze began to annoy me, but Ece just smiled and told me to ignore it. She had had to develop a thick skin herself to endure such looks.

Gaze—or stare—is an important aspect of cultural and social life in Turkey. As a woman—let alone as a trans woman—I have neither become used to it nor entirely normalized it. Its diminishing and restricting power can reach the level of sexual assault, focusing on particular body parts and attacking our sense of our own bodies. People also direct strong looks generally in judgement of other people’s physical appearance, bodily features, and dress codes. Indeed, everyday life can become quite violently intimate through this distribution of sexual gaze.¹⁵

Looking at people is culturally learned and can function as a disciplinary and/or punitive phenomenological tool that organizes social life, gender roles, and sexuality in particular. Unless

¹⁵ In Toronto, one of the first cultural differences I noticed was the absence of this particular sexual gaze in public life. Even when people find themselves looking at each other on the street, they often smile at each other to convey, as several of my non-Western (and non-Turkish) friends in Toronto have suggested, the message that “I am not a threat to you.”
one fits into the norm (or even when or because one fits the norm as a young woman), one feels the strong presence of these piercing looks as one navigates public spaces either in urban or rural settings. The gaze can be a form of investigation directed at a stranger entering a communal space (enclosed or open, like an urban neighbourhood or small village). Or, inversely, young women can be trained to shy away from looking men in the eyes as it might be interpreted as giving consent to sexual intimacy. Associated gender conventions tend to socialize women and girls into not looking in the eye of the authoritarian male figures such as the father, husband, male state officials, or older men in general. These modes and meanings of looking require us to stress the organization of everyday cultural and social life in Turkey and its strong phenomenological character, which functions on various power differentials of sex-gender, age, class, and ethnicity.

As indicated, the accounts of bodily experience, or embodiment, in this dissertation are not exclusive to my informants. Just as I had become aware of my own physicality next to trans women on the street in Taksim, so also were there times at the center when the materiality of my body was met with bemusement or questioned. For instance, one day when I was in Istanbul LGBTT (Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transsexual-Transgender) and chatting with the gacıs on a late winter afternoon, Yelda and Christine arrived. They were both in their early 40s and I had never seen them before. In contrast to the casual style of the gacıs at Istanbul LGBTT, Yelda and Christine were well-presented, the difference in their incomes and life styles readily apparent from their brand-name clothes and high-heel shoes; their makeup was meticulous, their long blonde-dyed hair carefully combed, their skin smooth and glowing with good health.

Yelda sat next to me; I was the only person in the room she did not know. Eventually, she turned to me and started a casual conversation. We were soon chatting about American TV
programs screened on Turkish TV channels, including the series *Nip-Tuck, Six Feet Under* and *Dexter*, for which Yelda and I discovered we shared a common taste. She was also into movies and started to recommend American independent cinema and gave me the names of her all-time favourite American actors and actresses. Our chat about transnational pop-culture continued almost an hour, and we fell into silence. Then, out of blue she asked me if I had had my operation. I was surprised and a little bewildered, but then perplexed her with my negative response.

“So do you still have it?” she asked, pointing my genitals with her eyes. This time I could not help myself, and, laughing, said, “I never had it! I was born with a female body!”

Now, she was puzzled. After a few seconds silence, she started making various kinds of explanations. First, she said how it was rare to see a *hasgacı* (real woman) visiting the center or spending time with trans women. Then she said I had bigger hands than an average woman, so she thought I was a tranny. Also she said she found my interaction and closeness with other people in the room quite surprising. According to her, if I were a “normal woman,” I would have been less relaxed and comfortable chatting with trans women. I could see that she was embarrassed, offering these explanations one after another to make up for her mistake—while I, on the other hand, was amused and trying to show I was not at all hurt or offended. Then she wanted to compliment me.

“It’s too bad! I was going to ask you where you had your surgery, because it seemed a perfect job!”

I laughed again and thanked her. Later on during my time at Istanbul LGBTT, this story caused even more mirth and merriment and circulated among the gacıs. And when anyone
wanted to emphasize that I was one of them in terms of my politics, they also brought up this issue to tease me.

“You even look like one of us.”

**Methodology and the “Entry” to the Field**

As mentioned, the findings in this dissertation are based on ethnographic research with queer and transgender people living in Istanbul in 2009–12. In Istanbul, I exclusively focused on the district of Beyoğlu, as it is a concentrated place for trans lives. However, my focus on Beyoğlu does not mean that there are no other districts in Istanbul where trans people live or work. On the contrary, Istanbul is an old and complex, yet vast and growing metropolis (of some fourteen million people according to the 2012 census). Trans people do have other places to live and work. None, however, are as concentrated as Beyoğlu, for the reasons detailed in Chapter 3 regarding the specificities of its sexual history and current culture of tolerance for sexual diversity.

In the years before and after I did my main, ten-month fieldwork (in 2009–10), I also spent two summers for preliminary and follow-up fieldwork purposes, in 2007 and 2011 respectively. My project was located across several research sites, ranging from transgender people's homes and neighborhoods to the cafes, bars and streets they frequented. I attended events such as parties, funerals, conferences, meetings and political campaigns for sexual rights and against hate crimes; conducted interviews with transgender people, lawyers, consultants, doctors, and social and NGO workers; gathered legal codes and documents on sex reassignment surgeries, issuance of new ID cards and transgender killings; and collected official and historical
documents, newspapers, blog articles and novels about sexually marginalized, particularly transgender, people in Turkey. I employed participant observation and in-depth and semi-structured interviews, in addition to drawing from general conversation. I did participant observation at the 2008-established trans and queer center, Istanbul LGBTT and at the center for sex workers, Kadın Kapısı (Women’s Gate), set up by the Human Resource Development Foundation (İnsan Kaynağını Geliştirme Vakfı, IKGV) in 1995.

Related to the original aims of IKGV, the initial purpose of the Kadın Kapısı center was to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS, among sex workers. Later, in 2005, Kadın Kapısı made some organizational changes and became a sex worker support/advocacy NGO. In addition to providing sex workers with health services and educational programs about sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, it also provides legal consultation and struggled for sex workers’ rights and working conditions. It is, at the same time, a safe place for sex workers to socialize; therefore, unregistered sex workers, including female, male, and trans sex workers, frequent the center.

Besides Istanbul LGBTT and Kadın Kapısı, I also spent time with other LGBTQI organizations and feminist associations, and participated in the everyday life of LGBTQI individuals at parties, public parks, cafes, sex-worker venues, in local streets and squares, and private homes. I conducted in-depth interviews with fourteen trans women, four trans men and seven service providers (individual professionals, including social workers, doctors, lawyers, and therapists and counsellors).

Most of my trans women informants were either ex-sex workers or still doing sex work. Since I met all the trans women informants through Istanbul LGBTT, they were more or less engaged with LGBTQI politics and mostly identified as trans activists. Most of the trans women
informants were financially marginalized and disconnected from their natal families, although some of the elder trans women did have their own houses, which they had bought when they were younger and earning a lot of money from their sex work.

Of the four trans men informants, three were trans activists; as opposed to the trans women’s situations, they all still had connections with their birth families. I met them through my friends at Lambda. My non-trans informants were also part of the larger political queer scene in Istanbul, associated with either of the two LGBTQI organizations or else independent queer activists.

It was in October 2009 when I arrived back in Istanbul from two years of PhD studies at the University of Toronto, to live and research a full year in the city. My interest in trans gender issues had originally emerged during my master’s research on female sex workers at Boğazici (Bosphorous) University in Istanbul in 2005–7 out of issues arising from the differences among various sex worker groups. Now, back in Istanbul, it was not easy to get hold of my former sex worker informants as they were all gone, and though I had already attempted to develop contacts with female, male, and trans sex workers, my first three months of fieldwork passed quickly with little luck in reaching different sex worker groups. Then, one of my friends, Alper, helped me contact Sevda and Esra from Istanbul LGBTT. Alper was also a PhD student, in Sweden, and about to return to Linkoping. He was helping the Istanbul LGBTT.gcaisi to write a project proposal to receive funds from a European NGO for the organization of the first Trans Pride in Turkey in June 2010. He introduced me to the.gcaisi and I took over the proposal. Thanks to Alper, therefore, I entered Istanbul LGBTT as someone offering practical help and was met with trust and a positive attitude, and started visiting the organization every day.
Istanbul LGBTT is in a tiny room on the fifth floor of an old, dilapidated building on a side street parallel to Istiklal, one of the most popular and crowded streets in Istanbul. The street was packed with small restaurants and bars mostly frequented by university students, corner stores, coffee houses, cheap hotels and billiard spots. There was no sign of Istanbul LGBTT unless someone lifted his or her head to see a rainbow flag waving out of a window on the gray five-storey building. The building looked cramped between the other blocs on the street. Upon stepping in its dark and damp entrance, the smell of paint thinner would hit one in the face. The odour came from the shoe workshop on the second floor, where, each time I climbed to the Istanbul LGBTT room, I saw two young men in their late-20s making shoes for local shops.

On the first floor, there was the tea-maker, who served the storeowners and workers in the neighbourhood. He had an eight-year-old daughter, Ceylan, who worked for him. Once in a while, when we ran out of tea at the center, gacısı would order tea from this tea maker and he would usually send his daughter to bring tea for us. I remember being impressed by the tea maker’s lack of prejudice with regard to having his daughter interact with trans women, as usually people in society would behave otherwise, trying to “protect” their children from such interactions. The gacısı would show lots of affection to Ceylan, who was a rather shy and sweet girl.

As an association, Istanbul LGBTT was surviving on informal donations collected from its members, most of whom were trans women, and trying to attract all trans people from different parts of the city. During the time I spent at Istanbul LGBTT, apart from a small number of gay and trans men, it was older trans women who most frequented the organization. These people treat the center as a drop-in community space and feel like it is a home. One of the main concerns for the center was the difficulty of attracting trans people there. Since most of the gacısı
worked as sex workers, they would go to bed early in the morning and not wake up until the late hours in the afternoon. In other words, their everyday life flows in a different temporality than much of society.

I spent most of my fieldwork time at this association, chatting with trans people, helping organize their events and protests, communicating with other political organizations via phone calls and emails, translating English materials and conversations, witnessing quarrels and break-ups with other individuals and groups and among themselves, listening to their gossip, observing moments of solidarity, love, friendship, care, compassion, and of jealousy, enmity, fight, aggression, hate.

Esra, Sedef, Sevda and Ece formed the core group of the organization. We developed good friendships, and they became my key informants. Esra and Sedef were the main founders of Istanbul LGBTT, and before Istanbul LGBTT, they had laboured in several political organizations, including Lambda. Their separation from Lambda and the discussions that followed had taken place in tense and confrontational terms (see Chapter 2), leaving both groups somewhat estranged for a long time after. As soon as I stepped in the queer social world in Istanbul, I found myself trying to untangle the history and dynamics of these long-lasting dissensions and discords that immediately plunged me into an intricate social world of intense gossip, not to say internecine conflict.

At times, I had to hide the fact that I had friends from Lambda and was engaged in some other collaborative political work with them. If discovered to have some close connections in Lambda, I might have been grouped with some others who visited Istanbul LGBTT and tried to make peace between them and Lambda; those people trying to keep good relations with both groups were never trusted. Negotiating these conflicts or those with other LGBTQI groups or the
tensions internal to Istanbul LGBTI, I tried my best to stay neutral, which sometimes worked, sometimes not. The changing relations dynamics would place me in various positions: sometimes I would be a suspect of some sort, while at other times I would be a close friend supporting the cause. Fortunately, the discord subsided towards the very end of my fieldwork, by which time, I had already managed to disclose my Lambda connection.

Mapping of the Dissertation

My dissertation is organized into eight chapters, including Introduction and Conclusion. Chapter 2 gives an overview of the historical salience of ‘the intimate’ in the politics of the Turkish state, and demonstrate its links to the dominant gender/sexual norms and values in sociocultural life. In an attempt to contextualize the gendered conditions of a trans life in the country, this chapter further shows the strong influence of a dichotomous sex/gender model on public and private life in Turkey.

Chapter 3 begins with introducing my readers to the queer history of Beyoğlu to contextualize the contemporary spatial conditions of trans lives in Istanbul, and then continues with exploring trans people’s everyday experiences of spatial discrimination, marginalization and displacement by a range of institutional (i.e. the police) and non-institutional (i.e. capital owners, landlords, neighbours, etc.) actors within this environment. I argue that trans women’s constant displacement and forced mobility can be understood, in fact, as a form of emplacement, constituting new modes of sociality.

Building on spatial tactics and regulations of the state, Chapter 4 investigates other effective forms of violence that substantially shape trans people’s lives. I engage in a theoretical discussion
of violence, and unpack it as an analytical category by deploying ethnographic data regarding trans people’s past and present violent experience with the police. Focusing on the simultaneous exercise of legal and extralegal, governmental and sovereign forms of police violence, I elaborate on the forms of violent intimacies constituted between trans people and the police, embodying the state power.

The violent proximity and intimacy between the state and trans people’s bodies becomes clearer through my discussion on the medico-legal construction, regulation and control of “transsexuality” and sex reassignment, the topic of Chapter 5. For a trans person, to change their ID from blue to pink or vice versa is significant, as it ultimately denotes the official recognition of their sex and influences their everyday life in several institutional settings (e.g. school, work, hospital etc.). However, they have to complete specific medico-legal steps to attain this status by modifying their body and searching for ways to prove their “true” sexual identity. A group of institutional actors, including medical and legal authorities, evaluates the “truth” of trans people’s sexual identity. This evaluation process opens trans people’s bodies to various practices of violence, including the formation of specific forms of touch between the medico-legal actors and the trans body. I detail the entire sex reassignment process as a site to scrutinize how the Turkish state, through its medico-legal techniques and actors, “gets intimate” with trans people’s bodies.

Chapter 6 continues with the inscription of trans lives, bodies and queer desires into the domain of law through the deaths of trans people. Specifically, I look at the court cases of targeted killings of trans people, and how trans people respond to the unjust conditions of their everyday lives by organizing around these trans killings and mobilizing the discourse of “hate crimes,” a category of crime that has not yet passed into the Turkish criminal law. LGBTQI people, through their campaigns and demonstrations, hold the state responsible for these killings, since the state’s
security forces and judicial institutions have shown little interest in finding or punishing the criminals, turning a blind eye to the deaths. Moreover, even when perpetrators are brought to courts, Turkish criminal law takes a role in cultivating a culture of impunity, which fails to develop effective sanctions against perpetrators, often reducing the culprit’s sentence. Hence, cases of trans killings signify a crucial site to explore the relationship between law and justice within the context of LGBTQI politics by investigating how Turkish criminal law and the ways it is implemented represent a significant source of injustice in the lives of trans people. Such an investigation in this chapter allows me to further discuss how the calculations of justice in the form of law are products of indispensible foreclosures of specific desires, sexualities and bodies, thus simultaneously producing and shaping unjust lives.

The last chapter before Conclusion, turns to the damaged intimacies between trans people and their natal families. Abandonment by the birth family is a common experience among numerous trans people in Turkey. This abandonment shows itself not only when trans people are alive, but also when they die. In this chapter, I discuss family as one of the most contested intimate sites in trans people’s lives, of which definition gains specific meanings based on queer alignments other than biological ties. I look at how trans people in particular, and LGBTQI community in general, re-claim the intimate familial space abandoned by trans people’s natal family members, replacing the functional and emotional role of the family, transforming their friendship network into “queer” familial ties, and announcing themselves as the “real” family.
CHAPTER 2

ATTACHING “PUBLIC” TO “PRIVATE”:

INTIMATE LIFE, GENDER AND SEXUALITY

The Turkish state focus on intimate domains of everyday life and projects of the good life has been salient since the introduction of the modernization project during the late Ottoman Empire. When the Turkish Republic was established from the ashes of the Empire in 1923, the focus on nation-making was equated to the construction of the new, civic man/woman and the making of the modern family and its well-being. The person and the family ranked among the primary targeted domains for the state politics in its implementation of the modernization projects. Becoming a modern subject was conditioned in the transformations of the individual, focusing, for example, on her/his attire, and in the family, instrumentalizing the nuclear unit in the state’s production of modern subjects (Aytac 2007).

Since the establishment of the Republic, acting, feeling, being, identifying as “modern” has been strongly linked to a nationally shared domestic intimacy that has been proved, among other things, by how people married each other and how they lived their domestic space (Ozyurek 2004). ¹⁶ Consequently, public redefinition of the ideal model of the Turkish national subject has

¹⁶ Özyürek’s (2004) ethnography is based on two photographic exhibitions: first, “Family Albums,” organized by the state, featuring a display of official wedding ceremony photos since the foundation of the Republic; and second, “To Create a Citizen,” organized by a private bank, showing photos of “modern” Turkish people in their domestic lives.
been associated with how people live their intimacies in private spaces. In other words, the terrain of “off stage” (Shryock 2004)—that is, the relations and activities of the private space—produce and even stage social identities before they are shown publicly. What emerged as a consequence of this was a whole set of projects to produce norms and develop new ideals of domesticity in relation to the modernization project.

The transformation of intimacy in everyday family life in modern Turkey and the organization of domestic space according to notions of European modernity was crucially informed by considerations of gender and sexuality, producing “modern” gender roles along with the heterosexual control of female sexuality at the intersection of the new and the old. The state made women’s lives and bodies the chief site of such “modern” aspirations by promoting the new Republican woman and the display of her body in public life. Breaking with the Ottoman past and its Islamic identity, the state drew on projects of modernization, which actually meant a secularizing Westernization (or Europeanization), a willingness, preference, and active choice “to borrow institutions, ideas, and manners from the West” (Göle 1996:11). These projects marked women and their bodies as the bearers of Westernization and as carriers of secularization (Kandiyoti 1987; Tekeli 1988; Sirman 2000, 2002), “remaking” them through new ideas and practices considered “modern” along with European definitions of modernity (Abu-Lughod 1998).

In accordance with the will to modernize the nation through women, a set of legal codes and regulations were put into effect subsequent to the establishment of the Republic: the veil was removed in 1924; education was made mandatory for girls as well as boys in 1924; “Sharia,” the Islamic law, was abolished, and the Swiss Code was adopted instead in 1926, banning polygamy
and granting women equal rights in cases of divorce, child custody and employment; and finally, women were granted suffrage and political rights, such as eligibility for political offices in 1934.

Behind these regulations, there lay a marked attention to increasing the public visibility of women and forming women’s citizenship in the new Turkish nation-state. However, as discussed by some scholars, these legal regulations represented the values of the relatively small group of women from an urban, middle class background, implicating the role of these in determining the model of woman to represent the modern nation (White 2003b). Women who embraced older customs and wore headscarves or more modest clothes were deemed traditional, primitive, and peasant-like. It was the urbane that was valorized, and expressed in a “women’s rights” discourse as one segment of the cultural dimension of “Atatürk’s Reforms” (Atatürk Devrimleri).¹⁷

The emphasis on cultivating the ideal, modern, middle-class feminine identity revealed itself also, and more clearly, it may be argued, in the domain of education. The state opened educational “Girls’ Institutions” (Kız Enstitüleri) to introduce new notions of domesticity and educate girls in the notions of bourgeois home-making. Until they lost their popularity in 1970s, these institutions were spaces for the state to produce “educated housewives,” who were taught skills in every aspect of domestic life, namely, tailoring, nursery, drawing, cooking, house management, sanitation, fashions, cleaning, furnishing and decoration, and laundry work (Akşit 2005; Gök 2007; Yenal 2007).

¹⁷ Essentially, this was a first-wave feminist body of state legislation that granted power to women within the context of the development of the Westernizing patriarchy (and thus, far from making any claims that might challenge this [the patriarchy], was actually a part of it [the Westernization], one aspect of the transition [to the “modern” form]).
According to Yeşim Arat (1997:100), a scholar well-known for her studies on the role of women in the Turkish modernization process, the state encouragement of women worked at two levels: elite women were motivated to participate in public life as professionals, while “other” women were expected train as modern housewives who would organize and manage the domestic space in correspondence with those norms deemed modern, that is, “order,” “discipline,” and “rationality” (see also Navaro-Yashin 2000). What was sanctified was not only a meticulous organization of domestic space, but also a careful cultivation of new perceptions and practices of cooking and eating, which eventually became significant markers of middle-class status and cultural taste (Yenal 2007).

This new subject, the *citizen woman*, was a product of state-sponsored feminism, that which defined the ideal, modern Turkish woman and the norms under which women could be accepted into public life. She was supposed to be urbanized, emancipated, and active in public life, but loyal to her family and the nation, so self-sacrificing, and thus modest, chaste, and, ultimately, devoid of sexuality (Kandiyoti 1987; Ilkkaracan & Ronge 2008; Sancar 2012). Hence, whereas women’s public identity was largely defined in relation to the family and what they did in the domestic space (Durakbasa 1998; Sirman 2002), their sexuality was implicitly conceived of as a threat to public order and morality and associated with men’s honour (Ilkkaracan & Ronge 2008). Women were encouraged to take off their veils, but to wear “an invisible veil,” since citizen woman was expected to “master the complicated art of covering her sexuality” (Ilkkaracan 2008:44). This way, rather than disappearing, customary norms, laws and discourses found new translations in the discourse of modernization, even in its expression as that to which women were supposed to aspire (when typically they did not or could not). The vanguard of social reform as applied to the female, therefore, still held to the traditional notions of *namus* (honour) and *haya* (shame), as related to *ırz* (purity) and *ıffet* (chastity), and the
associated müstehcenlik (obscenity) in its organization of the not so new public morality (Ilkkaracan 2008).

Men, on the other hand, whose masculinity had been shaped through their subjection to the rule of the father within an extended kinship network in the Ottoman household structure, were freed from this and made equal to one another under the Republican government (Sirman 2007). As Nükhet Sirman eloquently argues, within this new, modern gender regime, the father as a sovereign to several households united through kinship ties was exchanged for the husband as sovereign to his nuclear family. Thus women, although announced as the equals of men in public life as enfranchised citizens of the Republic, in fact remained unequal and subjected to their husbands’ authority in their private lives.

Mandatory military service became the most effective apparatus to realize the new understanding of gender by granting heterosexual men an equal share of the nation-state sovereignty—even if they did not share the same stake in this—on condition that they submit to the state rule of military discipline (Açıksöz 2012). The strong and exclusive role of the military-nation formula in shaping the modern Turkish hegemonic masculinity came to find expression in the saying “All Turks are born soldiers” (Her Türk asker doğar), thus naturalizing the convention of conscription (Altinay & Bora 2002:142).

Excluding females and the feminine, the Turkish military enabled heterosexual, able-bodied male citizens to represent the nation-state through fraternal links and a sense of superiority over women. To this day, the military has continued as one of the most prominent

18 Military service also functioned in the state’s “civilizing mission” to make citizens (Turks) of its rural (male) mass, by detaching them from their villages for two years and teaching them how to read and write. For further discussion, see Altinay (2004) and Ewing (2008).
domains for the production of gendered life in Turkey, particularly that of hegemonic masculinity (Açıksöz 2012).

Based on this historical account, the next section provides a detailed description of the dominant gender roles and norms in contemporary Turkey, and their relation to family life. The aim here is not to produce universal claims on the performance of gender roles and norms, but rather to establish the socio-cultural context and underscore the widely observed and fairly ubiquitous gender patterns and roles at work—or performed (Butler 1990)—in everyday life. It is an overview of the hegemonic ideas and discourses operative generally and in this case about what it means to be a woman and man, as well as a trans person—the individuals, that is, who have to tackle and negotiate these gender roles in their everyday lives.

Notions of hegemonic masculinity and dominant femininity are closely tied to the processes, desires and practices of family-making, and the state’s investments in this intimate domain. A general perspective of the dominant gender roles and norms should thus serve to provide a more comprehensive social and cultural background so as to grasp what it means to be a trans person, the gendered conditions of a trans life are in Turkey, and the kind of gender dichotomies that are at stake in the oppression of trans lives.

**Gender Relations in Turkey**

“Hegemonic masculinity,” now a popular concept in gender studies, was first introduced by Raewyn Connell (1987) to analyze the gender hierarchy between men and women, as well as hierarchies within masculinity. The term underscores masculinity as a heterogeneous concept, drawing attention to the role of other relations of power based on ethnicity, race, class, sexuality,
and religion in establishing a hierarchy of masculinities in a society. Within this hierarchy a particular definition of masculinity tends to become dominant, subordinating others.

According to this conceptual framework, it is possible to define the present hegemonic masculinity in Turkey as: heterosexual, authoritarian, conservative, culturally Muslim, and middle to high-class—to which might be added: Turkish (as an ethnic self-identification), west Anatolian (rather than eastern), and light-skinned (rather than dark). An ideal Turkish man is expected to be an obedient son to the father, and deeply devoted to his mother (Kandiyoti 1987; Helvacioğlu 2006), as well as to prove himself as a risk taker, assertive, warrior, courageous and fearless.\(^{19}\)

As is usual in patriarchal regimes, Turkish boys/men are discouraged throughout their lives from overtly displaying emotions that are considered stereotypically ‘feminine,’ and hence weak, including pity, fear, sadness and compassion, and are motivated instead to express emotions considered to be representative of strength, such as aggression and outrage. Similarly developed, male bonding is ubiquitous and strongly expressed (e.g., physically). Protectiveness and possessiveness, which can take both financial and cultural forms, are also significant aspects of hegemonic masculinity. A constant play of vigilance and willingness to claim and protect, as well as sacrifice for family, kin, community, and flag and nation is essential.

\(^{19}\) The founding father (sic) and iconic symbol of the nation, Atatürk embodied most all of these characteristics and qualities. Although there was also a significant streak of feminine strength running through in his personal life, since his father died when he was eight years old, and, later, Mustafa Kemal did not command his high-class wife, Latife Uşaklıgil—they divorced after less than two years—this did not necessarily undermine his hegemonic credentials (especially since his patronage [sic] as step-father or protector of a total of ten children gained him a [modernistic] family patriarch status.)
There are several developmental stages and rites of passage marking the journey from boyhood to manhood for the male to show himself to himself and others as a strong, resilient, and rational member of society. In order to transform into a member of the Turkish hegemonic masculine world, a male should register the following practices and rituals: circumcision, educational achievement, joining the soccer culture, and military service, before getting a proper job, marrying, having children, and having an active and directing role in sexual relations (see Bereket and Adam 2006). His performance in these sites shapes the public opinion of his masculinity in private and public environments. Hence, he has to cultivate and prove his masculinity to receive public approval.

Circumcision (performed during childhood, but unfixed) is celebrated and the boy feted (and by extension his father, and the rest of the family) with a circumcision ceremony (sünnet töreni). Circumcisions are ritualised family gatherings to rival weddings in family/social importance, with the boy, dressed in cape, crown, and sceptre, being showered in displays of love and affection, along with presents. Educational expectations are higher of boys insofar, as girls on average attend educational institutions for fewer years (e.g. approximately 80% of illiteracy is female). Identification with contact sports is similar to that in many parts of the world, but particularly pronounced (e.g. serving as a standardized organizer of classroom friendships).

Regarding compulsory military service, the sense of superiority over female citizens in their relation to the state awarded to men through this practice (above) is also granted them through sexual and gendered investments in its teachings and objects. For example, within the

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disciplinary space of the Turkish military, the strong signifiers of the soldier’s honour are the nation and the gun, connoting a man’s mother and wife/girlfriend respectively (Başaran 2007). This is not just metaphorical: soldiers are literally commanded to name their guns after their girlfriends or wives, supposedly leading to the affective possession and protection of their guns. By means of this militaristic displacement, a man’s gun signifies his honour (which resides in the female—see below). In that sense, compulsory military service functions as a primary site for the production of hegemonic masculinity (Altinay 2004; Biricik 2008).

Completion of the draft also serves to reproduce hegemonic masculinity insofar as a man becomes a proper candidate for marriage only after having received his discharge certificate from the army. Likewise, he is promoted to the level of preferred candidate in the job market. Since compulsory military service lasts several months (currently, six to twelve), employers tend to refrain from employing workers whom they can expect to lose. Families think similarly, as they do not want their daughters to be left alone, while their husbands work for the nation. And for both, there is the unspoken idea that a youth only becomes a man through his military service.

Once men accomplish their duty as soldiers, they become socially eligible to be the heads of their own families (aile reisi) and superiors over their wives. Outside the private space of their homes, they are invited to identify with the state and allowed control over women’s bodies and sexuality, especially through honour (Altinay 2004:80). Among the cultural and social values that Turkish men are required to defend, it is honour that lies at the center.

Anthropologically identified as a cultural norm (ethical code) of Middle Eastern patriarchy, the honour code is regarded as representative of social relations (Herzfeld 1988) and an organizer of power relations not only between men and women, but also among men and
other men (Sirman 1998) through its establishment of strong links with female sexuality and social hierarchy (Abu-Lughod 1986). In Turkey, the dominant gender regimes sanction men to compete with each other in terms of their capacities to protect their honour. Mostly affiliated with the sexuality of the female members of his family (e.g. wife, sister, mother), a man’s honour thus represents the male possession of female sexuality; it is one of the fundamental relations of everyday life that produces and organizes gender-based inequality. In order to demonstrate their masculinity, men may defend their honour by controlling the sexuality and bodies of their female kin, by violence and, ultimately, murder (see Chapter 6).21

Women live under constant familial and social pressure to be sexually modest and chaste and to have their first sexual intercourse when they get married (Delaney 1991). Any act that might defy such rules and norms would cause a “stain on the honour” (namusunu kirletmek/namusuna leke sürmek) of the man in particular and the family in general, bringing shame to all.22 Hence, men typically and normatively see the honour code as their reference point to perform dominant masculine roles and to justify their regulation of female sexuality in public and private life.23

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21 E.g., monthly figures recorded 25 women as killed by men in December, 2013. At http://www.bianet.org/bianet/erkek-siddeti

22 Shame being what is antithetically gained when honour is lost—and that which motivates recovery of honour (e.g., through female-directed violence). The name “honour” code, therefore, stands as shorthand referencing the system of social relations specified by an honour-shame ethic.

23 Not to risk overgeneralized statements, I should underline the wide variations, between urban and rural environments, for example, as well as between smaller and mega-urban settings. Even in mega-urban areas like Istanbul, class, religious and other differences among social groups and in different urban districts significantly shape how women (are expected/permittted to) display their sexuality and bodies in public. For example, while overt and active forms of female sexuality may be easily sanctioned in a more lower class or conservative neighborhood in Istanbul, the same public visibility may be welcomed in fancy or elite neighborhoods. For further discussion on the relationship between public female sexuality and the spatial organization of urban life in Turkey, see Zengin (2009).
Yet it is important to note that not only active and “illegitimate” female sexuality, but also same sex relations among men can damage men’s and especially family honour. Ahmet Yildiz’s murder in 2008, for instance, became known as the first gay honour killing in Turkey. A 26-year old Kurdish gay man and university student, Ahmet was shot and killed on the street in front of his apartment in Istanbul. The murder case still remains unsolved, but his father is the primary suspect. As this incident indicates, what constitutes honour is not the female per se, but illegitimate feminized sexuality. A stereotypical public view on gay men in Turkey would associate them with femininity and being “soft” (yumuşak), people who are not man enough. Hence, in Ahmet’s case, his openly gay life feminized him in his family’s eyes, breaching the norms of hegemonic masculinity, and thus staining his family honour and bringing the punishment of death.

Since the feminine is socio-culturally devalued and substantially diminished, women gain significance and worth as complementary to men, an understanding that assigns particular gender roles and duties to men and to women to be performed in their public and private lives. Most obviously, they are expected to complete each other within the constraints of marriage. For females growing up, menarche is socially invisible, and even though they may have wide access to education and the world of work, the discourses of chastity, domesticity, reproductivity, and moral purity position them as “women,” expected to realize their selves first and foremost as proper wives and mothers (Kandiyoti 1987; Sirman 1989). Tying women’s social recognition to their reproductive capacities and the domain of family, this marginalizes other forms of existences and possible lives that lie outside of this realm. Even though large urban environments do, in fact, provide people with alternative forms of intimate relationships and opportunities for non-marital sex, the general conservative texture of social life mostly disapproves and prohibits
intimate affairs outside the marriage boundaries. That is, family functions as the condition of women’s social recognition, and marriage as the totality of their (recognized) sexual experience.

Home space is widely considered a product of female labour—proverbially, “The female bird makes the nest” (*Yuvayi disi kus yapar*)—and female labour is concentrated on the home. Although urban migration and the neoliberal capitalist dynamic of the last thirty years in particular has led to increased numbers of women being formerly employed (as opposed to working on family farms), even official female unemployment figures remain a third higher than those of men. In this space, both biological and household reproduction represents a significant dimension in the making the family, becoming strict criteria up to which women are expected to live to be considered respectable (White 2003a; 2004). Married couples without children expect to face social pressure to give birth, not only from their extended family members, but also friends, neighbours, and other social actors. Usually, it is women who bear the prejudice or pressure of infertility. The lives of both singles (divorced or bachelor) and married couples without children tend to be regarded as defective or deficient, or as lives not quite lived in terms of their sexual legibility (Berlant 2011). For working women, there is a reasonably robust system of state benefit (maternity leave) to support the new mother, but which does not extend to men (as paternity leave).

A significant part of family-making is tied to women’s care-work. Caregiving, as a feminized form of labour, concerns not only the nuclear family members, but also, especially in the context of a little developed social welfare system, the elderly members of the extended family, such as grandparents, and gran-aunts/–uncles (Kandiyoti 1987; Marcus 1992; White

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24 Men 8.4%, women 11.0% (2013). http://countryeconomy.com/unemployment/turkey
Women are also expected to organize the domestic space and take care of everyday domestic chores, unless the family is upper or upper-middle class (when domestic service providers are paid to cope with the everyday domestic work).

The Turkish Family Structure and Sexuality

The dominant family model in Turkey is the nuclear family based on heterosexual marriage between consenting adults. The initial feminist work on critical family studies drew attention to an understanding of the family as a domain for the reproduction of gender inequality (Rowbotham 1973), and conceptualized it as the “linchpin” of women’s substantive inequality (Okin 1989). They also underlined that, contrary to common belief, the family is not a private, autonomous and intimate space of consensus among its members (Rapp et al. 1979). In contemporary Turkey, the processes, desires, discourses and practices of family-making and how families are lived in everyday life are shaped by the production of gender roles and inequality, and vice versa. The desire for a nuclear family is cultivated carefully from an early age, socializing boys and girls into specific gender roles. In most cases, and notwithstanding the importance of military service for males, it is marriage that transforms boys and girls into women and men as members of the society (White 2004), attributing to them greater maturity and seriousness and making them more respectable in the eyes of family members, neighbours,

25 As a corrective to the general linkage of the formation of the nuclear family to the establishment of the Turkish Republic, in late 19th century Istanbul households, according to Duben and Behar (1991), the nuclear family was prevalent, and extended families were concentrated mainly among people with means (and there was also a high ratio of single-woman households). Today, extended family units are still quite common in the countryside (home to a fifth of the population, nationally), as are extended family living arrangements (such as multiple households in the same apartment block) in urban areas. These considerations mitigate rather than challenge the dominance of the nuclear family model in contemporary Turkey.
employers, landlords and institutional actors. Married people tend to find it easier to rent apartments, for example, and may be more likely be given employment.

Family life and family-making largely determine how sexuality, read as female sexuality, is supposed to be lived according to the honour code. The organization of law is also shaped by the same code, working as a mechanism to regulate women’s sexuality and effectively attaching them to the demands of family, men, and the state. For instance, until recently, sexual crimes like rape, abduction or sexual abuse against women were legally categorized under “Crimes Against Society” and specifically under the subsection of Crimes Against Traditions of Morality and Family Order (Adab-ı Umumiye ve Nizam-ı Aile), rather than violations against individuals. In September 2004, the Turkish Penal Code was finally reformed removing all reference to women’s virginity, chastity, morality, or honour and recognizing women’s autonomy over their bodies and sexuality.

This achievement was made possible by dedicated feminist activism that started in the early 1980s and, for the first time in Turkish public life, politicized the issues of domestic violence, rape, and incest in the family, and sexual liberation. In 2002, feminists initiated the campaign for the Reform of the Turkish Penal Code from a Gender Perspective (Kadın Bakış Açısından Türk Ceza Kanunu Kampanyası). This campaign focused on virginity testing26 and

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26 According to the Turkish Penal Code, virginity tests can be demanded by the prosecutor in cases of rape, prostitution, or extramarital intercourse. However, the routine examination practice goes far beyond this, extending also to female subjects who are political detainees, girls in state-run dormitories, orphanages and/or girls in high school. Marking women’s purity as an emblem of family honour, virginity tests also operate as an institutional surveillance mechanism through which the state preoccupies itself with the modesty of its national female subjects and the production of decency and public morality. For a more detailed analysis of how virginity is persistently emphasized in law, and how the Turkish state creates a national order on the basis of women’s modesty, see Ayşe Parla (2001).
honour crimes, rather than directly referring to women’s autonomy over their sexuality. The campaign not only mobilized debate on particular public discourses around the construction of female sexuality as a familial asset located at the intersection of shame and honour, but also drew attention to how the state itself acted as one of the most significant promoters of this construction through its law-making and enforcement processes.

While an honour-and-shame focused approach informs the background sexual politics of the Turkish state, it is not sufficient for analysis of the current conditions of non-normative sexualities in Turkey and the state’s role in shaping them. For this, it is necessary to focus on contemporary politics and the new turn taken by Turkish state policies with regard to the intimate and sexual lives of its citizens since 2002, when the neo-conservative AKP won the elections and formed its majority government. To date, the AKP has enjoyed three consecutive terms in power, and it has been notably invested in intimate and sexual politics via an increased number of policies regarding the family and its role in the organization of social life. The next section introduces the recent government ventures into the personal lives of its citizens, and their consequent exclusions and reductions of intimate possibilities.

**Intimate Impositions of a Neo-Conservative Life**

On December 28, 2011, a Turkish drone-strike killed 34 Kurdish civilians, mostly teenagers from Uludere (Robozke), a village on the Turkish side of the Turkish-Iraqi border near Syria.

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27 “Honor killing” is mostly referred to as the killing of a woman by her family members or intimate partners who denounce her sexual behavior.

28 “Robozke” is the locally used, Kurdish name, “Uludere” the official, Turkish-language name.
These young men, who provided for their families by smuggling cigarettes and diesel fuel from across the border, were allegedly mistaken for terrorists and killed in what was labeled an accident. Up to present day, the Turkish government has taken no responsibility for this massacre—indeed, a recent military investigation rejecting any need for further military inquiry (since the attack was carried out under a ministerial order) described it as an “unavoidable accident” (kaçınılmaz hata). In the weeks following the bombing, in order to avert the intensifying gaze of public attention, the Prime Minister used the familiar tactic of deflection by introducing an alternative debate into the public discourse. In this case, it was abortion.

It was toward the end of May, 2012, at the Fifth International Conference on Population and Development (held in Istanbul), that Prime Minister Erdogan expressed his desire for a young and dynamic population and his demand for a minimum of three children from each family. And it was in this speech also that he stressed his firm stance against caesarean delivery and declared abortion to be “murder.” Despite the negative reactions he received subsequent to this speech—abortion had generally not been a hot issue in Turkish politics (see below)—two days later, Erdogan made the following controversial statement: “Each abortion is an Uludere” (Her kürtaj bir Uludere’dir). With this wordplay, he strategically acknowledged the massacre by projecting it onto women. In this way, a “mistaken” massacre could be expressed not as an explicit violent act of the colonial Turkish state in the Kurdish region, but rather as women’s violent act to their embryos in their wombs.

29 Report by Military Prosecutor Ali Mujdat Eski, quoted in Radikal newspaper, 8 January., 2014. The case can be expected to eventually make its way to the European court of Human Rights.

30 http://www.turkhaberler.net/siyaset/kurtaj-cinayet-dedi-en-az-3-cocuk-istedi.htm

31 For the full speech (in Turkish), see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmdT9niLf4I
Using Uludere as a signifier and abortion as the signified, Erdogan’s semiotics conjured a shift in the location of the debate from Kurds and the Kurdish borderland bombed by Turkish drones to women and their wombs cut open by the surgeon’s knife. It was a neat trick, politically audacious, as astonishing as it was appalling. The signification transference effectively afforded massacre a new sexual and intimate content. With this new semantic coding, massacre became officially communicable as abortion, and abortion as massacre. State terror was equated with an individual act and new limits drawn to intimately speak (or unspeak) about military massacres through the bodies, reproductivity, and sex lives of women.

Equating the death of 34 Kurdish youth to the “death” of an unborn child, Erdogan’s discursive translation of state terror into a denunciation of women’s reproductive decisions caused a public outcry. Thousands of feminists and women went to the street to protest. Yet, rather than take a step back, Erdogan’s government only further raised the tension with the explanations of the Ministers of Health, and of Family and Social Policy. Supporting their leader, these ministers advocated a ban on abortion even in cases of rape and advised women to kill themselves rather than their unborn babies (Berber 2012).

Until the summer of 2012, abortion had not been an issue at the state level.\textsuperscript{32} However, that summer, one leading (male) official after another set the stage for public displays of misogyny, overtly equating women’s lives with their reproductive capacities. Encouraging raped

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{32} Since its legalization in 1983, abortion had been relatively accessible to women (depending on their social and economic background), albeit tied to certain conditions. Prior to that it had been illegal, and women suffered disability problems due to forced miscarriages and illegal abortion. See Gürsoy (1996) and Kaoomerlioglu (2012).}
women to deliver their babies, the Minister of Health pledged that these babies would be looked after by the state.33

This was the same government that had earlier banned reproduction for trans people and ordered the removal of their reproductive organs in case they demanded recognition of their sex from the state (Chapter 5). This juxtaposition of reproduction rights and duties (the emphasis on women’s duty and denial of tans rights) provides a stark illustration of specific government attitudes; more generally, these discourses and practices of reproductivity allow the state to attain “an ever more invasive presence at the core of lived and social and corporeal worlds” (Mueggler 2001:9).

Under the AKP government, the state’s reproductive policies have taken a turn that stresses family life as well as specifying who has the right to participate in this familial domain (by defining who does not). The state’s hegemonic discourse on family and family life, corresponding with the cultivation of religious youth, brought new interventions in the organization of everyday life, which also served in implementing neoliberal reforms and regulations that mainly depend on cheap and flexible labour in sectors ranging from construction and transportation to education and tourism. The litany and extent of intrusions in and restrictions on people’s private and everyday activities and habits has gradually increased since the AKP 2007 election victory for a third time in office under Erdoğan’s increasingly extreme and intolerant leadership (c.f. the Uludere-abortion rhetoric). The direction toward which this tendency has taken the country thus also contextualizes this dissertation as a study in the

33 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZ23sGO81Sk the current strength of female opposition and feminist resistance to the AKP government thus has clear and specific roots in women’s issues (e.g., that half, rather than the more usual minority of protestors at Gezi were female was not just due to its origin in an environmental issue).
contraction of trans space under an authoritarian administration. While serving to exemplify the possibilities under autocratic regimes, it also serves, I contend, to throw into relief the less dramatic leanings of more liberal and pluralistic patriarchal state forms, of apparently open and “modern” societies.

Everyday life in Turkey has changed rather relentlessly over recent years through a raft of government measures and locally enforced directives embracing more conservative norms and values. In addition to those mentioned above, these have included new regulations on alcohol consumption and sale, promotions for women to be the primary caregiver in the family, prohibitions of single-person apartments as part of construction plans, introduction of more religious courses specifically on Sunni Islam into the elementary and high school curricula, enforced removal of two passengers who were kissing each other on public transport, and investigations of student apartments where female and male students reside together. In other words, there was an escalation of state involvement in popular concerns related to how people drink, kiss, entertain themselves, what kind of homes they can have, and with whom they live (among others).

At the state level, these restrictions find patriarchal and misogynistic tones in Erdogan’s speeches. As eloquently noted by Zeynep Korkman and Can Açiksöz (2013), Erdogan scolds, orders, forbids, domineers, and pressures his “subjects” as if he were the husband, brother or father to each of them: like a husband, he demands children; like a father, he supports an alcohol ban; and like a brother, he rats on his sister for hanging out with men. As a general trait, Erdogan

35 http://www.demokrathaber.net/genclik/otobuste-opusme-eylemi-h1805.html
embodies specific notions of hegemonic masculinity to secure an authoritarian political style. His stubborn, aggressive, and rigid attitude provides him with a culturally convenient masculine stance, which helps him imagine the entire nation as a grand family and himself as the head of this household.

Of course it is not always rebuke, exacerbation, furiousness, intolerance, and prohibition, but also love that shapes Erdogan’s manners. Portraying a man of authority yet protection, of aggression yet compassion, of intolerance yet faith, and of prohibition yet risk-taking, Erdogan performs his political leadership like his gender through a combination of hegemonic values of conservative and tough masculinity. Since he first came to power, he has effectively used the discourse of love (particularly of nation) as a communalizing political speech form:

My brothers/sisters we are in love with you, we are in love with this nation...

We are sufferers, we are in love with this nation, we are lovesick...

We are a political group tied to this country with love.\(^{36}\)

The paternalistic father/husband/brother figure this time finds his expression not in rebukes or anger but in a patronizing love, which claims to know the best for the nation, in other words, “his family.” Needless to say, the love of this new father of the nation is based on certain conditions, namely, people’s obedience and respect for his rules and expectations.

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The underlying logic behind such discourses and masculine performances is a particular understanding of the family in Turkey, and its place at the heart of state politics. In fact, state actors and discourses frequently utter the phrase, “The Turkish family structure and morality.” The AKP government has carried this discourse a step further through newly introduced state projects that declare family-making and family life as the engine of society. For example, with the initiation of “To Be A Family” (Aile Olmak), a project designed by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, the Turkish government plans to reflect the “sensitivities” of the traditional Turkish family in, for example, the construction, garment, transport, and entertainment industries. At the launch of the program, Erdoğan addressed unmarried citizens with a message underlining the importance of the coupling of men and women as the perpetuation of human kind.

The notion of family structure emphasized in these official discourses has a particular content: heterosexual, reproductive and based on the economies of care (for extended as well as nuclear family members). According to this perspective, lives beyond the limits of the family structure are deemed valueless, thus deserving no possible share from state protection or distribution of resources. Official discourse, while privileging the discourse of family, denies recognition to other people unless they represent themselves in familial terms. As the example of queer family-making shows, this family structure has strong effects on trans people’s lives and forecloses several intimate possibilities for them (Chapter 5).

A life oriented around familial norms has been a long-term state project for legal regulations, and sexuality has always played a crucial role in the legal promotions of a social life

37 http://www.kaosgl.com/sayfa.php?id=14355
based on family. To list a few examples of recent developments: in 2004, the government attempted to modify the Turkish Penal Code by re-legalizing adultery (zina) as a crime as part of the legal package in progress; in 2008, the PM initiated the three-children discourse; in 2010, shortly after the issuance of a circular on equal opportunities for men and women, Erdoğan explicitly stated that he did not believe in gender equality; the Ministry of Women and Family, founded in 1991, was renamed as the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, erasing women’s status as specific subjects for state concern; and intermediary mechanisms and local state actors (including bureaus attached to the Presidency of Religion Affairs) were introduced to prevent divorces from taking place and convince couples to remain married and protect family life.38

Examining this trend through a study of common sex-gender related social values, a Turkey-wide research project on “Conservatism in Turkey: Family, Sexuality and Religion” has found that conservation of the institution of the family is considered more important than that of the state, nation, or religion; and that from a list of “non-normative sexual practices” that of “homosexuals” (eşcinsel) is regarded as having the most disturbing lifestyle, followed by couples having extramarital affairs and living together, men wearing earrings, women wearing immodest clothes and exposing their body, and youths flirting with each other (Yilmaz 2012:39).

People in Turkey are not passive recipients of these state-sponsored lifestyle projects. In addition to liberal opposition, there has been an increasing feminist and queer backlash against the organization of social and everyday life within the strict confines of the family. Both of these groups reject the government’s insistence on recognizing women as part of the family rather than

38 http://bianet.org/bianet/toplumsal-cinsiyet/144197-tek-mesru-yasam-aile-degil
as individuals, and have called on the state to recognize other forms of living arrangements, households, or networks of solidarity besides the heterosexual nuclear family model.

So what does it mean to be a (self-identifying) LGBTQI person in this socio-cultural environment of increasingly oppressive life so dominated by the heterosexual, reproductive, nuclear family convention? What do LGBTQI people do in the face of such a gender and family normative framework? How do these factors shape their perspectives and everyday living conditions? What identities, political positions and social relations, as well as intimacies become possible, or impossible?

A Short Story of LGBTQI Politics in Turkey

The emergence of organizational efforts around LGBTQI\(^{39}\) rights in Turkey dates back to the early 1990s with the foundation of the Istanbul-based \textit{Lambdaistanbul} and the Ankara-based \textit{Kaos GL}, in 1993 and ’94, respectively. While 1996 proved to be a key year in terms of organizational visibility, with Kaos GL emerging into the public sphere rather differently than Lambda, it was not until the mid-2000s that these organizations gained their official status.

In Istanbul, LGBT people used to organize regular gatherings in several places, including clubs and cafes. In 1993, \textit{Club Prive} was one of those places, used regularly for three months until police pressure caused them to leave for others in various spots in town, where, as Lambda, they held weekly meetings. In Ankara, lesbians and gays used to gather in their private homes to

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\(^{39}\) The LGBTQI activism in Turkey first named itself “LGBT” activism, and has added the last two letters (Q=queers, I=intersex) to its name within the past few years. I prefer to deploy “LGBTQI” as a general political category for the sake of terminological consistency throughout my dissertation, but in this section, I keep “LGBT” intact to point out the historically specific terminological circulations.
have long night conversations, where they would express, among other things, their keenness to organize “gay prides” in Turkey similar to those that took place abroad.

Swinging between lack of hope in ever organizing a gay pride in a country like Turkey and the deep motivation to do something for LGBT people, Kaos GL decided to publish a journal to reach out to as many LGBT people as possible (Kaos GL members today still emphasize the role of journals and newspapers in shaping their first steps into organized LGBTQI politics in Turkey). First, in 1994, the group rented a mailbox and widely announced the first call for submissions to Kaos GL. Upon the circulation of the call in a progressive leftist magazine, Express, they received more responses than they expected, allowing them to publish more than one issue. So, as they described on their website, the first public voice they made as lesbians, gays, and anti-heterosexuals, was not a whisper; on the contrary, it was a scream.

When 1996 arrived, Lambda’s activities in Istanbul were to reach out to LGBT people across the city. Lambda also printed its first publication, two issues of a bulletin named 100 de 100 Gey ve Lezbiyen (100 percent Gay and Lesbian), delivered by being placed in the Kaos GL issues circulated in Istanbul or distributed in cafes and bars frequented by LGBT people. When preparing for its first organized public activity in 1996, Lambda invited local, national and

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40 Thus: “Call to Gays, Lesbians, and Anti-Heterosexuals: If you think that you are alone, you are wrong. We existed and exist in each social group and space. Yet not with our own identity, but the one that was presented to and imposed on us by heterosexism, the one that defined us. Hasn’t the time arrived to change these identities? We’ve taken the first step and rented a mailbox. Our goal is both to establish a network of communication and to meet with those who want to walk with us in the future. Write your concerns, emotions, and problems, as well as how you can contribute personally. Who do we have to trust except each other?” (Kaos GL 1994)

41 http://www.kaosgldernegi.org/belge.php?id=tarihce
international figures, including intellectuals, artists, representatives of LGBT organizations, and deputies from abroad, to participate in a series of events. The governorship of Istanbul ruled to prohibit the events the day before they started. Following the cancellation, the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights decided to add “homosexuals” to its reports on Turkey\(^\text{42}\) (below).

Meanwhile, the first gay and lesbian radio program on *Açık Radyo* (Open Radio) began streaming regularly on Sundays between midnight and one a.m., which lasted for a year and a half. This occurred during the organization of the United Nations Habitat II Conference, preparations for which included increasing police violence and pressure against trans people living in the streets close to the conference venue (Chapter 3). At the Habitat conference venue, Lambda organized a table together with IKGV, a pioneering NGO established in 1988 researching and developing intervention programs around marginalized sexuality, HIV/AIDS, sex work and sex trafficking in the context of urban migration.\(^\text{43}\) As I earlier mentioned, one of my field sites, Kadın Kapısı was a center initiated by IKGV (below).

Due to the Lambda and IKGV table at Habitat, the LGBT organization gained visibility in the local media. They used this to release a press statement drawing attention to the police violence being used in the ongoing displacement of trans women; then organizing under the Lambda banner, they mobilized various local and international actors individuals and institutions to visit trans women’s neighbourhoods to and protest against the police violence and the violation of the women’s rights.


\(^{43}\) [http://www.ikgv.org/index1_en.html](http://www.ikgv.org/index1_en.html)
In July 1996, the first gay pride event took place when, back in operation as a queer meeting place, Club Prive hosted a night event called “PRIDE” (ONUR). In the years that followed, this expanded to include talks, panels, and movie screenings, gaining its current status as an annual event. Two years later, in 1998, the first nationwide LGBT gathering took place, attended by Lambda, Kaos GL, Sappho ‘nun Kızları (Sappho’s Girls), Bursa Spartaküs (Bursa Spartacus)\(^{44}\) and Almanya Türk Gay (Germany Turkish Gay); these meetings continued at six-monthly intervals until 2004. Besides organizing these meetings, the groups listed took a lead role in organizing social events such as dinners, picnics, movie screenings, and parties to bring LGBT people together and create a space for bonding, communication, and discussion.

These activities went into the 2000s at an increasing pace and growing attendance. The rainbow flag made its first wide public appearance on May 1, 2002, when LGBT people marched under the banner of the “No to War Platform” (Savaşı Hayır Platformu) against the impending US war in Iraq. With its strong ties to the transnational political arena and discourses, this demonstration established both LGBT visibility and the slogans chanted, such as, “Question your homophobia” (Homofobini sorgula), “Forced heterosexuality is a crime against humanity” (Zorunlu heteroseksüellik insanlık suçudur), and “Homosexual rights are human rights” (Eşcinsel hakkı, insan hakkıdır), all having clear connections to international discourses of human rights. Towards the end of the same year, Lambda participated in another mass demo against the war in Iraq, this time with its own banner reading Lambdaistanbul HOMOSEXUAL Civil Society Initiative (Lambdaistanbul EŞCİNSEL Sivil Toplum Girişimi). Until 2006, Lambda did a lot of organizing work at universities, conferences, in the streets, and in venues which made

\(^{44}\) Bursa is Turkey’s fourth biggest city.
it possible for the organization to develop more permanent relations, communication, and collaborative work with other political organizations, particularly with feminist and non-governmental organizations working on human rights issues.

The human rights discourse has been widely analyzed as one of the pillars of globalization. There is a vast scholarship on the relationship between the processes of globalization and queer sexualities. Some of this scholarship, referring to “global queering” (Altman 1996) or the “Gay International” (Massad 2002), has taken globalization to be responsible for producing and proliferating gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and transsexual identities in various non-Western locales. These scholars see local LGBT identities as derivatives of Western sexual categories or discourses of sexuality, introduced into locales in a top-down manner and begetting new LGBT subjects, while contaminating or even effacing the “authentic” or “indigenous” queer beings and same-sex practices or subcultures.

However, as Arjun Appadurai explains, “globalization is … a deeply historical, uneven and even localizing process. Globalization does not necessarily or frequently imply homogenization or Americanization” (1996:17; emphasis original). In other words, globalization can produce new cultural differences, as well as cultural convergences. Moreover, these cross-cultural and long-distance encounters can also create zones of, what Anna Tsing calls, “friction,” that is, “the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference” (2005:4).

With regard to local non-normative sexualities, such frictions can occur in myriad settings, ranging from the nation-state’s reproductive policies to civil law, and from family life to the general heteronormative culture prevailing in everyday social life (Howe & Rigi 2009). To address such frictions, as well as the asymmetries of the globalization process, recent feminist and
queer scholarship promotes a transnational approach in order to understand the relations between the “local” (often understood as traditional) and the “global” (often understood as “Western”) (Anzaldúa 1987; Grewal & Caplan 1994, 2001; Povinelli & Chauncey 1999; Manalansan 2003; Nagar & Lock Swarr 2010).

Similar to the ethnographic research on queer worlds in non-Western contexts or in the global South (Howe 2002; Swarr & Nagar 2004; Boellstorff 2005; Rofel 2007; Tucker 2009; Dave 2012; Swarr 2012), the queer literature in Turkey engages with the transnational discourses of human rights and sexual identity, yet it is not totally ruled or determined by this. One should approach these processes also as part of larger transnational stories that intersect multiple competing projects within the national context, varying, for example, from neoliberal frameworks to attempts to join the European Union, and the “developing/emerging nation” context, with agendas of state modernization and the expansion of NGOs and the spread of human rights discourse, and more, of course, besides. It is no surprise that these global flows have influenced and shaped the lives of queer people, as profoundly as those of non-queers. The in- and outflow of global capital, labour, discourses, images, lifestyles and identities with the shift to neoliberalism in the early 1980s, the role of EU accession, and the human rights/NGO synergy with LGBT movements and organizations has been crucial in the development of groups like Lambda and Kaos GL in Turkey.

Parallel to the multiplicity of transnational stories, one should also follow Anna L. Tsing’s (2005) advice and turn the analytical lens to frictions in the intersections between the global and the local. The events around Lambda’s decision to establish itself as an official organization having created for itself a more public visibility and gained support from various political and social groups serves as a case in point. A week after its application to the
the governorship of Istanbul to be recognized as an official association, the governorship forwarded Lambda’s bylaws to the Ministry of Internal Affairs requesting a detailed investigation of its purpose and activities. Following the investigation, Lambda’s application was rejected on the grounds of its being against the law and morality, and as defying the 41st Article of the Constitution, “The family is the foundation of Turkish society and relies on equality between spouses” (Aile, Türk toplumunun temelidir ve eşler arasında eşitliğe dayanır). Both the name “Lambda” and the organizational objectives were found to be offensive to the Turkish morals and family structure: Lambda was to be closed.

Upon Lambda’s objection, Istanbul Governor’s Office took the case to the courts. Although the legal decision was appealed and the legal expert opinion declared there to be no breach of the law with regard to Lambda’s activities or organization, the lower (local) court again ordered the closure of Lambda, and on similar grounds of transgressing Turkish family norms and values. The detailed ruling stated that the patriarchal family model prevails in Turkish society and the family is a sacred institution. The decision also emphasized the importance of kinship ties and religious or moral rules in social life, and continued its justification by suggesting that the women and men who have the particular sexual orientation in question were few in numbers and their political demands a recent phenomenon. The verdict, moreover, stated that these demands emerged more in urban than rural settings. Given the noted reasons, the court decision found the composition of Lambda to represent values and norms that stood against morality and decency, thus upholding values and norms that are widely disapproved by almost the entire society.45

At the end of a controversial, two-year long legal struggle, in 2008 the Supreme Court rejected the lower court’s decision to close Lambda, entitling Lambda an official status as a legitimate association. Yet the Supreme Court decision also reserved the right to close Lambda in case of its involvement in any activities that “promote homosexuality” (eşcinselliği teşvik ettiği takdirde) or were against public morality and decency in the closing verdict. The ruling had no explanation as to the meaning intended by “promoting homosexuality” or what was considered by violating public morality and decency. If operating in the public domain and becoming visible to struggle for LGBT rights is associated with “promoting homosexuality,” then it can only be stated that Lambda has been organizing such activities since this court case and faced no threat of closure so far.

The “T” of LGBTQI: Trans people

The majority of the trans people organized under the banner of Lambda until 2008 were trans women. Indeed, transgender politics in Turkey was primarily characterized by the demands and struggle of trans women until very recently. It is only in the last few years that trans men have emerged as political actors in the transgender activist scene. This relative late arrival was accompanied, in the beginning, with some trans women’s perception of trans men as unfamiliar and odd. I remember hearing some of the transgender women reacting to the slogans including the word “trans man” at the LGBT pride in Istanbul in 2010, unable at first to make sense of the term.

Trans men gained more visibility and recognition within the queer movement in Istanbul with the 2007 establishment of the Voltrans Initiative by three trans men. One of the founders
was Ali, whose story opened this dissertation. Ali, who had also been a long-time activist in the feminist and LGBTQI movement prior to Voltrans, dedicated the last years of his life to fighting against transphobia in general, and struggling for the betterment of trans men’s lives in particular. Regarding the confusion or non-recognition of trans men as an identity in the LGBTQI movement, in 2009 he commented as follows:

When one says ‘trans,’ the first person that comes to mind is usually a transsexual [transseksüel] woman. There might be two reasons for this: first, our perception, second, society’s perception. Society disregards, looks down upon, and so torments trans women because they are women, and also they have “given upon their manhood.” Mainstream media demonstrates them as “monsters.” For me, trans women are the pioneering actors of the LGBT struggle. This issue of “visibility” is similar to the case of gay men, who are the first people to come to mind when one mentions “homosexuals” [eşcinsel, lit. same-sexual]. So, lesbians and bisexuals become invisible. Yet transsexual and transgender men are at the bottom of the list when visibility is at stake. There might be many reasons for that, including the values attributed to “manhood,” people’s preferences to not organize, thus remaining invisible, or the dominant misperception that tomboys [erkek fatmas] are relatively well-respected members of society, so trans men will have less trouble.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, trans women, who had previously organized under Lambda, decided to create a pro-transgender space and, in 2008, established a center, which they named Istanbul LGBTT. Although visited predominantly by trans women, Istanbul LGBTT was open to all queer people. During my fieldwork, gacıs (a local colloquial term for trans women, below) would talk about and criticize Lambda for being transphobic at various levels, ranging from the biased distribution of jobs in the association to the prioritization of problems on the LGBTQI political agenda. Hence, they found it necessary to create a space predominantly for trans

people. Parting from Lambda was a story of escalating tensions that had long existed between trans and non-trans people in urbanite queer world of Istanbul. I spent most of my fieldwork in the midst of these tensions and dissensions expressed in the (non-)relationship between Lambda and Istanbul LGBTT.

During the period of my research, Istanbul LGBTT was still a nascent organization, trying to raise funds to survive while working to prioritize trans people’s problems, their needs and concerns, as well as to publicize and increase awareness about the different forms of violence that they face. Trans killings and police violence were the two major issues, around which gacıs diverted their energies to organize demonstrations, protests, and legal work. Yet Istanbul LGBTT was more than merely a political organization, representing a home for the majority of my trans women informants.

To elaborate on this issue of home and home-making, and other spatial dynamics that shape trans people’s lives, sexualities, and political demands in Turkey, now I turn to the transgender (and queer) history of Beyoğlu, and discuss how spatial exclusion and marginalization and the resultant mobility of trans people, have been an important component of both past and present transgender lives and sexualities in Istanbul.
CHAPTER 3

DISPLACEMENT AS EMIPLACEMENT

It was one of those sunny, warm May afternoons. I left my apartment in the city centre neighbourhood of Beşiktaş to go to the Istanbul LGBTI centre in downtown Beyoğlu, a trip that I made almost every day during my fieldwork. It was a short bus ride to Beyoğlu’s central Taksim Square. The usual crowded, chaotic and noisy texture of the city prevailed even more so here. A young man was shouting out selling simits, a popular circular pastry with sesame seeds, that he carried on a tray above his head. Kids from around seven to twelve years old approached people to sell bottles of water cooled in their buckets filled with ice. People were running to catch their buses, and a group of men gazed at the scene from the sidewalk. Some of the bus drivers were chatting, puffing on their cigarettes, and would-be passengers looked exhausted from standing waiting for their bus. Cars were stacked in the traffic surrounding the square, blowing horns; people were crossing the street against the lights; suited business people walked with their black leather bags; some elderly ladies were sitting in their traditional outfits, trying to sell tissues to passers-by. Rushed steps, loud voices and laughter assailed me from all sides.

I walked towards Beyoğlu, leaving Taksim and Gezi Park, which backs onto the main square. Back then, the French-designed promenading park that backs onto the main square was still relatively unknown and invisible, even to the vast majority of Istanbul’s citizens, let alone to the rest of the world, where it was to gain an international reputation. In May 2013, when Gezi
faced the threat of demolition to make way for a retro Ottoman shopping centre and mosque complex as part of the urban transformation of the area, it shot to fame – or notoriety – as the central node for one of the largest people’s resistances in the history of Turkey, emerging as a counterpublic at both the national and international levels. Before that, however, Gezi and its surroundings was an overlooked area with a lower- or underclass status, a site for the families of janitors residing in the neighbourhood’s basement apartments and a clandestine, queer place, used as a blind hook-up spot.

Until the protests, Gezi’s visitors included the most financially deprived queers, young rent boys⁴⁷ and trans women selling sexual services, as well as gay men looking for casual sex and recent transgender and gay migrants to Istanbul, newcomers seeking connections with other queer people in the city. Especially late at night, unlicensed trans sex workers would emerge to publicly solicit on the main road alongside Gezi linking Taksim Square to Harbiye, Dolapdere and Kurtuluş, districts that had become popular among trans women over the last decade as places to live, as well as do sex work. However, an outsider to the area or to the informal sex economy would hardly have noticed the activities ongoing in the park. Nor, in fact, did many people even visit the park to rest and enjoy themselves. Of course, the character of the park has changed tremendously with Gezi protests, and these clandestine queer practices have been largely displaced. When the protests started, the LGBTQI presence was very visible, as the demolition of the park posed a significant threat to LGBTQI and sex workers’ lives.

Prioritization of capital flow, public morality and the politics of urban renewal have longed shaped LGBTQI people’s relation with city space. The possible destruction and transformation of Gezi were to epitomize yet another, similar story.

⁴⁷ For a detailed analysis of rent boys in Istanbul, see Özbay (2010).
Critical studies of social geography owe a great deal to Henri Lefebvre (1991)’s assertion that spaces and subjects mutually constitute and shape each other, that social relations and the locations of everyday life are tightly coupled, constantly co-producing and co-structuring each other. The production of urban space always also means the production of social relations (Lefebvre 2000; Massey 1994). Our actions and movements make and shape the spaces and places we live and work in, just as these spaces and places simultaneously mould us as particular subjects and inform our actions, interactions and identities (Brown et al. 2007). Sexuality is a part of this dynamic, and our geo-spatial relationships are structured by certain assumptions, norms and values of sexuality. As Gavin Brown et al. (2007: 4) argue, “sexuality—its regulation, norms, institutions, pleasures and desires—cannot be understood without understanding the spaces through which it is constituted, practiced and lived.” My goal with this chapter is to contribute to such discussions on the spatial production of sexuality by focusing on the spatial history of nonconforming sexual practices and gendered identities in Istanbul generally and trans women’s lives in particular.

In the history of Istanbul, Beyoğlu has always had a special relationship with sexuality, nonnormative sexual practises and subcultures. The majority of my trans interlocutors had lived and/or worked for varying lengths of time in specific neighbourhoods in and around the district of Beyoğlu. However, their relationship with Beyoğlu had also been significantly marked by their continuous displacement from their neighbourhoods by a variety of social, political and economic forces. Among these, the police force occupied a unique role, while their nonconforming gender identities and sexual practices tended to be used as an excuse to implement wider set of projects to transform and organize the city space into zones that attract capital, as well as comply with the dominant, heteronormative sexual values and associated morality. Hence, the past and present conditions of trans lives have been shaped by the spatial
production of sexual otherness and violence, and the combination of these has also paved the way for the violent destruction/production of violent urban spaces. This chapter, focusing on trans people’s individual recollections and collective narratives of a five-decade-long history of continuous displacement in the Beyoğlu area, discusses the role of nonnormative genders and sexualities in the politico-economic transformation and uneven distribution of urban space since the 1960s. However, I also want to further my discussion by elaborating on another dimension in trans people’s stories of displacement, that is, home-making in the midst of, and through constant displacement.

As one might expect, narrating personal and communal stories provides trans women with an opportunity to recount their experiences of social exclusion, marginalization, discrimination and routine state (police) violence. But, besides this, they carry another narrative value, one in which the past and present meanings of trans friendships, community, and politics describe a forced, ongoing mobility within particular districts of Istanbul that results, at the same time, in tales of trans home-making, in a localized human history of searching for and fashioning a neighbourhood space of their own. Mobility itself can be an important component of marginalized sexual identities, and construction of autonomy and forms of agency (see Wardlow 2006). In the words of Thiranagama (2011:5), I analyze the constant displacement also as a “ground of sociality, a new way of inhabiting the world,” in terms, that is, of establishing a spatial belonging, as emplacement.

Before discussing this, I want to complete my journey to the Istanbul LGBTT centre, continuing from Gezi through Beyoğlu. Thus we may navigate the present day district and become familiar with its social and cultural history, to contextualize the research.
Beyoğlu and the Vicinity

Leaving Gezi Park behind, I crossed Taksim Square to Istiklal Street, which marks the start of Beyoğlu and serves as its central reference point. The downtown crowds become even more intense as one steps into this famous pedestrian thoroughfare, and a streetcar runs from the top, at Taksim Square, down to the Galata, Pera and Asmalımescit neighbourhoods. This long, cobbled street and the intricate weave of alleys and side roads running off and alongside Istiklal is the pulsating, bustling hub of contemporary, popular and cultural life in Istanbul. Over the last decade, the degree of commercialization of the street and its environs has increased to an unprecedented level, with the transformation of its historical buildings into neoclassical fronts for shopping malls and hotels running parallel to the rising property prices, urban renewal projects and a gentrification both generalized and planned that began to displace marginalized and lower-income residents. Gezi’s planned demolition was, in fact, a part of these recent phenomena.

Among its many artistic, touristic, entertainment and other cultural functions, Beyoğlu is also the centre for political activities, housing the main centres of numerous political parties, associations and (e.g., human rights) NGOs. While walking down the Istiklal, therefore, it comes as no surprise to happen upon a political demonstration, march, press campaign or table placed for petitions. Most of these political events take place at the midpoint of the street, at an intersection of streets and intense human traffic that opens out into a small square in front of the French language Galatasaray High School. During my fieldwork, I spent a great deal time here, supporting protests and press campaigns against violence and hate crimes targeting LGBTQI people (see Chapter 6).

One never sees Istiklal Street quiet or empty, either late at night or early in the morning.
Having spent ten years in Istanbul, I had seen the street in many seasons at almost every single possible time of the day, but it was always wide awake. Life continues non-stop here, just with changing social actors at different times of the day and changing intensities.

![Istiklal Street](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/ba/Istiklal_busy_afternoon.JPG)

**Figure 3.1** Istiklal Street.

When one turns off the main street and enters the criss-crossing alleys and back streets, dilapidated structures meet the eye. Even though they look as if they receive no maintenance, many of them are historical buildings, beside which improvised constructions rose over the years to create an architectural collage. Once housing residential buildings, as well as shops and stores, these streets are now packed with cafes and restaurants, bars and clubs, offices and centres for political and other associations, and sweatshops and cheap hotels used for sex work. The

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48 Source: [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/ba/Istiklal_busy_afternoon.JPG](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/ba/Istiklal_busy_afternoon.JPG)
declining role of off-Istiklal as a residential area is mainly due to its popularity as a centre of nightlife and the accompanying noise level, but also as a centre for sex work and LGBTQI activities (parties, demos, gatherings, meetings, etc.). Even though low in number, there are still apartment buildings and rented rooms that attract sex workers, trans women, LGBTQI and also non-LGBTQI people and others leading “deviant” lives. Especially for trans women, sex workers or not, the area represents a focal habitat and survival zone due to its relatively welcoming and less violent social body. Sex workers also find the Beyoğlu area spatially convenient, since they can have their home here near the workspace.

In the vicinity of these streets also are higher-end neighbourhoods, areas that were gentrified in the mid-90s or are in the process of being so. Cihangir, for example, which lies along Sıraselviler Street, toward the Bosphorous from Istiklal, used to house trans women until their violent ejection by the police in the mid-90s as part of the gentrification of the area. Since the late 2000s, a similar process has been at work in the Tarlabası neighbourhood, on the opposite side of Istiklal (see map, Figure 3.2). Until recently, this was home to various marginalized populations, especially Roma people and displaced Kurds from Turkey’s southeast (Kurdistan region)\textsuperscript{49}—and trans women and sex workers.

\textsuperscript{49} Over three hundred thousand villages were emptied and part destroyed by the military as a strategy in its guerilla war with the PKK (mostly in the late 1990s), making over a million people homeless, a sizable number of whom migrated to Istanbul (Jongerden 2007).
Figure 3.2 – Map of Beyoğlu, showing İstiklal Street (red line) and local districts (circled); historically, the Beyoğlu area covers all these districts as far north as Tarlabası/Gezi and parts of Dolapdere, excluding Kurtuluş and Pangaltı.

In short, Beyoğlu has long been a major district for different forms of “otherness,” alongside and part-defining its character as a sexual, recreational and cultural centre. Hence, when I talk about Beyoğlu as my fieldwork site, I talk about a patchwork of neighbourhoods, together with the practices and encounters there between different “others” and “non-others” insofar as they touch
upon trans lives, contextualize their interactions and encounters and shape their subjectivities and their motions and mobility in the city.

History of Beyoğlu and its Sexual Subcultures

Beyoğlu is located on the European side of old Istanbul, which itself is divided by the Golden Horn into two zones that are socially, culturally and economically distinct from each other. Encompassing the famous districts of Eminönü, Eyüp, Süleymaniye, and Sultanahmet, the opposite side has been historically known as the heart of the sultanate and the traditional centre of the Ottoman Empire, with its distinguishing Ottoman architecture (including Topkapı Palace) and, historically, overtly Muslim lifestyle; Beyoğlu, in contrast, has represented a more Westernized, or “European,” part of the old city, with its distinctive style of architecture, recreational activities and residential history having grown out of links to the Italian trading cities.

Previously known as “Pera” (Greek, “across”) until the founding of the Turkish Republic, when the Turkish state expunged non-Turkish names as part of the nationalization process, central Beyoğlu still goes by its old name for some people (although “Grande Rue de Péra,” the original name for İstiklal before it was changed in 1927, is not used nowadays). Developing up the hill from the dockside activities at the Bosphorous and Golden Horn, the area has a residential history linked to the establishment of diplomatic embassies (Venetian, French, British and Danish), opened in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Büyükünal 2006:16). The Europeans who took up residence there were called Levants under the Ottoman Empire, while other Christian minorities, such as Rums (local people of Greek origin) and Armenians, as well
as Jews, also moved in.

Located next to Pera, Galata was the neighbourhood where these minorities were concentrated in large numbers. This area had been the centre of foreign trade since the Byzantium period, and it was mainly through the minority groups that it maintained its merchant character during the Ottoman Empire. Thus, Galata, together with Pera, also stood for a non-Muslim religious centre, with synagogues and churches in the region, associated with non-Muslim lifestyles for centuries. Pera was always identified as a higher-class area than Galata, a difference that has even been a subject in novels that talk about nightlife, prostitution and the culture of recreation in these two neighbourhoods at the end of the nineteenth and the start of the twentieth centuries. As Beyoğlu, it gradually grew into an attraction point for a “cosmopolitan” lifestyle, with a fashionable set combining with its multi-ethnic residents, and the opening of recreational activity places, such as bars, clubs, restaurants and theaters for the well-to-do, the construction of Art Deco hotels and European-designed apartment buildings and the establishment of schools with French, English, Italian and German education. A multi-lingual environment thus developed, as described in Giovanni Scognamillo’s (1990) A Levanten’s Memories of Beyoğlu (Bir Levanten’in Beyoğlu Anıları).

A Levanten film critic and author with an Italian background, Scognamillo has published widely about Istanbul and Beyoğlu. In Memories, he states that his family from two previous generations did not have to learn Turkish until their adulthood, when they started to do business, and describes Beyoğlu as the “safe zone” (kurtarılmış bölge) for non-Muslim communities (Scognamillo 1990:72). Indeed, Beyoğlu of the nineteenth century seems to have resembled a

typical European city, nothing about it was particularly “Turkish,” as stated by the French author Ubicini (1855:444, cited in Akın 2002:33). Levantens and other non-Muslim residents of the area, who were socially, economically and culturally distinct from the rest of Istanbul society, are described as composing the first bourgeois social group of the Ottoman society (Akın 2002; Büyükünal 2006).

At the same time, this same Beyoğlu became a hub for brothels, low-class cabarets, meyhanes, and hashish cafes. As opposed to the glamorous and flashy bourgeois life on the main street, the back streets and alley ways were claimed by the underclass and working class, those excluded by high culture and shunned by the bourgeoisie. Murderers, thieves, beggars and prostitutes were the main social actors of this backstage, with trash, mud, epidemics and dilapidated houses their props. Galata, in particular, had gained a reputation as the red-light district of Istanbul from Byzantine times (Scognamillo 1994; Bali 2008; Zarinebaf 2010; Wyers 2012). And in these neighbourhood brothels, one could not find Muslim prostitutes. In fact, under Ottoman rule, the state allowed prostitution as long as it was limited to red-light districts and non-Muslim areas; Muslim prostitutes were not officially permitted to work in these public brothels, their work sanctioned as providing sexual services only on the condition that this was for Muslim men in their own houses and private brothels (Zarinebaf 2010:87–90). Hence, the sex economy in Beyoğlu was mainly in the hands of Armenians, Greeks (Rums) and Jews.

51 Meyhane (from Persian, lit. “winehouse” [mey = wine, hane = house]): a traditional bar-restaurant, where alcoholic beverages (especially the aniseed raki) are served with side dishes (mezes).

52 These Muslim private brothels or Muslim prostitutes’ houses were documented in the districts of Aksaray, Kadıköy and Uskudar, on the Asian side of Istanbul, but prostitution there was under the charge of intermediary actors who controlled and operated these houses secretly; these houses were thus few and under strict surveillance (see Sevengil 1998 [1927]:145).
Historical research on prostitution in the nineteenth century Ottoman Empire emphasizes the Crimean War (1853–56) and Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78 as the periods of escalation in prostitution, particularly in Istanbul, as the war conditions left thousands dispossessed and caused an unprecedented rise in the number of refugees from the Balkans and the Caucuses, along with migrants from rural areas to Istanbul (Karpat 1985; Özbek 2010; Yetkin 2011; Wyers 2012). In the harsh economic conditions of the time, particularly having lost their male “guardians” (husbands, fathers, brothers, etc.) to the war, many women looked to survive by creating financial opportunities in the sex economy. This increase caused sexually transmitted diseases to spread across the city, resulting in the implementation of new measures by the Ottoman state in 1878 to regulate and tax brothels. According to these measures, the opening of brothels was tied to strict rules, and Muslim women were prohibited from working as licensed prostitutes.

Later, during the First World War, the number of prostitutes and prostitution houses increased on a massive scale, among both the non-Muslim and Muslim populations due to the war economy, widespread poverty and migration (Karakışla 2003; Toprak 1987). There is some agreement also that increase in prostitution in Beyoğlu at that time was due to the considerable involvement of White Russians in the sex trade (Toprak 1987:32). Towards the end of WWI, Istanbul was a popular destination for White Russians who migrated from Russia following the October Revolution in 1917. The White Russian presence and influence in Beyoğlu’s everyday life was strongly felt, specifically between 1920-24, a period which also overlaps with the British, French and Italian occupation of Istanbul (from 1918 to the end of the War of Independence and founding of the Republic of Turkey in 1923). During this short period, apparently, Taksim, Tarlabası, Galata and Pera were swarming with entertainment places and restaurants opened by White Russians, and the Istanbul nights were enlivened by special dance
and song shows, cabarets on the main roads, pavilions in the side streets and restaurant tables that would no longer fit into packed restaurants and so were placed outside on the pavements (Deleon 2002:29).

With the defeat of the occupying countries and the establishment of the Republic, official policies and reforms targeted the homogenization of the nation based on a Muslim Turkish identity, leading to a significant decline in Turkey’s non-Muslim populations. The 1927 census—taken in the aftermath of the “population exchange”, in which Muslims in Greece and Greeks in Turkey were forced to migrate and resettled in Turkey and Greece, respectively (although with the Greeks of Istanbul exempted)—showed minorities as composing 2.5% of the national population. Since then, the non-Muslim minority population has dropped drastically, from over 350,000 to 80–90,000 nationally, even while the population of Turkey as a whole has increased six-fold (Döşemeciyân et al. 2011). 53

As a consequence, Beyoğlu became considerably more “Turkified.” Its particular form of cosmopolitanism vanished as it was turned into “a national synthesis” in the 1930s to 50s (Özlü 1991:10). Thereafter, from the 1960s, socio-economically driven inter-regional and urban migration accelerated. With its relatively high level of infrastructure, services and facilities, and cultural, educational and, especially, employment opportunities, Istanbul became the country’s most common migrant destination. Hence, internal migrants combined with Turkish locals in gradually replacing Beyoğlu’s predominantly non-Muslim profile. This demographic shift brought provincial tastes to the neighbourhood. Now people could hear arabesk music rising

53 The decline resulted from several nationalist initiatives, including the “Citizen, speak Turkish!” (Vatandaş Türkçe konuş!) campaign from 1928, which placed pressure on non-Turkish speaking communities to speak Turkish in public (Aslan 2007), the imposition of a punitive Capital Tax (Varlık Vergisi) on wealthy non-Muslim groups in 1942 and the Istanbul Pogrom of 6–7 September, 1955 (aimed mostly at the Greeks).
from music stores instead of classical European and more contemporary American tunes, or they could eat traditional “Turkish” food, including various kinds of kebabs and *lahmacun*. The change in Beyoğlu’s cultural, social and economic profile led the Turkish intelligentsia to perceive it as “becoming rotten,” degenerated and deprived of its “true nature,” which, allegedly, had represented the heart of the modern, high-culture, elegance—in short, everything identified as Western (Kaptan 1988).

At the same time, different parts of Beyoğlu were regarded as already ghettoized and transformed into dens for sex work, the informal economy and the drug business, with Tarlabası, in particular, attracting attention over these issues. Thus, the 1960s witnessed constant police raids of bars, pavilions and hotels to “cleanse” Beyoğlu of prostitution and establish public morality (Scognamiglio 1994:110). The shutdown of two major, licensed red-light districts, along the Büyük Ziba and Abanoz streets, in 1954 and 1965 respectively, forced sex work onto the streets. At Abanoz had been established the first official Ottoman brothel (in 1884, ironically, as a response to the growing levels of sex business in the streets). This was also the street, I was informed, where trans women and gay men started to concentrate for the first time, later in 1960s.

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54 *Arabesk*, an Arab-influenced style of popular music, and *lahmacun*, a flatbread topped with minced meat, spices, etc., are both associated with the consumption habits of poorly educated urban migrants, considered low brow and non-modern by the committed national subjects of the Turkish state’s modernization (read also, Westernization) project. Martin Stokes (2010: 74) argues that *arabesk* discloses the inner Orient, a representation of traditional elements and the “Arabic” influence on culture that had been, and were, systematically repressed.


56 At least, that was the earliest date I was able to ascertain from my interviews with trans women over 50. If there was another place of concentrated trans existence in the area before Abanoz Street, it has, to my knowledge, gone unremarked (largely, of course, because of the historical invisibility and thus lack of reporting and research on LGBTQ people generally).
Beyoğlu and Abanoz in the 1960s and 70s

From here, the queer, and particularly the trans history of Beyoğlu is based on trans women’s accounts of oral history. One of the elderly trans women from whom I collected historical information about trans lives in Beyoğlu was Yeliz Anne (“anne” [pron. a-ne] being Turkish for mother, not the Christian name). The trans people, as well as the LGBTQI community at large, respect her as the most senior trans woman in Istanbul—hence the epithet, which they use to address her (see Chapter 7). Yeliz was born male-bodied in Adana, a southern city in Turkey, in 1943. I met her when she visited Istanbul LGBTI one day while I was there.

It was her hair colour that first struck my attention. Yeliz Anne entered the room with her tiny frame and platinum-blonde dyed hair no longer hiding the long, outgrown gray. Platinum-blonde is a hair color popularly associated with wanton and lascivious femininity in Turkey, and it is unusual to see women using it—extremely rare, indeed, on those over a certain age. The Turkish film industry has widely used this hair colour to signify stereotypical prostitute figures, classically, during the Yeşiļçam studio movie period of the 1960s and 70s. When she started speaking, I heard a deep, strong and rusty voice, most probably the result of long-time heavy smoking and drinking. As I got to know her, I found one could hardly convince her to stay in the same place longer than half an hour. She was extremely active, constantly moving around Beyoğlu, from one spot to another, but all our conversations took place at Istanbul LGBTI. Her accounts of Beyoğlu and particularly Abanoz Street were not only treasured but also crucial data,

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57 Essentially escapist melodramas, the Yeşiļçam movies tended to be grounded in social realism (from which contorted, rather fantastic plots developed, typically involving elements of illicit [extramarital] sexual relationships and underworld activities).
since most of my trans interlocutors were not old enough to have experienced those days. The
information supplied by her is supplemented here by interviews that she gave to local magazines
and newspapers.

In 1961, at eighteen years of age, Yeliz Anne ran away from Adana to come to Istanbul
because of the pressure and exclusion she faced from her family due to her nonconforming
gender appearance and behaviour. She described how she spent her adolescent years back in her
hometown feeling like a girl and watching the women working in the brothel next to her family’s
house. She heard about Beyoğlu, specifically Abanoz, for the first time from one of those sex
workers, with whom she had made friends. She recounted her sex worker friend’s words: “Go to
Beyoğlu in Istanbul! And when you go there, you should find Abanoz Street. People like you
hang out in those streets!” At that time, “people like you” did not only refer to trans women, but
also effeminate gay men (i.e., displaying gender roles and norms normatively attributed to
femininity). There was no particular conceptual separation of different queer identities, such as
“gay,” “transvestite” and “transsexual.” They were all lumped together and referred to mostly as
lubunya or sometimes as eşcinsel and ibne (Chapter 1). Occasionally, trans women would be
separated as a different group addressed as kadın kiliğndaki erkek (men in female attire), a
category now deployed by the police at times to criminalize trans women (Chapter 4). The
gacıs,58 including Yeliz Anne, reflected the then blurred lines between feminine gay men and
trans woman in their colloquial language by mostly using the word “lubunya.”59 Henceforth, I
use “gacı” in respect of my casual and informal conversations and interactions with trans

58 Colloquial referral for trans women in LGBTQ circles in Istanbul (Chapter 1).
59 The queer history in Turkey is far from unique in conflating gay men and trans women. Najmabadi (2013)
preseats an eloquent description of a similar dynamic in the context of Iran in 1970–79. See Najmabadi (2008, 2011,
2013) for further discussion on how the global flow of medico-legal discourses interact with local state discourses
and religious dynamics to shape the specific categories of gay and transgender in Iran.
women, and “lubunya” to address feminine gays and trans women together, as an undistinguished grouping.

Until the late 1960s, Yeliz Anne moved back and forth between Istanbul, Adana and Bursa. In these years, she explained, visible lubunyas were few in numbers, and even they were mostly closeted. Whether gay or trans, their lives were imprisoned in a narrow constricted environment, and they would be scared to go out in public except for a circumscribed zone of particular streets. Otherwise, they would face violence, being verbally harassed and physically attacked, both by police officers and also randomly by ordinary people, mostly men. Even though the brothels in Abanoz were shut down in 1964, there were still a few houses (illegally) offering sex. From around 1973, these houses grew in number. A recent oral history project by an LGBTQI organization in Izmir, Siyah Pembe Üçgen, which brings together nine trans women’s testimonies and stories from the (1980) coup d’état period, reveals that prior to its closure in 1978, Abanoz Street was in its heyday, embracing not only the local trans women, but also foreign trans women from countries such as France, Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia and the USSR to work in Istanbul (SPÜ 2012:60–70). Against that, however, Yeliz Anne stated that the number of openly trans women in Istanbul at that time was small, not exceeding ten or twelve people. They tried to survive as a group, living and working in Abanoz Street and the local area.

In the late 1970s, sex work in Abanoz was stamped out by the police force, and trans women had to leave the area. Melis, a trans woman in her early 50s, experienced the last days of Abanoz before being displaced from the area with other lubunyas. One of the prominent members of Istanbul LGBTT, as well as an active participant in LGBTQI-related protests, Melis had a unique ability to talk non-stop at top speed, sometimes repeating herself and not finishing sentences. I remember her many times at Istanbul LGBTT being scolded by other gacis for
speaking too much. I never saw her without her bright lipstick. She had long, straight, black hair with some clusters bleached close to her forehead, adding a platinum blonde contrast. She liked to dress showy, wearing revealing clothes and presenting her slender body in tight jeans, skirts or blouses. She loved to go before the cameras and camcorders during protests and pose in her heavy make-up and eye-catching outfit. Unlike most of the Istanbul LGBTT gacts, she enjoyed spending time at the hairdresser’s and paying great attention to her physical appearance. In fact, the first time she connected with the lubunyas in Istanbul was through a hairdresser in Beyoğlu.

When she first came to Istanbul at the age of fifteen, Melis spent some months’ homeless and engaging in sexual transactions with middle-aged men. Like Yeliz Anne, she had also heard about Beyoğlu, and she started to spend her time there. One day, she saw a lubunya, in her words, “a man in female outfit,” on the street, and followed her to the hairdresser’s. Entering, Melis saw many lubunyas, all together in one room. Back then, some of the hairdressers in Beyoğlu were concentrated sites for lubunyas. Getting excited, Melis approached them and explained how she too wanted to become one of them. This is her story of making contact with other lubunyas like herself, after which she started illegal work in the Abanoz brothels. At the time of my fieldwork, she was still an unregistered sex worker. Melis said that the brothel where she worked was raided several times back in the 1970s, but the managers could always hide her. After a few years, however, the raids became more frequent and targeted all the houses in Abanoz:

They started to raid all the houses. We escaped to the roofs. Some of us escaped to the other buildings. All of us hid somewhere. Meanwhile they shut all the houses down. It was in Abanoz Street. It is one block away from Bayram Street. I wanted to move to Izmir [a city on the Aegean] at that time, but then I heard it was the same over there too. They took me into custody during one of those raids. They cut my hair. They were also
planning to return me to my family, but they could not do that since I was over 18. They released me after a while. Once you were caught, you would be automatically sent to Cancan.\textsuperscript{60} We would stay four to five days. At last, one of the police chiefs said to the hospital staff: “What are we gonna do with these ones? They come back anyway. You should keep them at Cancan for a minimum twenty days.”

The lubunyas were ultimately violently forced out of Abanoz by the police. After their expulsion from this street, some of the trans women started to work in Dolapdere, a shabby neighbourhood to the north of Tarlabası full of derelict buildings (see map). In those days, all these neighbourhoods lacked proper main roads, giving Dolapdere the appearance and feel of some kind of special zone. Meanwhile, Turkey was headed towards the coup of 1980, with rising tension and fights between rightest and leftist groups. Streets in the city became divided into zones, each associated with a particular political camp, thus limiting people’s mobility depending on their affiliation or sympathies. Bombings, shootings, political raids and attacks were part of everyday life.

\textbf{September 12\textsuperscript{th}: Being Trans during Military Rule}

Despite the vast literature on the coup d’état of September 12, 1980 and its subsequent three-year long military government, there had been no research on the LGBTQI experience and

\textsuperscript{60} Cancan is a colloquial name given to Cankurtaran Dermal and Venereal Diseases Hospital, in Istanbul. Both registered and unregistered sex workers visit this hospital for their regular medical examination. During my research on the regulation of sex work in Turkey, I tried to enter and conduct research at this hospital, but I was not allowed due to the strict state control there. The hospital was closed for reconstruction in 2012 and has not yet reopened. Sex workers’ health controls are now processed in Bakırköy Psychiatric Hospital (a very large and somewhat notorious institution). For further discussion on Cancan, see Zengin (2009, 2011).
testimony of this period until Siyah Pembe Üçgen's (2012) work, *Being Lubunya in the 80's (80'lerde Lubunya Olmak)*. Even though lubunyas were severely victimized under the military regime, their stories, alongside other sexual and gendered forms of violence in that period, have been significantly obscured by the lack of intellectual and political attention. Despite the burgeoning feminist literature on the issue (Baydar and Ulagay 2011; Akbaş 2011; Mamak Kadınları 2011; Kadın Yazarlar Derneği 2010), the LGBTQI story remains virtually untold, the community’s voice unheard.

Under the military government, sex workers and lubunyas in Dolapdere and Tarlabası were displaced. They joined their co-workers in the brothels of Bayram Street, now one of the only two brothel streets left in Beyoğlu. September 12 appeared as a catastrophic historical moment in some of my interviews with gacıs. There was a strong division between pre- and post-September 12 periods in terms of the social and economic conditions for lubunyas, as Sedef explained:

Prior to September 12, there was a huge population of lubunyas. At each club, at each bar, there was a lubunya taking the stage. Many of them were feminine gays. They were making significant sums of money. No matter if one lacked the talent for singing, it was enough to entertain people simply by going on stage to do belly dancing in female clothing. With the coup government of Kenan Evren [leader of the military coup and later president], all these spaces were banned from providing lubunyas with a stage to perform. So those who used to make a living from the entertainment sector, had to switch to the sex work economy, since there were no other jobs available to them. This sectorial transition brought more violence and pressure.

Under the military regime, not only lubunyas but also other groups were treated violently. Everyday life in Turkey was in crisis, with a wide set of rights and freedoms suspended. The
military government shut down political parties and terminated the activities of associations and organizations except for those of Red Crescent, Child Protection Institution and Turkish Air Association. The sale and circulation of books, movies, magazines, newspapers and songs with political content was banned. Thousands were stripped of their citizenship and sentenced to death or life imprisonment. Hundreds died being tortured or just disappeared into the hidden cells of police stations, prisons and military offices. Yeliz Anne recounted several stories of her friends who were beaten, murdered, raped and/or disappeared by the military.

In 1981, the then Minister of Internal Affairs, Selahattin Çetiner, released an order via the radio announcing a ban on all male artists in female outfits performing in bars, cafes, clubs and pavilions. The order was followed by a dramatic increase in the frequency of police raids on these places. Lubunyas, who were predominantly working as performers, drag queens or sex workers in nightclubs, music halls and bars, could no longer find anywhere to make a living. Some of them still continued to work in the bars and clubs secretively yet under the constant threat of being caught and arrested. In addition to the prohibition on nightlife performances, the daily curfew starting at midnight interrupted the flow of money earned from sex work. Hence, trans women had to adapt to working and soliciting in the street before midnight, while trying to hide from military officers, as well as policemen. Predictably, the number of clients was far fewer than it had been when one could work all night until the morning.

One night under the military regime, as Belgin Celik (2012:81–2) testifies in Siyah Pembe Üçgen’s oral history project (above), the police collected all trans people and gay men from their houses, bars, cafes and clubs, as well as from the street, and brought them to the old police station in Sansaryan Inn in Sirkeci (across the Golden Horn from Beyoğlu). Police officers forced the lubunyas to board a train to deport them en masse from Istanbul to Eskisehir.
Vice squad police (*Ahlak Polisi*) stood next to them on the train, and beat them with batons, aiming at specific body parts, as they were packed onto the train. During my fieldwork, I heard various aspects of this deportation story repeated during my conversations with the older trans women. Melis was one of them:

They exiled me. They sent me to Eskisehir. We ended up in a small village in Eskisehir. They brought us cheap plastic shoes. We were barefoot. All our feet were pricked! They used to lump us all on trains and send us that way. They didn’t want us to return to Istanbul. But we came back! Then I found myself being exiled to Izmir. Then to another place… They would just drop us off at places in the middle of nowhere. They would leave us there.

Melis was one of the lucky ones who survived this deportation ordeal and found a way back to Istanbul. There were also others who managed to escape from the train on their way to Eskisehir. Not everyone was so fortunate, however, and some did not return and disappeared entirely. Some gacıs who had been part of this community have not been seen since. As the account of the exile train reveals, the state violence against trans women took an extremely brutal one. Chapter 4 visits these examples and discusses the multiple forms of state violence against trans lives and bodies; for the moment, I want to prioritize my discussion on the spatial dimensions of this violence with a particular focus on the forced transportation as an attempt to erase *lubunyas* from public life, and the trans women’s response with practices of emplacement—for, despite the severity of the state violence, most lubunyas did indeed find ways to return and re-establish themselves where they felt they belonged. Although a few lubunyas died (were killed) in this process and others disappeared, the state did not succeed in vanquishing them all—and thus the community as a whole—from Istanbul’s urban space. Those displaced were not permanently so,
but came back. Drawing on and developing a resilience born of their forced mobility, the lubunyas returned to Istanbul and in so doing transformed their displacement into a form of (re-)emplacement.

Displacement as emplacement took place not only across Istanbul and other cities, but also within Istanbul, particularly in different neighbourhoods of Beyoğlu. The intensity of everyday violence made safety and survival a vital concern for trans women. Lubunyas were constantly changing apartments within Beyoğlu due to discrimination by landlords and neighbours, as well as increasing rents. Most of them stayed in Tarlabası, either by accommodating themselves in cheap hotel rooms with a few other trans women, or by renting a dilapidated apartment with others. Some of the luckier ones with means were able to find houses on Ülker Street, on the east side of Istiklal Street in Cihangir, a memorable street which was gradually to become a place—a home—for trans people in the following few years. Before moving on to the story of this street, I shall first look briefly at the residential history of trans women in Tarlabası.

**Tarlabaşı: The Place of “Others”**

With the deportation of its non-Muslim residents (above), Tarlabası was considered as having been ghettoized by the marginalized “others” of the city (Bali 2012; Kuyucu 2005; Güven 2005). Moreover, a major part of Tarlabası was destroyed for an urban renewal project during the tenure of Mayor Bedrettin Dalan in 1984–89. This urban project was enacted within the context of a series of political and economic changes that were introduced in the aftermath of the September 12 coup. With the reduction of the import substitution model and shift to a more liberalized
macro-economic approach under Prime Minister (later President) Turgut Özal, Turkey entered the new, neoliberal era of globalization (Öniş 2004; Önder 1998). As part of this process, Istanbul became the locus of transnational flows of capital, commodities and images, as well as of capital accumulation (Keyder 1999). Since the mid-1980s, the physical appearance of the urban landscape has thus undergone a rapid transformation with the rise of five star hotels and office towers, construction of gated communities, the marketing of Istanbul as a tourist destination, and the removal of small business from the central districts (Öncü 1997).

Reflecting this rapid urban transformation, the destruction of Tarlabası was part of a broader project that linked the newly developing business areas to the main airport via the city centre (Ünsal & Kuyucu 2010:57). Mayor Dalan had hundreds of historic buildings demolished to make way for the new Tarlabası Boulevard, establishing a boundary between Beyoğlu and Tarlabası that separated them from each other (see map). This division led to Tarlabası’s further marginalization and ghettoization, as it became of a neighbourhood for those groups living the most precarious lives, the underclass of bottom-income and marginalized groups, including sex workers and queers along with undocumented immigrants, Roma people and displaced Kurds, the addicted and the physically and mentally disabled and ill. Some of the trans people renting houses in the new Tarlabası sought to escape this oppressive environment, and slowly started to move to Cihangir. Sedef was one of those trans women who lived in Tarlabası for a while before moving to Cihangir, explaining the reasons for her move as follows:

There were better houses in Cihangir and we were able to find more clients. Tarlabası was a place where mostly vermin and junkies lived. Not everybody would go into that neighbourhood to buy sex. In a way, moving to Cihangir represented a jump between different [social] strata for lübunyas. I moved to Cihangir in 1987 and started to live with a friend. This place gradually filled with several trans women in the same year.
The move to Cihangir beginning in the late 1980s started a new era in trans women’s lives. Cihangir, particularly the Ülker quarter, became the site of the making and unmaking of a home for trans women, within which the glory days for the community were followed by fierce fights and a notorious “battle” between trans women and the police. Some trans people refer to the story of this street as Turkey’s “Stonewall”.

Despite their eventual defeat and displacement by the police, gacıs showed a notable resistance against police violence in the mid-1990s. The communal experience of state violence in Ülker Street still plays a significant role in shaping lubunya subjectivities, including their determination by life-course and present-day relations among different generations of trans people.

Ülker Street, a.k.a. Lubunistan

Today considered a home for the bohemian bourgeois (artists, intellectuals, etc.) of Istanbul, Beyoğlu’s Cihangir district during the 1990s was, in fact, a place that embraced the marginalized people of the city—it was a decade long gentrification of the area that has since transformed it into an upmarket residency. Cihangir lies among the old neighbourhoods that were the target of the first wave of gentrification in Istanbul in the early 1990s. This section focuses on the displacement of trans women from Cihangir as part of this gentrification process, facilitated by several social actors, such as police officers, non-trans residents, local property owners and outside developers.

With the municipality’s spatial re-configuration of Beyoğlu in the 1980s, trans women

\[61\] The protests by the gay community against the police raid on the Stonewall Inn, in Greenwich Village, New York City on June 28, 1969 are generally recognized as pivotal in the development of the gay liberation movement and emergence of LGBT politics.
were displaced from Abanoz and Tarlabası (as mentioned), from where, along with Dolapdere, they started to move to Cihangir, inhabiting several streets and emplacing this area as a home, as a (relatively) secure statement of existence and (re-)establishment of sexual identity in the public realm. Trans people were not the sole residents of the neighbourhood; intellectuals, artists, university students and single people who were deemed or identified as “progressive” and had no issues with living with trans women in the same streets, also dwelled there. Among my trans informants, former residents of Cihangir described these streets back then as the “safe zone” and “Trans Empire,” dubbing the area “Lubunistan” and “Ibneistan.”

Sedef is one of the oldest residents of Ülker Street. She resisted leaving the street even when nearly all of the lubunyas were later displaced (again, by the police, again). Since the early 1980s, she has been a dedicated trans activist with a communist political agenda. Sedef is also a popular spokesperson on issues of police violence and state discrimination against trans women. One day, when Sedef and I were sitting at a teahouse in Beyoğlu, I asked her to tell me about the Ülker Street days. She told me how they began to move to Cihangir in the early ‘80s, a neighborhood with better housing conditions than Tarlabası. At that time, housing in Cihangir was still affordable but more expensive than in Tarlabası. Only those trans women who could make enough money from sex work were able to move to Cihangir. In 1985, Pürtelaş, Başkurt and Ülker Streets and Kazancı Yokuşu in Cihangir were attracting quite a few trans inhabitants. By mid-1986, in Sedef’s words, trans women “began to seize the neighbourhood” (emphasis added).

When they first moved to the neighbourhood, the trans women used to go on the main roads to pick their clients, but slowly they started to work by hanging out and calling their clients from the windows of their homes. The neighbourhood became a popular sex work zone with the
transformation of its four or five streets into “nearly an open brothel,” as Sedef emphasized. As Deniz Kandiyoti (2002) also notes, the Ülker Street gacıs would make plenty of money from the lucrative sex economy back in the 90s; their clients would line up at the street entrances with their cars to buy sex until the early hours of the morning.

Cihangir brought a spatial stability to trans women’s lives after years of having been constantly pushed from one place to another and working on the street subsequent to their return to the city after the coup period. The gacıs who were residents of the area during that period talked to me about it in a nostalgic fashion, describing the peace cultivated between them and the non-trans dwellers of the streets. Police officers initially countenanced the sex economy in this neighbourhood because they would take their cut from the gacıs’ income. Some of the gacıs sigh about those days, memorializing them as “the halcyon days of their community.” Their physical concentration and proximity to one another in a single urban area had empowered them, and they had begun to see Cihangir as home to their community. Within a decade, though, this was gone.

The shift to a neoliberal economic model initiated an unprecedented epoch of privatization, leading to flows of international capital into the emerging market that was Turkey, especially its metropolitan centre. Identified as a future global megacity, Istanbul began to undergo a more rapid urban transformation with the accelerating pace of development. By the late 80s, some of the downtown neighbourhoods with historical value had become primary targets for this transformation. Cihangir was one, and its localized majority population of lubunyas thus posed an undesired human texture for Beyoğlu’s new design.

Toward the late ‘80s, Sedef explained, there occurred a gradual change in non-trans residents’ attitudes to trans women. The residents began to raise complaints about the lubunya presence and sex work in the neighbourhood. Yet Ece, who also resided in Cihangir at that time,
claimed that the change in the neighbours’ attitude could not be explained simply by an increasing sense of disturbance from the lubunya presence. She emphasized the systematic attempt of the police to pressure the neighbours to take a hostile stance toward trans women.

From her perspective, by no means all of the neighbours wanted them to move out of the neighbourhood; they were, in fact, getting along well. Their non-trans neighbours used to visit them in their homes. She even stated that gacıs had developed such intimacy with the residents of Cihangir that nearly each of them had a lover from the neighbourhood:

But the police and the local government also pressured the residents. The grocery storeowner, where we used to get our groceries for years, started to refuse to sell us their products due to the police pressure. This police pressure also caused a hairdresser, another grocery store, and a water station [supplying drinking water] to shut down their stores and move out of the neighbourhood. The police visited real estate agents to warn them not to rent any apartment to us. Even the ones that were willing to support us could not do anything because of the police.

When the police started to raid gacı houses, Sedef took an active role in organizing trans women and developing resistance against the state violence. To my questions about the degree of police violence and what they went through in Cihangir, she responded with a detailed account of the displacement in two stages: first, the trans women’s displacement in Cihangir and their subsequent “incarceration” in just one street, Ülker Street; and second, their eventual displacement from Ülker Street:

In Cihangir, we expanded beyond window-soliciting and stood on foot at the street entrances to pick up clients. This situation lasted until 1989, when the then-chief police officer, Doğan Karakaplan, initiated mass raids on our houses. Those raids had the air of raids that usually took place in houses of illegal political organizations. 200-300 policemen
would surround and blockade the entire neighbourhood with their rifles and other sorts of guns. Then they started to smash our doors by force.

The police justified these raids on the grounds of the protection of public sexual morality. In fact, as Sedef explained, it was a cover-up for a more complicated story, involving a brothel owner, Matild Manukyan, who collaborated with the police. Manukyan, an Armenian-Turkish woman born in Istanbul in 1914, had inherited from her father a brothel in Galata, Beyoğlu. Over the course of time, she expanded her sex business, signing further lease agreements with the state to increase the number of her brothels to fourteen. In the 1990s, she became a well-known public figure due to being the top taxpayer in the country for five consecutive years. It was no coincidence that her breaking tax records overlapped with the augmented pressure and violence against the trans women in Cihangir because, as Sedef explained, the demand for trans women’s sexual services worked against Manukyan’s business. The trans women’s neighbourhood was packed until the early mornings, and Manukyan was losing many clients. Thus, as Sedef and her friends later discovered, Manukyan bribed the police chief, Dogan Karakaplan, with the gift of a Mercedes car. When Sedef pointed out the Mercedes car as an import with a huge sales-tax, she made sure that I knew its colour as well: “It was the latest version, a gray one!” As her story went on, Sedef revealed an even more complicated dynamic behind their displacement from Cihangir:

After Matild’s bribes, the police began to force us to move from the neighbourhood, organizing raids, threatening us and our clients, mobilizing non-trans residents of the neighbourhood against us, taking us into frequent custody, beating and torturing us. In the 90s, the majority of the trans women were displaced and evacuated from their houses in Cihangir. There was only one street left: Ülker Street. Some of the girls moved to this
street, while others started to gather on the E5. With the move to the E5, there was a massive increase in the number of trans deaths… We were more experienced in Ülker Street. I insisted on not running away but resisting because we had nowhere else to go. Of course most escaped! They had told us that Hortum would be in power for the short-term. It was the time of Habitat meeting [the United Nations’ meeting on the question of human settlements]. The first attacks started on May 21 and 22. Whoever heard the name “Hortum Süleyman” [Suleiman the Hose] fled the neighbourhood. He stayed as the Istanbul police chief until 1997. He is the one who struck the final blow against trans women in Cihangir.

…There was this woman, Güngör. She had bought a charity building at a low rate. Initially, she was on good terms with us; she was keen in renting out her apartments to us. But she had two apartments on each floor, a front and a rear one. The latter ones were not well lit, and she asked for three times their actual rent value. Once we wanted to rent the front apartments, but she stipulated that we had to rent them both. Upon our refusal, she resorted to authorities, including ministers and mayors, to report that “This neighbourhood has turned out to be a brothel, but we, families, are living here!” They mobilized the neighbourhood, started to keep guards in the streets, and attacked people who wanted to visit us. People from the neighbourhood did all this! The police supported them… We also had trouble with the mafia and we tried to resist.

In 92, there was a mafia group one street down from where we lived. They used to extort fees from lubunyas. They attempted to do the same thing in Ülker Street. The chief of this bandit gang was my client, and he was in love with me. All the gang members gathered together in the street. For the residents of the street, it was so much better! At that time, we were fewer in number. Maybe thirty-five. These bandits intercepted, beat and robbed our clients on their way to our homes. Some of the girls started to fight with them,

62 A well-known highway in Istanbul, and a significant symbol as an everyday space for unlicensed sex work, especially for trans women.

63 Hortum was the nickname for the chief police officer, Suleyman Ulusoy, known for his use of unprecedented violence against trans women by torturing them with his hose (hortum) (see below, Chapter 3).
but the police supported those bandits. Even some of the girls, who were lovers of policemen, were on their side. This situation caused many trans women to flee the neighbourhood for a while. We were down to five people from thirty-five. Five of us insisted on staying, and we organized lots of plans. But we sorted them out! [She chuckles].

Neighbours, police officers, landowners, mafia members, brothel owners, lovers, clients… Sedef’s story strikingly demonstrates the multiplicity of social actors involved and the diversity of economic and social interests and processes that went into marking and targeting trans women to displace them from Cihangir. The majority of the trans community was displaced by the systematic police raids and violence in the clean-up operation prior to the 1996 United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in Istanbul. Expelling trans women from their houses, the goal was to “cleanse” the entire Cihangir district from unwanted sexual practices and people with nonconforming gendered and sexual identities. From the police perspective, this goal was achieved because shortly after this displacement the neighbourhood saw a significant change in its residents’ profile: bohemian upper-middle class people invested in real estate in Cihangir and renovated the houses.

The displacement was facilitated also by the collaboration of other social actors. The Association for Improvement of Cihangir (Cihangir Güzelleştirme Derneği, CGD), an organization founded in 1995 by architects, other professionals and the old residents of the neighbourhood, played a prominent role in making the district desirable for a particular segment

\[64\] The supreme irony of an international settlement conference being preceded—prepared for even—by displacement, was noted also in the context of the host country’s de-settlement of Kurds by the alternative conference organized in Beyoğlu (and this also forcibly relocated in the face of police intimidation).
of the public by promoting the renovation of buildings and rehabilitation of streets. The CGD organized itself around providing safer and cleaner physical and social environment in Cihangir and gained a positive reputation for the district among the public (Ilkucan 2004: 68–9). However, the drive to make the neighbourhood a desirable residential area for the elite transformed trans women into a target population to be ousted from the district. Thus, while recounting the Ülker Street era, gacıs remember not only the police officers, but also the CGD members who called on the police and worked closely with them to expel the remaining trans community from Cihangir.

During the notorious struggle between trans women and the police forces, many trans women were arrested and subjected to violence and torture. According to my interviewers and other sources, the early 1990s were the harshest years, with police pressure taking extremely violent forms and trans people being severely persecuted (Selek 2007; SPÜ 2013). This event is referred to as a lost battle between the state forces and the trans women community. There is still an often-told story that recounts Hortum Suleyman’s alleged claim, “The citadel has fallen!” referring to the evacuation of trans women from their houses.

That said, the last five trans women did succeed in staying in their homes, including Sedef. For Sedef, the struggle with the police signified a personal triumph over place but a collective defeat for trans women. She emphasized the need to draw lessons from this defeat and held some members of the trans community responsible for the lost battle:

Our trans friends also made a lot of mistakes. They invited men from the neighbourhood. They broke bottles on people’s heads. They screamed, yelled at people. In other words, they exaggerated their freedom rather than appreciating it. Then they ran away after two police raids. They should have taken responsibility for what they did. But they didn’t. The empire that we seized, our ghetto disappeared. Many of us entered there. Five to six streets
belonged to us. In the end, there was only Ülker Street left—only a small part of it. Eventually we lost that as well. It was again because of Matild. She bribed Hortum Süleyman. She bribed everyone. Even the lubunya club-owners collaborated with the police because gacıs stopped going to these nightclubs to find their clients… We worked in the neighbourhood, and we made a lot of money. But they attacked us in our houses. The neighbours didn’t want us. There were rental fights. They bought our houses so cheap and later charged high rates.

When it came to fighting against gender, sexual or economic inequalities, I noticed, Sedef always displayed a more militant stance than the majority of the gacıs. She would quite frequently complain about the lack of political awareness and motivation among the LGBTQI community at large to change their lives and the unequal system in general. She demanded that other trans women become as politically engaged as herself, and tried to convince everyone around her about her communist-LGBT political agenda. As I came to know her better over the course of my research, I could see what might have upset her about the struggle in Ülker Street. Not every trans woman would have taken the Ülker Street struggle as politically and seriously as did Sedef, and there must have been many who stopped wanting to risk their lives in the face of police violence. The fact that some gacıs preferred or had to leave left Sedef with a sense of betrayal.

In 1997, the feminist journal, Pazartesi (Monday), published an interview with Sedef conducted immediately after the constant police violence and harassment in Cihangir had caused a majority of the trans women to flee the neighbourhood. Sedef, having committed to staying, was now living in constant fear. Her questioning of the logic and intimate description of the results of the gentrification and its displacement of her friends is striking:
We have been there for twenty years. Those who arrived twenty days ago pontificate about the ideal texture of neighbourhood. We don’t live in a neighbourhood mostly inhabited by families. Why do they come and live in a mostly trans neighbourhood? All our emotions of love, sex and life have been turned upside down. I have not been able to have an orgasm for many months now because of stress. I cannot turn my lights on at night. I am living in constant fear of being raided or taken into custody. We cannot hang around in the neighbourhood. They might take us into custody. [Pazartesi 1997: 17–18]

In one of my personal conversations with Sedef, I reminded her of this interview and asked her about the meaning of Ülker Street for her. She explained that they, the trans community, had experienced Cihangir as a place that embraced their existence. After Ülker Street, they have never again been able to attain such spatial connectedness as a community. The place that had once operated as a “safe zone,” providing a source of empowerment and representing a sense of community, instead became a source of vulnerability, fear and anxiety for those who survived the police violence and stayed in the neighbourhood. The sense of safety had largely derived from the number of trans women living and working in close physical proximity with one another; the spatial togetherness conditioned the formation of a sense of community, which simultaneously, produced a sense of place for the community. In other words, the Ülker Street experience showed the workings of space as a medium to cultivate a sense of community; it showed trans women’s use of spatially bound practices to make a place of their own. Sedef’s complaint indicated that trans women lacked the freedom to choose where to live enjoyed by others; hence, the prevalence of a sense of “placelessness,” or seeing Beyoğlu as the only place that they could make their home, which for Sedef and many other trans women defined their relationship to Istanbul in general.
Years later, Ülker Street still occupies a central spatial, political and communal reference in trans people’s lives. There are friendships that grew stronger from this experience and those that fell apart. Ülker Street has come to symbolize how morality, sexuality, sex/gender, capital and state violence are interwoven for the simultaneous production of a queer place and a sense of community. Ingram (1997a: 36) defines community as, in large part, “a reflection of the level of repression and unequal distribution in resources and access to them.” Trans women created an enclave and emplaced themselves in Cihangir as a historical outcome of a chain of displacements and unequal distribution of space in Beyoğlu and Istanbul (indeed Turkey) generally. Their intricate and tangled relationship with the city space has become a condition for group formation and empowerment. Trans women were able to politically mobilize around their claims over Ülker Street, even to the extent of gaining the strength to resist the security apparatus of the state.

Some scholars of geography (e.g., Adler & Brenner 1992: 26) stress that the claiming of urban spaces and appropriation of them as visible, distinct neighbourhoods—c.f. Sedef’s “seize” (above)—requires not only residential concentration and the development of a network of voluntary and service organizations, but also the material control of residential and business property. In the case of Ülker Street, however, although some of the trans women attained properties as residents, these were unable to function as a condition for their spatial security. Spatial security was strictly tied to the intertwineinent of property with the majority social norm, with “properly” sexed, moral bodies. For this reason, while trans women owned some of the Ülker Street properties, they would still have remained vulnerable to the imposition of the will of the dominant.
Although gacıs remember their time in Cihangir before the police violence as the Golden Age of their collective history, they also draw lessons from what they could and could not achieve as a trans community during that period. For example, Sevda, who lived with Sedef for years in Cihangir, summarized the pros and cons of the spatial concentration of the community as follows:

We used to call that area “Lubunistan” or “İbneistan.” I saw those streets as a ghetto. Cihangir was the first LGBT ghetto to me. Maybe the first real one! It was perfect in terms of the communal dynamic. Yet it was a step back with respect to our integration into society because all our friends were trans people. Our role models were all trans as well. Our community was antisocial and introverted. This way, we became more exposed to hate crimes. Hortum arrived, broke down our doors, invaded and burned them down. Despite everything, now we have acquired some places in Kurtuluş and Pangaltı [districts neighbouring Beyoğlu—see map].

Sevda’s account reveals another dimension of the relationship between sexuality, place and community, a dimension that contradicts the frequently repeated story of Ülker Street as the good old “safe zone.” The literature on queer space suggests that designated safe spaces for queer people might also become targeted spaces for queer bashing (Myslik 1996). Sevda’s words tell a similar story in emphasizing how Ülker Street as a trans enclave shaped their experience of violence by rendering them spatially vulnerable to the acts of multiple actors. The very conditions of spatial empowerment simultaneously functioned as the source of their vulnerability and weakness, making Ülker Street a destination for social actors who wanted to attack and displace trans women. Hence, in some situations, the dynamics of safety and unsafety may operate in a dialectical relationship, shaping the production of places, as well as subject who inhabit those places.
With the displacement of trans people from Ülker Street, the bohemian elite has gradually formed the new profile of Cihangir (e.g., the small art galleries that have sprung up there are now a focal sitting for Istanbul’s Biennial). Trans women have been dispersed across several neighbourhoods, causing the diminution of their spatial strength as a community concentrated in particular streets. When it comes to trans women’s residential practices, present-day spatial relations take more flexible, mobile, fluid and individualized forms. This results in a sense of placelessness as a community, but this placelessness should not be understood as “place's opposite,” but rather “as an embodied experience or practice that is or does anything” (Knopp 2004: 130). Placelessness is not just a negative, an absence or a lack, but also stands for something positive, related to plasticity and, shorn of the restrictions of place, unlimited possibility. Thus, while it is true that compared to the years in Ülker Street the strong sense of trans community has dissolved, leading the majority of trans people to either live by themselves or share an apartment with one or two more flatmates, it is important also to be attentive to what trans people have done with their placelessness and how they have mobilized themselves to create new spatial possibilities.

One example of this new mobilization is their making of the spaces of “communality without community,” that is, the “constellation of strategic sites for sexual minorities, with various associated behaviours, forms of contacts, and alliances across the landscape” (Ingram 1997b: 100). Complete displacement from Cihangir might have deeply shattered the spatial conditions of a strong community, but it has also spawned conditions for an emplacement in the form of (structured by) scattered sites of communality across the Beyoğlu area. Trans people have developed communal spaces by collectively making and inhabiting places for survival, politics, and social gatherings loosely connected across but not specifically contained in a wider urban environment. Istanbul LGBTT, for example, is one example characterizing such spatial
dynamics. In concluding this chapter, I will elaborate a little on Istanbul LGBTT’s spatial significance and meaning for trans people; but first, I will provide a more comprehensive portrayal of the reasons behind trans people’s current dispersed, mobile and fluid spatial conditions.

The Current Situation

The gentrification and urban renewal projects in Istanbul begun in the 1990s with a few districts, including Cihangir, have reached a hitherto unseen scale and speed with the implementation of new urban transformation projects during the 2000s. The renovation of existing buildings via these projects has combined with the construction of gated-housing communities for professionals and the well-to-do and new housing projects on state-owned (or requisitioned) land by the Mass Housing Administration (Toplu Konut İdaresi Başkanlığı, TOKI) for the new middle class and the signature (and since the Gezi Park protest, notorious) building of new shopping malls have become the defining markers of the new neoliberal era (Bartu-Candan & Kolluoğlu 2008; Islam 2010: 60). The massive state actor TOKI was first founded in 1984 to address the housing problem of low-income groups by promoting the construction of house cooperatives with cheap credit, and also distributed pre-title deeds to the gecekondu (squatter housing) owners, who were promised title deeds upon upgrading their dwellings.65 This promise led many gecekondu owners to construct low-quality apartment blocks for rental profit. As more gecekondu owners invested in the rental economy, so did tensions begin to occur between state

65 Gecekondu: lit. “settled overnight,” referring to the original practice of unpermitted building of small houses on state land claimed as (if) a common during the night-time (when people were free after work hours, to avoid unwanted attention, and because the days are hot during the summer).
agents and gecekondu owners, resulting in changes to the TOKI policies. Now, the gecekondu owners were targeted as the “invaders” of the city, and thus needing to be displaced (Dinçer 2011).

Concurrently, the decade-long integration into the global world economy brought new approaches to economic development by prioritizing city investments in the tourism sector and promoting historical heritage. Hence, the poor urban dwellers residing in the inner-city, historical districts of Istanbul became the other target population for displacement in the bid to renew and develop the urban landscape—and TOKI became an efficient agent to realize such goals. With the establishment of the AKP government following the 2002 general election, TOKI was converted into what, in fact, operated as a privatization agency with only the appearance of a public enterprise. Enacting new laws and amending the existing ones, the AKP government paved the way for the bourgeoning of TOKI contractors/subcontractors and pressured the organization to increase its construction capacity to the maximum over short periods of time (using, e.g., strict time-limit penalty codes).

TOKI capital comprises public places and other real estate properties. Since 2002, it has administered the appropriation of these from other state agencies for sale, transforming a majority of them into higher-end housing and shopping malls, especially in Istanbul (Sönmez 2012). The present era thus represents the transformation of the inner city into a main source of capital accumulation (Dinçer 2011) as opposed to the urban development projects of the mid-1980s, which were merely oriented towards expanding the city limits by transforming squatter
With this new era, capital has begun to transform areas that are proximate to historical zones and business centres under the name of urban renewal projects (Ergun 2004). Some of these areas were inner-city squatting zones inhabited by socially, economically and culturally disadvantaged and/or marginalized groups, as was the case with Cihangir, and ownership of the properties started to change hands rapidly, displacing the former residents of the area (Uysal 2012; Robins 2011; Karaman and Islam 2012; Bartu-Candan & Kolluoğlu 2008; Kuyucu 2013).

Spread to all the historical neighbourhoods of the city, this urban trend began to appear to politicians, government officers and policy-makers as a magic bullet: “[I]t helps to avoid earthquakes, reduces crime, decreases segregation, removes stigma, decreases poor living conditions and even combats terrorism!” (Islam 2010: 60). Smith (2005 [1996]: xviii) analyzes the present situation as a particular kind of uneven development, one within which gentrification vis-à-vis suburbanization stands as “internal differentiation of already developed spaces.” Istanbul in general, and Galata and Tarlabası in particular, lie at the heart of this uneven development through their recent transformation into and thus spatial production of neighbourhoods in high demand among young consumers and the elite social groups of the city, as well as international tourists.

However, as we have seen from the aforementioned stories of displacement, the processes of spatial production and transformation are not only stories of development and profit, but also of class, ethnicity and sex-gender. For example, the impoverished Kurdish and Roma settlements. With this new era, capital has begun to transform areas that are proximate to historical zones and business centres under the name of urban renewal projects (Ergun 2004). Some of these areas were inner-city squatting zones inhabited by socially, economically and culturally disadvantaged and/or marginalized groups, as was the case with Cihangir, and ownership of the properties started to change hands rapidly, displacing the former residents of the area (Uysal 2012; Robins 2011; Karaman and Islam 2012; Bartu-Candan & Kolluoğlu 2008; Kuyucu 2013).

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66 The opportunities and incentives for speculative development this provided was a cause of the Gezi Park protest and, later in 2013, became related to the corruption controversy that engulfed the government and also Istanbul municipality (especially in the Fatih district).
inhabitants of Beyoğlu are two target groups of policies of displacement, spatial exclusion and marginalization, of programmes that not only result from but also, in fact, impel and direct these urban transformation projects. Some groups can no longer afford to live in their previous neighbourhoods; others become targets due to their illicit behaviours and/or nonconforming gender identities and sexual practices. Trans women thus characterize a specific target group.

Trans women’s accommodation in Beyoğlu has hugely decreased as much from the police pressure and violence over the last decades as from the skyrocketing rents accompanying the capitalization of the area through urban transformation projects. Consequently, the trans women have been pushed into looking for residency at the edge of the Beyoğlu area, in Kurtuluş, Dolapdere and Pangaltı, to name a few. Ironically, perhaps, now the location of the marginal is taken for the dominant, the marginal are displaced to its margins. However, my informants still spent most of their time in (central) Beyoğlu, for various reasons.

First, trans women who are also sex workers, have their established networks and places to find clients in Beyoğlu; second, with its relatively tolerant sexual culture, Beyoğlu embraces different bodies, sexualities and genders that face severe discrimination and exclusion in other parts of the city; third, trans women, whether sex workers or not, have Istanbul LGBTT in Beyoğlu; and fourth, the area does represent and deeply feel like a “real” home for some gacis, as they articulated. The presence of this place has been essential to the reproduction of a sense of trans communality, since it was one of the few permanent places where trans people could meet and spend time together without fear of the consequences or other pressure from the outside world. And notwithstanding the series of displacements in their history, trans people have succeeded in establishing a form of emplacement by founding Istanbul LGBTT and creating an intimate space of proximity with and for one another. The lost physical proximity from the Ülker
Street times has been partially recreated and to a certain extent compensated for by the institution of a new space enabling trans people to gather together in the “safe zone” of Istanbul LGBTT. This is not the intense and ghettoized, bounded space of residence/work that developed in Ülker Street, but rather a networking space defined by a core place around and with which residence/work gravitates and interacts.

Currently, trans women do still hold one trans-majority residential location in Beyoğlu, but only a very small one, limited just to two buildings on one small side-road, Bayram Street. Parallel to the now demolished Abanoz Street, Bayram Street is one of the oldest of the city’s brothel streets. The two brothels accommodate approximately twenty trans women, who both live and work there. Other than this micro-area, trans women are not concentrated in one specific part in Beyoğlu. No longer resident in the district centre, however, they constantly navigate the Beyoğlu streets, thus reaffirming their spatial attachment with Beyoğlu through their very mobility. And meanwhile, as ever, they try to avoid the ordinary, everyday violence of the police and other people, as exemplified by Ceylan:

I was walking in Tarlabası, talking on my cellphone. I heard someone calling me, “Shsst! Shsst!” but I didn’t dare to look. Lots of people verbally assault us that way. So I thought it was one of them…I kept walking…but in a sec, two policemen showed up standing next to me!! …I saw them holding batons over my head and getting ready to hit me. And then they started threatening me: “Don’t walk here! Go to the side-alley and walk there.” I couldn’t even utter a word and rushed into one of the backstreets. I am glad that I didn’t say a single word to them. Otherwise I could’ve easily found myself in hospital.

This suggests a final note on the public space. Trans women sex workers are told by the police to work on side alleys to find their clients rather than main streets. As long as they remain invisible,
the police might not bother them. However, interviews with trans women show contrasting results after police warnings. There have been incidents when the police have caught trans women soliciting in side-alleys and have fined them for blocking the traffic on a main street. This ticketing practice has been a substantial issue in restricting and shaping trans women’s and sex workers’ mobility in the urban environment since 2009. Trans women face the constant risk of being ticketed by police when they go out, and those on lower incomes especially avoid certain areas of the city, including Beyoğlu. This way of using space punishes the public presence of trans women, trapping many of them in the immediate area around their residence. It also the contemporary organization of state violence in relation to trans lives in Turkey. In the next chapter, I focus on this mechanism of monetary punishment to explore the contemporary forms of state violence.
CHAPTER 4
EMBODYING THE STATE:
POLICE’S (EXTRA)LEGAL RELATIONSHIP WITH TRANS PEOPLE

Melis stormed into Istanbul LGBTTT spewing a long, cursing tirade in a powerful voice one would not expect from her slender body. Our chitchatting stopped as all the gacis turned their attention to what she was saying: the police had a new tactic; they were penalizing trans women just for being in the street. Melis was fuming after being issued another ticket, adding to her total that was now into double figures for the year. “I was just standing in the street, not even soliciting!” she angrily protested.

The other gacis in the room joined her in cursing the police and started to complain about how the police had gone out of control lately. They were fining trans women at every corner on Istiklal Street regardless of whether or not the women were involved in an illicit sexual transaction. The gacis had started to receive tickets from the police while they were walking, shopping, running errands, taking a cab—in other words, when going out public and participating in everyday, mundane activities. Each ticket, with a fine of 69 TL, put trans women in a debt that gradually accumulated and added up to thousands of liras.67

67 TL: Turkish lira. The 69-lira fine was equivalent to around 50 dollars at that time, but the value of this in terms of cost of living could be doubled or trebled for a better estimate.
This ticket system began in 2009, representing a shift in the exercise of state force against trans people. In fact, such a shift can be traced back to 2002, when the AKP came to power and claimed to be transitioning to a new era of democracy and transparency, which no longer allowed for torture by the state. During the 1980s and 1990s, state violence in Turkey had showed its extreme face to leftist and marginalized sections of society, including trans people, as demonstrated in the last chapter. The violence inflicted on trans people had included long-term custody and torture, kidnapping, expulsion from certain neighbourhoods, and transportation to other cities, as well as public humiliations in the form of forced haircuts on the street (Berghan 2007; Selek 2001; Zengin 2011; see Figure 4.1). While the arrival of the 2000s saw an end to this cruelty (mostly), trans women have witnessed new forms of attack, such as police fines or state attorneys filing lawsuits against them.

Thus, although the grossest forms of intimidation are largely gone, their replacement by other governmental strategies represents less an easing than a change in the exercise of state oppression and abuse of the civic rights of trans people. Essentially, it is just the style of the hegemonic control that has altered, with the state monopoly of violence applied to the same ends but in a way that is legally enshrined.\textsuperscript{68}

This chapter brings together (1) trans women’s accounts of the past and present experiences of violence with the Beyoğlu police force—the disciplinary, regulatory, and punitive practices of the police regarding certain aspects of trans women’s lives, bodies, and sexual practices—and (2) police and related documents in order to (3) probe the changing relations (forms of conduct and the contact) between the police and trans people, over the last thirty years (divided into two periods, roughly

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\textsuperscript{68} Another form of this state-sanctioned, particularly legalistic oppression includes the routine banning of Internet sites with queer content (censored through state-imposed filters and court judgements/fines).
before and after the millennium). Focusing on both the legal and extralegal violent practices employed by the police against trans people, I make a larger argument on the work and logic of state power through entanglements of law, violence, and sexuality. Specifically, I examine how “the state” in the form of the police establishes distinct forms of transitions and collaborations between sovereign and governmental forms of violence to control and regulate nonnormative sexualities, and how this process enables the state power to produce itself as exception to its own laws in distinctive ways over different historical periods.

Figure 4.1 A newspaper clipping printed in 1986 demonstrates two civil policemen, forcefully cutting a transgender woman’s hair. The newspaper heading translates, “Their [the police’s] haircut turned Remziye (the trans woman’s name) into Remzi (a male name),” and they use an extremely offensive and derogatory language by addressing Remziye as nonoş (faggot).  

69 http://gecmisgazete.com/?Remziye-nin_saclarina_2makas_atip_Remzi_yaptilar&icerik=8643
Considering the issue of state and more particularly police violence, we are reminded by Nordstrom and Robben (1995) not to reduce violence into some essential core concept or fixed definition, and view it only as destructive. In contrast, violence is “a socially and culturally constructed manifestation of a deconstitutive dimension of human existence,” and hence, it is as “flexible and transformative as the people and cultures who materialize it, employ it, suffer it, and defy it” (Robben & Nordstrom 1995:6, see also Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois 2004). Thus, from an anthropological perspective, just as it deconstructs, this violence also reconstructs social relations, group subjectivities, individual lives and specific survival practices.

Therefore, the enmeshed relationship between state power, violence, and law involves trans people as active participants of a creative as well as destructive process, which produces ample room for agentive capacity and the extensive shaping of practice by trans people. Trans people have some power in determining the specificities of the extent and ways in which their oppression operates, so they may be victims of violence, but they are not passive victims. On the contrary, they constantly and productively negotiate and respond to the dominating process in myriad ways, obliging the state to introduce new legal and extralegal strategies to control and regulate, as much as produce and proliferate sexual nonnormativity. Hence, overall, I argue that violence, as a social and cultural relation, conditions and transforms the praxis of law into a process that is mutually shaped and co-formed by trans people and the police.

The Intimate Sovereign in the House: The Reign of Hortum Süleyman

On a cold rainy winter day, I was on my way to Ceyda’s house. She was living on the fifth floor
of a high-rise building located near the unmarked boundary separating Kurtuluş from Dolapdere. Having lived in Ülker Street, the epicentre of trans life, in Cihangir, in the heart of Beyoğlu, she was now displaced by the police forces to the outer edge of her preferred spatial environment. Ceyda’s house was in the middle of a steep road that runs to the central part of Dolapdere. An ancient city organically evolving across its traditional “seven hills,” Istanbul is full of such steep roads, paths, and streets that intersect one another without any particular plan or sense of architectural order. This physical “disorderliness” becomes even more visible when one enters districts like Dolapdere, inhabited mostly by the poor, the dispossessed and the marginalized. As I passed the dilapidated buildings walking down to Ceyda’s house, I noticed some of the underground nightclubs that I had visited as part of my previous research on sex work in Istanbul in 2005. At that time, these clubs were full of local women, as well as young East Europeans, Ukrainians, and Russians, providing sexual services for men through the night. Now, by day, they were invisible, dead, hidden. I reached the apartment building.

Ceyda welcomed me warmly, as I entered her long, narrow, and poorly lit living room and took a seat on her soft, comfortable couch. She put some wood in the heating stove for us; the modern period of increasing consumer wealth meant that central heating and radiators had long ago replaced such heating stoves in the houses of the middle classes, making stoves like this emblematic of a lower economic situation.

Ceyda had already prepared some tea. She brought the teapot into the living room and placed it on top of the heating stove. “This way,” she said, “we can refill our glasses without any need to cut our chat.” Sipping from our small tea-glasses and biting the cookies that I brought, we began to talk, and after a while, I asked her permission to switch my recorder on and talk about the kinds of violence she has to face in her everyday life as a trans woman sex worker. She
needed little invitation. As recounted, Ceyda had fought against the gacısı’ displacement from Ülker Street. She had lived through raids, beatings, and abasement by the police under custody. Referring to these violent practices as “polis işkencesi” (lit. police torture), she recounted those days as filled with extreme state violence.

The term “işkence” is a very loaded one with a long history in Turkey. Associated especially with the September 12 coup government of 1980, it has been used to connote violence as a means employed by the state by its various security forces to repress oppositional groups posing a (perceived) threat to its existence and organization. “İskence” thus, in fact, has a rather wide application, referring, for example, to police brutality and abuse generally (mostly physical, but also psychological), and not necessarily limited to torture in the strict sense (though that certainly is included). Here, it is rendered by the English “torture/brutality.”

Historically, the two main target groups, regularly and frequently announced as “terrorists,” and thus considered to be deserving of torture/brutality, have been leftists and Kurds—those who fought for and/or supported the independence of a Kurdish State since the 1980s, either by taking up arms or by providing the guerrillas with some sort of logistics (finance, food, shelter, etc.), or else by writing about and promoting the idea of a liberation for Kurds. Research on torture/brutality in the recent history of Turkey demonstrates that the police have been the primary perpetrators, and police departments, police stations, and prisons constitute the central places of torture/brutality, with the range of practices of torture, most commonly involving the following: beating, killing, pressuring, shocking, undressing, raping with batons or sexual organs, sexually harassing, injuring physically, cutting skins or organs, Palestinian hanging, and bastinadoing (Göregenli & Özer 2010:19).

When the AKP government came to power in 2002, their anti-torture discourse was
represented by the slogan “zero tolerance for torture” (*işkenceye sıfır tolerans*). Despite a decrease in the number of reported torture/brutality cases (ibid.:10), however, police violence has not ceased, and, in reality, has accelerated in the face of any form of active resistance, such as the Gezi protests.  

It has been very noticeable how LGBTQI community in Istanbul has taken a lead in the post-Gezi oppositional environment. It sees itself not only as at the vanguard of the resistance (in Turkish, “*diren,*” the catch phrase for organizations, websites, hashtags, etc. representing activist opposition to the government), but advocates, moreover, the possibility of “a different type of resistance.”

LGBTQI people generally (and among them the trans community especially) have been politicized in this case, it appears, by the combination of the citing of the trigger event (i.e., at Gezi Park, their very own stomping ground—Chapter 3) and decade of increasingly conservative (actually, morally reactionary) government, with the particular history of queer suffering at the hands of the police. During the most intense period of state violence, that is, the 80s and 90s, gacıs were certainly exposed to many of the aforesaid practices of police brutality and torture. They were harassed, undressed, beaten, sexually abused, and even killed under custody.

Violence against trans people reached its peak during the tenure of Hortum Süleyman as the head of the Beyoğlu Police Department, 1992-97. Hortum Süleyman’s real name is

70 Other protests: e.g., resistance to the (thousands of) river damming hydroelectric projects ongoing in the country’s northern Black Sea region. Gezi brutality: e.g., reported gang rapes of a single, young women in vans by plain clothes police (*sivil polis*).


72 Süleyman was formerly accused of ill-treating nine trans women in 1996–97. The court case was suspended
Süleyman Ulusoy. Trans women describe him as one of the most horrifying police figures because of his unique torture techniques on detained people. His “hose” epithet derived from his use of hoses to punish and beat trans women. Once in his custody, a trans woman was liable to be showered in cold water and then beaten with a hose. One story describes his office as housing a collection of hoses in different colours and sizes, and when people were put under custody, he would ask them which one they would like to be beaten with. The “battle” for Cihangir and the gacis’ displacement from Ülker Street took place during his tenure.

In the early 1990s prior to his appointment at the Beyoğlu police station, Süleyman had been in charge of the Kurdish region. This was a period when state violence against Kurds reached its extreme, with hundreds of unidentified murders and disappearances. Hortum Süleyman thus came to the Beyoğlu Police Station with his reputation preceding him. Some of the gacis recall him as the cruellest and most violent police figure:

Three of us were driving at night. Suddenly, we heard the police car calling out our license plate and telling us to pull over. After the ID check, we were put in the police car without being given any information. They took us to the police station and made us wait in the hallway. We were hoping we wouldn’t meet or be questioned by that awful person. But not long after, we heard his voice roaring with frustration, and then we saw his huge belly and sputtering mouth. He was standing with his famous toy [the hose] before us: Hortum Süleyman! He was shouting as much as talking: “You faggots, who’s had it cut off?” One of us had had the surgery. They put her in the women’s holding cell, and calling us “men,” they transferred us to the men’s cell. After two days, they released us. Of course there was a “farewell party.” We were 30 or 35 trans women, lined up like a welcoming committee.

before a final verdict could be reached, however, in accordance with the Law on Release on Probation and the Suspension of Cases and Sentences for Offences Committed until 23 April 1999 (AI 2011:12).
Hortum Süleyman appeared right in front of us again with his toy in his hands. When he made sure that everybody had had their share of his “treat,” the farewell party was over. Normally, parties end with people having foot pain [after long hours of dancing], but our parties always ended with us having headaches and painful hips.

In my conversations with gacis, Hortum Süleyman’s name came up quite frequently as a reference point when they talked about the Ülker Street times. He appeared as an extremely familiar, intimate figure in trans women’s narratives of violence in the 1990s. Despite the years that have gone by, the gacis could still provide vivid portrayals of him, referring to his “huge belly,” “evil face,” “buggy eyes,” “reproving voice,” and “always sullen and jittery face.” The continual violent contact between Hortum Süleyman, his hose and the trans bodies had left its traces embedded in the gacis’ memories and words, and established among them an intimacy of violence received that was still palpable, even after all these years. With the suspension of law in the dark corners of the police stations, gacis faced many years of the naked brutality of Süleyman. Calling on its institutionalized state power but deploying extralegal means, the police he led used torture under custody as a violent tool to reorder, tame, and reform the state’s gendered and sexual others.

Remember Aretxaga’s (2003) argument on the formation of “terrifying forms of intimacy” under state rule. She draws attention to “the intensification of bodies and intimacies that result from [the state’s] technologies of management” (2003:406). It is possible to translate Aretxaga’s assertion into the intimacy established between the police and trans women in the form of an intensely felt proximity constructed and manifested by physical violence. This intimacy was conditioned not only by the torture and physical violence trans women had to endure during their custody, but also by the diminishing of the boundary between what is private and what is public, especially in the case of police raids on their houses. The home, ostensibly private and intimate, lost such status when it came
to the raids on trans women sex workers. Such raids blurred the assumed distinction between what is private and public by unleashing the very uncivil characteristic of the civilian police in Istanbul at that time (as now, patently, and not limited to this one city, of course).

The state’s sovereign power not only functioned in police offices. Trans people’s lives outside the police station were overwhelmed by the hard work with which Hortum Süleyman and his crew engaged so as to establish their sovereignty over trans women’s houses and selves. The police smashed doors, broke security chains, and destroyed landlines during the raids; some gacis recounted that the walls in their houses were destroyed. As Ceyda and I continued our conversation in her living room about the police violence in the ‘90s, she revealed further vivid details about the extralegal practices of the police:

They knocked on our doors. According to the law, they had to show us a search warrant to search our houses. We know the legal codes, we’re not dumb! We used to open the door, and they would say: “Let’s go to the police station. Somebody filed a complaint about you.” And we never caused trouble when they took us to the station. But they used to take us in without a single piece of evidence. They beat us with hoses, they poured water on us. There were hoses in different colors, blue, red, yellow. Those hoses also had cables inside. They would wet them and beat us with them.

Dismemberment in the Face

Sedef told a story of violence one time that revealed another dimension of this “terrifying intimacy” between persecutor and the persecuted in the form of the police and trans women. A male-bodied transgender woman friend of Sedef, Selda, did something extraordinary during one of her many spells of detention and torture by the police. In the past, especially in those years during and following the September 12 coup, trans women were commonly remanded into custody for a week
to ten days. Rebelling against her incarceration, Selda cut off her penis and threw it in Hortum Süleyman’s face from behind the bars. Sedef said, she couldn’t take it anymore and she was crazy enough to do such a thing. Like some of the gacis in the room, my face changed with shock and repulsion upon hearing this story. Other gacis already knew the story and started laughing and bragging about Selda, as Sedef continued to give further description, about how the holding cell was covered all over by blood spilled on the floor and Selda was immediately hospitalized.

Recovering from the shock in visualizing this story, I found myself curious about the detail of how Selda had managed to sneak a sharp object into the jail. Like the Süleyman’s notorious collection of hoses, this story may be apocryphal, as I did not receive a convincing account of the sharp object from any of the gacis. Regardless of its veracity or otherwise, however, these stories still do some powerful symbolic work on the ways in which state violence operated in relation to the sexed body, and, in this case, how Selda transformed her body into a weapon to respond. Bringing together the most “public” and “private,” or the most exposed and hidden body parts, face and sexual organs, respectively, this story is rich in meaning. Analyzing it briefly, I first focus on the “facial” dimension.

Drawing on Gilles Deleuze’s and Felix Guattari’s (1987) concept of “faciality,” Peter Benson (2008:596) discusses “how power and perception overlap… on the basis of what people see when they look at other people’s faces.” Power relations, media images, and social stereotypes pave the way for the social production of faces, and “the facialization of the entire body and all its surroundings and objects” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:181). Hence, when we look at human visages, we can interpret them as symbols of various social inequalities based on, for example, gender, race, class, ethnic identity, etc., or as markers of place and icons of power or resistance. Nations and states gain faces via the widespread circulation of particular symbols,
figures, and artifacts. States also use various media techniques and conventions to produce popular imaginings and visages of, for example, criminals (Siegel 1998) or terrorists (Puar 2007; Engle 2007).

In a similar vein, people might attribute different faces to the state depending on their experiences and interactions with state actors (Navaro-Yashin 2002). When people look at some faces, they might see those faces as bearers of traces of specific social processes and pressures (Benson 2008:612). In Turkey, for instance, Kenan Evren, the leader of the September 12 coup, is for many the face of the military state. Likewise, for trans women in Istanbul, Hortum Süleyman’s face conveys a specific sexual image of the state, namely, as evil, transphobic, and torturous.

Michael Taussig theorizes face as “a contingency, at the magical crossroads of mask” (1999:3); hence, it is, at the same time, detachable and damageable. Just as there are practices of facialization, so are there practices also of defacement. Subversive practices of defacement utilize the power of faciality to challenge a face’s integrity and authority (Benson 2008:612). Defacement reveals the relations of power that have contributed to the production of the face, placing it in a novel context. It is, of course, this that gives literal masks their power of anonymity, with intended defacement as a subversive act (c.f. the use of Guy Fawkes V-for-Vendetta masks at street protests like Gezi). In this case, Selda’s throwing the severed penis at the torturer and incarcerator might be read as a subversive practice of defacement. The penis thrown in the face of the chief police officer becomes a weapon that targets the state in general, facializing the state through the visage of Süleyman, who thus becomes, literally, the face of the state.

Cutting off her penis and fragmenting her body surface, Selda breaks with the official
gender norm of her sexed body as constituted by the dominant regimes of truth and signification. The penis thrown at Hortum Süleyman’s face is an act of transforming her body into the condition and possibility of transgression that stains and parodies the face of the state in its administration of the sexual regime. Even supposing Selda’s story to be invented and communicated as rumour, it still functions to discursively render the state defaced and desecrated through the circulation of this rumour among trans people. In fact it functions thus especially as rumour (and not just as amazing veracity, a bizarre event that merely happened to happen).

As Feldman (1996:230) indicates, rumour mediates what could happen within given formations of disarray and therein produces a counter-society. The result is a “social production of collective experience in the absence of wide-scale social credibility” (Feldman 1996:230). Selda’s story is perfectly comprehensible—and perhaps more believable—as the projection of a desired act against the state (now materialized as political action through the opportunity afforded by Gezi).

Selda’s story can also be understood as a kind of “counter-spectacle” as a form of resistance to sovereign power. The sovereign makes a spectacle of discipline and punishment, and the ruled makes a counter-spectacle of her own body, disfiguring and brutalizing it by severing the penis, of course, but also displaying the power to do so. Thus, on one level she is humiliating the sovereign in his own castle, and thus, temporarily at least, claiming his, the state’s, space with the spraying and spillage of blood, but at the same time, she is also making an individual claim to sovereignty over her own body, and thus reclaiming the body captured by the state’s sovereign power literally, as well as figuratively. A violence self-deployed and directed at her own body becomes the condition of her resistance to the state and its sexual logic, and hence, the condition of re-establishing both her individual value in state-defined space of no-value (an
unregulated jail) and also the individual sovereignty of her body (within that space, but by extension in normative social space generally). It is also a moment of violence through which Selda forcibly defines and constructs her sex—by cutting off her penis, turning it over to the state, and slapping “the state” in its “face.”

**Medicalizing the Problem**

The state service delivery of extralegal violence to trans women’s everyday life was not limited to the police alone. After being released from the police station, they were often transferred directly to the hospital, *Cançan*, for medical examination. Although named as a public hospital, the doctors in Cançan only treated registered and unregistered sex workers, and non-sex worker women either avoided visiting this hospital or were not allowed to enter by the official gatekeepers without special permission from the governor’s office. The Turkish code on prostitution obliges registered sex workers to visit this hospital twice a week; otherwise, the police have the right to bring them to the hospital by force. The situation with the unregistered sex workers is a bit different: usually the police bring them to the hospital subsequent to the raids on their houses and workspaces.\(^73\)

During Hortum Süleyman’s tenure, this hospital worked in collaboration with the police and carried out extralegal practices as per Hortum Süleyman’s instructions. Usually, the police would arrange the hospital transfers just before the weekend so that the girls had to wait for their examination until the Monday shift, thus keeping them in the hospital over the weekend. The doctors would use small scars or pimples as an excuse to detain them in the hospital longer than necessary.

\(^{73}\) I have discussed the political, social, and cultural impacts of the organization of this hospital into a sex worker-only space (Zengin 2007, 2011).
Recounting one of those times she was transported to the hospital by the police, Melis verified this with a similar anecdote:

The chief police officer at the time turned to the hospital staff and said, “They should sleep on top of each other in the hospital. They can sleep in rooms or the hospital garden, I don’t give a shit! You shouldn’t let them out of the hospital for 15 to 20 days. Once they go out, they should be ill. If they are not diseased and they are healthy, you should give them an injection, you should make them faint. You should make them ill!”

They gave me one of those injections that they give to mad people. They would make me go crazy. One day, I reacted, “I don’t have syphilis!”… They made scars on my hands… I was completely fine. The doc didn’t want to let me go: “You should stay, you shouldn’t go! The chief doesn’t want you out!” When I finally managed to get out, the same police officer brought me back again. We were tortured every single minute… All our houses, our clubs were being raided. We had to go out on the highways [to look for clients]. We ended up working anywhere. I worked the highways for five or six years. I got into an accident. A car crashed into me. While I was trying to escape from the police, a car ran me over … I’ve spent my life running away. This world, this life has been overwhelmed with police violence. Always the police…

A multiplicity of state actors and institutional practices collaborated and combined to disperse the trans community. Trans women’s lives were sadistically and systematically ruined with sovereign forms of violence mediated via a litany of governmental techniques. In the case of the injections into trans women’s bodies, the application of biopower is individuated: human biology became the domain for a literal injection of control and discipline. With the collaboration of its security forces and medical authorities, the state violence takes extreme sovereign forms by first imprisoning and then occupying (entering) trans women’s bodies. I tried to gather more information on the institutional practice of injection, but Melis could not provide me with further details, changing the
subject with, again, “Because of all this, I spent my whole life running away.”

**Synthetic Legalities**

During the 2000s, particularly with Celalettin Cerrah’s tenure at the Beyoğlu Police Station between 2003 and 2009, the gacıs experienced a significant reduction in the terrorizing police violence and harassment. The raids on houses still continued, but less frequently than before, and beatings also decreased. Gizem, a trans woman of 39, recounted the Celalettin Cerrah period:

Cerrah’s times were looser in terms of police control. The police would raid and then go. There were specific days… For example, once a month or every two months, the police would make visits in certain areas for inspection. On those days, we would not go out to solicit. Now we work under the threat of internment every day! Before we used to be taken into custody maybe every three weeks or every two months, whatever, but now you’re being jailed every day!

Today’s increased “efficiency” in police surveillance and control of nonnormative sexualities started with the appointment of Hüseyin Çapkın to the same police station in 2009. His tenure instituted a new reign of police discipline and control, and new attempts to displace and disappear trans people from public life. However, the strategies introduced to achieve these objectives were profoundly different and brought new negotiations with law and novel computations of legal and extralegal practice. No longer were physical violence, torture, and terror the principle tools of state power. Instead, Hüseyin Çapkın promoted the use of law as a punitive strategy by fining trans women, filing
lawsuits against them, and taking them into custody within the limits of law, for shorter time intervals yet far more frequently.  

Some of my informants denied that today’s governmental techniques were devoid of extreme forms of violence, such as işkence. For example, Ceyda refused to see işkence (brutality, abuse) as something that belonged to the past. Rather, she spoke of its present-day, diffused forms in the everyday lives of trans women, and drew attention to the role of legal authorities and practices in utilizing işkence in a newly governed fashion:

İşkence has always been around! It only changes form and colour now and then. Sometimes it goes up, sometimes goes down. It takes different forms like physical violence, curses and insults. And sometimes during the police raids, they register us as “pimps,” or as illegal brothel owners even though we bring our clients to those houses as sex workers, not as pimps or owners of the house. If the prosecutor has some problem or other, then he orders to keep us imprisoned until the first court case comes up. They don’t bother to prove the alleged crime. Their order is enough to jail us! This is also violence… After the first court case, you can prove yourself a sex worker and not a pimp with your friends’ testimonies, but you still stay in jail till your release. That’s the problem! I have friends who stayed in prison from three to forty days. They got released after the first court case, but the cases went on for a year or two.

In my conversations with trans women, Hortum Süleyman and Hüseyin Çapkin began to appear as two major figures in the shared consciousness of daily life for the trans community, alike in their extraordinary efforts to dominate, and, when necessary, displace and erase trans people from social life. Their different approaches nevertheless deployed mostly correlating practices and strategies;

74 The current law permits only a maximum three-hour long custody.
juxtaposing the two thus reveals how the state, in the form of the Beyoğlu police force, has incorporated evolving technologies of violence to govern and discipline. Despite the alteration of its forms, state violence has always operated according to a consistently heteronormative and patriarchal logic that utilizes a range of both legal and extralegal means involving commitment to and employment of objectifying oppression, the consistent and widespread abuse of human rights (in the widest sense, of people’s humanity) in order to supervise, control, and regulate gendered and sexual difference, and thus to construct and punish sexual others.

Comparisons between the present and the past experiences of state violence were a popular topic of conversation among gacıs, though gacıs’ past time referrals and specific experience of the police depended on their age. And notwithstanding their different views on the matter, when it came to certain aspects of the police’s attitude, every single trans woman agreed that there had been a pivotal change in the police use of power against trans women. Even though present day police violence is less physically intimate and painful and less psychologically terrorizing and brutalizing, gacıs still bitterly complain about it, due to the completely unchanged punitive logic it enforces.

During my conversations, I was struck by the insightful analysis of casual comments about the shift in the police violence. Gamze’s words exemplify this, with her emphasis on the development of novel forms of violence, such as the “ideological,” linked especially with the AKP government:

From the late 1990s to 2002, the situation was not that bad! There was violence from time to time. Yet with the AKP government—this is very crucial to note—an intellectual reaction against LGBTT people started. You know, when Hortum Süleyman beat trans people with hoses, his acts were perhaps more shaped by patriarchy at large, perhaps his hidden sexual feelings, or maybe his personal homophobic hatred. But the current actors do ideological
violence. This is really important! We have a thesis. For the first time, the government counters us with an anti-thesis.

Gamze’s “thesis vs. anti-thesis” statement speaks to the public production and circulation of official discourses about “homosexuality” by current government actors in response to LGBTQI campaigns about hate crimes and human rights. I will turn to this point below but, first, I want to discuss her focus on ideological violence, a significant theme that provides a productive trope identifying what has changed since the AKP government came to power in 2002. The regulations, practices, and discourses of the present government can be interpreted through ideological lenses as a mode of expressing the newly introduced techniques of power under its term.

As Eric Wolf (1999:4) suggested, ideologies are “programs for the deployment of power” and “suggest unified schemes or configurations developed to underwrite or manifest power.” They are systemic and infused into the lives of their subjects at many levels. Louis Althusser’s (1972) influential essay, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” shows the extent of this infusion by highlighting the ideological apparatuses of the state, and their role in subject-formation. The ideological state apparatus (educational, religious, legal, military, and political institutions, the family, media, etc.) works by interpelling, or “hailing,” individuals as socialized subjects, transforming them into subjects of ideology through repeated discourses and ritualized practices. Žižek (1989:43) refers to this process as the internalization of “the symbolic machine of ideology.” Within this, a change of government may become crucial, insofar as it involves an alteration in the collective mindset of those who hold these ideological state apparatuses, and hence the material and discursive resources of the state. The ideological experience is malleable.
In countries with heavily politicized bureaucracies (civil service sectors) and a relatively strong centralization of civil power in the executive, like Turkey, each change in political administration tends to bring with it the introduction and establishment of the governing party’s cadre in public offices. The appointment of a range of new figures to key public positions, such as the Head of Police, Schools, Universities, and the Governorships, is usually the first thing to expect once electoral power changes. Naturally, such a system of patronage works even more effectively when the elected party succeeds in forming a single-party, majority government, and, moreover, when it achieves this over successive terms in office, which is exactly what the AKP has done.

With the power in Parliament to pass legislation at will and to ensure the execution of this and further determine public policy through its appointments, Turkey’s governing party has introduced a raft of material, discursive, and symbolic transformations into various domains of institutional practice (the judiciary, education, health system, etc.) directly impacting on everyday life. These changes, whilst claimed to be replacing the long-standing oppressive and discriminatory state structure with a more democratic and transparent one, have, in fact, endorsed the organization of institutional and non-institutional life alike according to a socially conservative ideology shaped by the values of Islam (see Chapter 2). The Republic’s history of social engineering (from population movements to techniques of nationalist citizen production) is now taken up according to these new, adjusted ideological norms and values.

As part of this ideological rectification, the government sought to restructure the Turkish state into an actual, not a so-called, “state of law” (within which context the “zero tolerance for torture” discourse was introduced). This has operated to disguise the ways in which violence has

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75 Recent developments, first crystallized by Gezi but traceable back to the third election victory in 2009 and subsequent downing of the military (through the courts, but on fabricated and generally non-substantive evidence),
been incorporated into the everyday lives of social actors, especially via the use of the legal system. Since the basic approach to the hegemonic gender normativity has not been ameliorated, its instrumentalization through state agencies such as the police remains fundamentally unaffected. What the change did, perhaps, facilitate, was an empowerment of civil society (expressed, for example, through LGBTI Istanbul) and the concomitant establishment of a more sophisticated anti-establishment critique. Hence Gamze’s phrase, “intellectual reaction” or “ideological violence” against LGBTI people, referring, at one level, to the change in the official discourse and exercise of violence, the replacement of simple, brutalizing, and sometimes plain barbaric forms of physical violence by the police with more technical, calculated, and subtle forms. Yet her insight operates at other levels, also.

In 2009–10, Selma Aliye Kavaf, the then Minister for Women and Family (now the Ministry of Family and Social Policy—see Chapter 2), released several statements about LGBTQI people, denouncing “homosexuality” especially, as a sickness. A discursive space opened and developed as certain columnists, known to be strong supporters of the government (see Chapter 6), followed suit and opined similarly. It is possible to interpret this discursive space as a product of several social, cultural and religious factors; the most significant, however, was the decade-long heightened visibility of queer activism in Turkey. Gamze’s emphasis (above) on the dialectical relationship between the current government and LGBTQI people, that is, in her words, “thesis” and “antithesis,” becomes more meaningful when situated within this discursive context.

appear to have severely undermined this sovereignty of law. Against that, however, one might argue that the major concerns (as of January 2013) have revolved around control of the legal-judicial apparatus rather than its abandonment.
Through the institution of law, thus through rationality rather than brute power as its defense, the government was faced with the obligation of developing an official discourse on queer sexualities, an “anti-thesis,” in response to the LGBTT political discourse based on human rights and equality, the “thesis” itself facilitated by the new political atmosphere the new administration apparently sought to foster. In other words, the government unintentionally helped LGBTQI people to force the state to develop a language on queer issues in response, according to its own ideological demands. Thus it is that the discourse of legality and practice of law, not the overt forms of physical violence, have begun to represent the relationship between state institutions and actors, and the LGBTQI community. A synthesis has emerged in which the LGBTQI community has enjoyed significant agency.

Nevertheless, law and the legal system—seemingly independent—have been manipulated towards different ends, paving the way for the exercise of more subtle forms of governmental violence. In the hands of the police, the law has been instrumentalized to render individuals as subjects of ideology. In the policeman’s call of “Hey, you there!” trans people recognize themselves instantly as the addressee. In this routine drama of everyday state oppression, it is crucial also to stress the police’s selective and differential economy of stopping. As Sara Ahmed argues,

Some bodies more than others are “stopped” as the subject of the policeman’s address… The “hey you”… [is addressed to] the body that cannot be recruited, to the body that is “out of place” in this place. In other words, the “unrecruitable” body must still be “recruited” into this place, in part through the very repetition of the action of “being stopped” as a mode of address (Ahmed 2006:139–40).

In the next section, I focus on this “stop and search” strategy of the police, namely, the bonus system, to analyze how the police deploy (extra)legal means to exercise violence as a technology
of gender and sexuality production, “recruiting” trans women’s “unrecruitable” bodies into the system—but I also demonstrate how trans people cope with this “recruitment” and develop resilient mechanisms in the face of the police’s call, hence, compelling the police to invent new, more subtle forms of violence (and thus further detailing Gamze’s point above on the dialectical “thesis/anti-thesis” relationship).

The Bonus System

Towards the end of 2011, a police document was leaked via social media (Facebook and Twitter) that went viral. This document was divided into three columns, each of them representing “the name of the crime”, “points” and “in case of arrest.” It laid out 18 different categories of crime, ranking each of them according to a specific number of “points” (Figure 4.2). The points represented the bonus points that a police officer would receive upon his capture of the associated criminal type (with further bonuses available for multiple arrests on the same day).

At the top of the list was the category for “Molotov cocktail and terror-related incidents,” which brought the maximum of 1500 points to the police officer, 500 points more than for the next categories, a broad spectrum of standard categories, namely, homicide, kidnapping, mugging, and various types of theft (including house and car). After this slightly strange (and politicized) start—equating car theft with murder which was itself rated as less serious than throwing a Molotov cocktail—the list continued in more predictable fashion with items related to categories like gun-holding, drugs, assault. Lower down, worth 10–20 points and nestled between obstructing a police
officer and substance addiction there appeared two new categories of criminal, “transvestite” and “known woman” (travesti, bilinen bayan) (Figure 4.2).\footnote{76}

Regardless of exactly how this bonus system operated, clearly it was intended to be motivational, aiming especially at the prevention of certain types of crime and arrest of certain types of criminal—or, of particular sex business activities and sexual orientations/gender identities. During my fieldwork, I became aware of this bonus system as I actively witnessed almost every one of my trans women friends receive tickets. The tickets themselves, as written documents, represented the authenticity of the recently developed punitive practice on the part of the police, yet there was no public information about its grounding categories as listed by—and other than—the leaked document (about which I was unable to gain any further information beyond that garnered from gacıs, below). The document and its categories thus took on a ghostly presence, resonating in trans women’s everyday lives like an unseen but ever-present threat. At least, however, the leaking of the document uncovered the mystery of the upsurge in arrests and revealed the logic of the recent practices of police violence.\footnote{77}

Documents, as Tobias Kelly (2006:92) urges us, should be not be viewed “as abstract entities, but must be understood in the wider institutional and political context in which they are produced, verified, and take effect”. In other words, the social life of documents warrants the significant attention of critical research. For example, it is important to investigate the kinds of social and political relationships that are made possible and mediated through the production, as

\footnote{76} Literally translated as “known lady,” bilinen bayan carries the connotations of “lady of ill repute.” This category in particular was the subject of intense discussions, especially among women, for its vagueness (about quite what is known about the woman in question and how it is known, etc.).

\footnote{77} Assuming the forcible (temporary) removal of a person’s liberty and financial penalty on the basis of sexual orientation/gender identity to be a form of violence.
well as circulation of documents. This is clearly the case also for official documents; the relationship between the state and documents is also noteworthy.

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<td>TRAVESTİ</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>BİLEN BAYAN</td>
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<td>KARAYOLLARI ÜZERİNDE SATICILIK YAPAN(Mendil Satan, Cam Silden Vb. Şahşiları)</td>
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1- Yukarıdaki puanlar failer ekipler tarafından alınıdıında verilecektir.
2- 1 günde birden fazla aranan şahıs tutanlığı olan ekipleri:
   Birinci aranan şahıs tutanlığı=20
   İkinci aranan şahıs tutanlığı=30
   Üçüncü aranan şahıs tutanlığı=40 puan gibi 10 puan artırılacak verilecektir.
3- 1 günde birden fazla NARKOTİK şahıs tutanlığı olan ekipleri:
   Birinci NARKOTİK tutanlığı=100
   İkinci NARKOTİK tutanlığı=150
   Üçüncü NARKOTİK tutanlığı=200 puan gibi 50 puan artırılacak verilecektir.
4- Bulunlu Narkotik dişinda Ticari ienden alınan her icraate 2 Katı puan verilecektir.

**Figure 4.2** Police categories of crime and points circulated via social media (2011)
Recent anthropological scholarship on bureaucracy has developed a particular interest in studying documents as the state’s material culture (Riles 2000, 2006; Hull 2008, 2012; Bubandt 2009; Navaro-Yashin 2007, 2012). As Yael Navaro-Yashin (2012:114) points out, documents are one of “the primary paraphernalia of modern states and legal systems,” and ethnographic research on documents provides analytical insights into the logic of administrative control and shows the kinds of subjects, objects, and socialities that documents construct (Hull 2012). An analysis of state policies and laws focusing on documentary practices also allows us to examine the institutionalization of sexuality, “state-sexuality” or “the state-sexuality nexus” (Puri forthcoming:35). From this perspective on documentary practices, the documents produced (literally and evidentially) invite discussion of the specifics of contemporary relations between the police and trans people, as well as the form of state power and its relation to law and non-normative sexualities in Turkey.

My trans informants told me, the Director of the Beyoğlu Police, Hüseyin Çapkın, initiated this bonus system in 2009 so as to provide police officers with a new means for recompense, in the form of things like payment, leave, and promotion. Officers collect points based on their performance, as measured by the type and number of criminals caught. Clearly, the logic behind the introduction of this mechanism is grounded in increasing the police efficiency by distributing to each officer performance-based rewards. For example, to accumulate 1000 points a week is considered sufficient to receive a vacation or financial bonus.

In my conversations with gacıs, they focused on common activities and categories, claiming that they themselves represent the most rewarding type with a bonus of 20, while

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78 The system appears to still be in place, judging from gaci comments.
solvent-sniffers, drug dealers, and thieves only bring in 5, 10 and 15 points respectively. That was how they explained the then recent increase in police stopping trans women issuing fines in Istanbul. On the other hand, the gacis were not even aware of the listing of travesti and bilinen bayan that the police apparently refer to as punishable identities. Certainly none had ever received a ticket that cited them for falling in either of these categories. But the categories patently do authorize police officers to arbitrarily stop and investigate trans people along with sex workers at any time.

Related to this, David Valentine (2007:28) alerts us to “power categories” and their capacity to enable action, identification, and communication with others but also in their power to disable, restrict, and hinder many other possibilities. In the hands of those who act in the name the state, the production of particular categories might function to regulate, punish, discriminate, and marginalize. For example, the police in Turkey can still deploy the categories of travesti and bilinen bayan, notwithstanding their absence in written law.

When it comes to fines imposed on trans people, the police use two different laws: the Traffic Law and Misdemeanour Act of Turkish Criminal Laws. The Traffic Law is used to sanction trans people when they are believed to be, or can be construed as, blocking traffic while bargaining with potential clients on the street; the Misdemeanour Act prohibits trans people from soliciting behaviours in public places as understood to be violating public decency and thus “breaching the peace.” The Act went into effect at the end of March 2005 and legislates for administrative sanctions against a range of publicly displayed misdemeanours, including disorderly conduct, begging, gambling, insobriety, uproar, causing disturbance, occupation of public spaces, consumption of tobacco products, failing to present the ID card when asked, polluting the environment, putting up posters, and carrying a gun. Trans women are typically
fined under the 37th Article, “disturbing others in the streets by selling goods or services”. However, trans women who do not work in sex trade are also booked for violation of this Article.

In one incident, for example, the police fined a trans woman under the auspices of the Misdemeanour Act on the grounds that she was a “man walking in female outfit” (kadın kılığında dolaşan erkek), which was also construed as contravening public decency. “Public decency” here refers to normative displays of gender roles and sexed bodies, particularly those of manhood and male sexual identity. Popularly in Turkey, a man in female outfit is viewed either as an insult to masculinity (read hegemonic masculinity) or as a source of mockery, and hence not sufficiently masculine.

Trans women also reported incidents during which some of them were threatened by police of disclosure of their situation to their parents, something that would have significant impacts on their life conditions. Disowning and abandonment of trans people by their blood families is common in Turkey: there are even occasional incidents of LGBT murders committed by their natal family members (see Chapter 7). Certainly, the police threat to report trans people to their families may have a great impact on them due to such familial dynamics.

The police did not always follow a steady trajectory when applying the law; rather, they have changed patterns and punishment categories since the initial implementation of the bonus system. In this developing history, the praxis of law has been shaped not only by the police, but also by trans women, as Gizem reveals:

First, they used to fine trans women for being exhibitionists. Trans women were charged with exhibitionism, but nobody was actually sentenced because of that. They all beat the rap. Then they started to make me out as a pimp on the ticket, even though I was selling myself; I was
working the street as capital [sermaye].\textsuperscript{79} They would jail me and I’d spend a month in prison. Now they’ve started ticketing us using the Traffic Laws. This way they thought they would be able to stop us. Girls started to carry tiny cams fitted into their key-holders to record police malpractice, because they didn’t block the traffic or cause any problem for traffic safety. Now the police started not giving the girls their ticket receipts that girls can make their payments through or use in court. And in return, the girls started to call Gayrettepe 155\textsuperscript{80} and say, “Sir, they didn’t give me my receipt, I want to take my receipt.” So now they give us the receipt whenever we ask.

Each time the police come up with a new strategy to punish trans women, the women respond with counter-tactics and force the state to search for new modes of violence with which to continue trans women’s social exclusion and marginalization. Borrowing from Michelle de Certeau (1984), the distinction between strategy and tactic may be useful here. De Certeau argues that the everyday life is full of a multitude of “tactics” that are developed in the face of “strategies,” that is, disciplinary technologies or forced relationships set by institutions and power structures (ibid:xix). Even though people are “caught in the nets of ‘discipline,’” they are caught in them with their “dispersed, tactical, and makeshift creativity” (ibid: xiv-v). Hence, groups or individuals constantly manipulate relations and events that are set by strategies.

From this perspective, the main goal of the Turkish police to produce strategies to reproduce a normative public life, from which certain people and lives are ejected, absented or rendered invisible. In the case of trans women, the police tried to execute this plan by not giving

\textsuperscript{79} I.e., working for a pimp. Later on during our interview, Gizem told that the police use the category “pimp” on purpose to prevent girls from finding official positions if they ever decided to quit as sex workers. Once someone has a record as a prostitute on their file, they are no longer available for state employment.

\textsuperscript{80} The main police station to which the police who ticket women are attached.
them a copy of the ticket. Legally, one of the two ticket copies should be handed to the person fined and the other sent to the court. Nevertheless, many policemen do not give a copy to trans women, but rather keep those copies. This way, the police preclude trans women from taking up the issue in court since without the document copy they are not able to dispute their penalty.

Since legal requirements are not generally well known or the knowledge easily accessible, some trans women thought that they were exempted from the fine because they were not given the copy of the ticket. When they received their summons to appear in court, they were shocked to learn of their financial punishment. And as they lacked the copy, they were unable to make any claim against their recorded “crime.” Moreover, when the fines of these tickets exceed a certain value, the police can sue the trans women, thus ensuring that the state retrieves the unpaid debt. By keeping the second copy, police facilitated the process of recording and following up on unpaid fines.

This was the latest tactic, or tactic set, that the police were deploying to further their main strategy as I was engaged in my fieldwork. Trans people were anticipating that many trans women would be pressed to pay huge amounts of debt, which would eventually lead to their imprisonment. However, each violent experience of and interaction with the police on the part of trans women is itself translated into a newly improved counter-tactic.

What impels such tactical moves, however, is a much more immediate imperative: they are simply coping mechanisms to deal with everyday violence. Istanbul LGBTT and Kadin

81 For example, the fines might reach at from 5000 to 6000 liras (of the order of $4000, by simple exchange value, but much more by local, real value).
Kapısı started to educate their visitors and friends in legal issues and taught them to insist on getting their copy whenever they were caught and forced by the police to sign a document on the street. During my fieldwork, Kadın Kapısı started to work with a part-time lawyer who would visit the centre once a week to provide legal assistance in responding to sex workers’ questions regarding the implementation of prostitution codes, as well as police violence in general. This legal assistance helped trans women to empower themselves before the law and dispute some of the fines in court.

Sevda was one of the main people who worked hard for this legal empowerment. She assessed the situation thus:

There is not as much physical violence in police stations as in the past, but the present police take advantage of some gaps in the law. They ticket gacis. We, as Kadın Kapısı, wrote numerous petitions. Due to these petitions, some of the charges against girls have been dropped. But now, the police have started to not give a written notice to gacis concerning their fines. They stop gacis in the street, ask them for their IDs and pretend that they are checking with gacis’ general record on the spot. In fact, they issue tickets, but they don’t give the receipt. Gacis are not even aware of being ticketed! Once these tickets reach a certain number, girls are put into prison since they didn’t pay their debts. Many of our friends have been jailed this way. They are only 19–20 years old and they have criminal records. Their only misconduct—though it is not legally defined as such—is prostitution… Doing sex work in itself is not a crime as long as one does it by oneself… One is found guilty for either establishing an organized prostitution network or having the status of a pimp and providing space for prostitution.

The gradual increase in debts to the state is not the sole problem. There are more substantial issues and motivations at stake behind the operation of this bonus system. First, as the police allegedly try to prevent sex work on the street, they indirectly motivate trans women to do more
sex work since most of them have no other option than prostitution to make money to pay for their fines. In a way, we can talk about a paradoxically circular system: the more the police fine trans women (attempting to make them invisible or just punish them for not being so), the more trans women search for ways to increase their share in sex work to stay free of debt to the state (and thus become increasingly visible).

Second, and more significantly, this legal regulation places trans women in a difficult situation where they can no longer move freely in public. Not only can they not easily do sex work on the street, but also many of them are afraid even to go out to the shop or just walk in the neighbourhood because of the punishment mechanisms that condemn them in their ordinary lives and are liable to be applied at any moment, without warning or reason.

I heard of several incidents in which trans women were caught and fined by the police while taking a cab or shopping in stores. During my time spent with the gacıs, I also heard rumours that police officers dug into trans women’s purses to search for condoms. If a trans woman happens to be carrying more than one condom, she is automatically suspected of prostitution and can get a ticket. Fines target their presence in the public arena irrelevant of whether or not they are sex workers, let alone actively on the job.

As discussed (Chapter 3), what is at stake is the place of trans people in the social space. They are pushed from the main streets to the side streets, and from the centre (of Beyoğlu) to the periphery, both of which have been historically fluid but fixed spatial configurations. Now, they are physically, financially and emotionally hounded out of the social sphere altogether as a matter of police strategy. Hence, there is a complicated and intricate tension between trans visibility and invisibility, between an unwanted inclusion into the public sphere (as abject figures) and an exclusion from the possibilities of full civic life.
Mary Gray’s discussion on the problems of LGBT visibility in rural US life resonates with some dynamics of trans visibility in the Turkish urban context of Istanbul: visibility does not always bring empowerment or a respectful recognition to its subjects, and it can, on the contrary, remove the very possibilities of an ordinary life (Gray 2009). Trans visibility, while a claim in and to public life, at the same time invites unwanted attention, material violence, and more policing. Sevda gives a powerful account of the perils of such visibility:

Biological women have a chance to hide their identity as sex workers even when they are in striking clothes. When they say, “I am not working, I am not a sex worker,” they can camouflage themselves successfully. But the police know that trans women have no economic choice but to do sex work. A trans woman can always be ticketed as an unlicensed sex worker, anytime. I know girls who got tickets from the police when they left their houses to buy some milk for breakfast in the early morning. Trans individuals have no way to be invisible. That is why, whenever they are visible in public life, they are seen as an easy target and ticketed by the police.

Police units tend to see all trans women in public as unlicensed sex workers or legitimate targets for detention and verbal and physical assault. Merely having a nonconforming gendered appearance becomes a justification for police violence. Sedef made similar remarks to Sevda, when she compared being a trans woman to an unlicensed non-trans sex worker in the eyes of the police:

Biological women get ticketed only when they solicit illegally in the street. They don’t get tickets anywhere else. But trans women get tickets just because they are trans women, not because they are illegally prostituting in the street. They cannot hide what they are. I start to panic and use side alleys to hide from the police even when I am walking home. I haven’t been working as a sex worker for years now, but still, in the street, I constantly watch out so as not to get caught by the police.
The motivation behind the extralegal punitive practice gained meaning with the leaking of the document and its categories of *travesti* and *bilinen bayan*. Trans people saw the textual proof of their long-time suspicion: just being a trans person (particularly trans woman) was sufficient to for police punishment. The police were straying far beyond their specific role of maintaining public security, thus creating a space for their own arbitrary and punitive (and remunerative) action and manipulation of existing law; in fact, they had gone further and taken it upon themselves to legislate on new crimes and new criminal categories.

The leaking of the details of the bonus system led to a reaction from some politicians. One MP, Melda Onur, from the main opposition Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) submitted a written question to the Minister of Internal Affairs. Onur first requested verification of such a chart and the bonus system, apparently enforced by a 600-strong special force established with the instalment as Istanbul Head of Police of Hüseyin Çapkın (2010), and then, among other things, requested an explanation of the categories of “*travesti*” and “*bilinen bayan*,” noting that “under the Law of the Turkish Republic and International Agreements being a transvestite/transsexual is not a crime.” An official response was received, albeit several months later and written not by the Minister of Internal Affairs but the Governor of Istanbul.

The Governor’s reply broadly acknowledged the existence of the bonus system and stated that the calculation of points corresponded with crime types and their concentration in individual districts. The ubiquity of certain crimes in particular neighbourhoods leads those crimes and criminals to be assigned the maximum number of points for the police officers in those areas. Every four months, the staff with the highest performance are promoted to positions that demand more

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82 Letter and reply (Turkish): [http://meldaonur.net/?p=520](http://meldaonur.net/?p=520)
active missions (although no clue was provided as to what an “active mission” might be), while officers with lower performance are redistributed to other positions, evaluated as a better fit for their skills. In response to the category of “travesti,” the Governor stated that trans people face no investigation because of their “sexual preference,” but that a legal process is instigated against people causing problems for traffic safety, although without regard to the person’s trans identity or sexual preference.

The tardy response did acknowledge and present a rationality for the points system, but it provided no explanation for the creation of the travesti category, let alone offer to explain it with an accurate definition of sexual orientation, to which reference was made, thus essentially treating this as interchangeable with gender identity, which was not mentioned. Overall, the Governor dissembled on the issue of the travesti category, neither denying nor accepting it as an official crime/criminal type, and thus once more ascribing a ghostly status to police violence against trans women: the category of travesti is not recognised in law but can nonetheless be deployed by the law, as enforced by the police.

On the hand other, the Governor’s reply did offer a definition of “bilinen bayan” as a woman who jeopardizes traffic safety by indecently exposing her body on the roads. The interpretation of “indecency”—the extent of exposure of which body parts constitute indecency—and the relative responsibility of a driver distracted by such “indecency” were unaddressed, thus leaving the definition still unclear (practically, to be determined without official guidelines by police action and sanctioned or otherwise by court judgement). In fact, if the issue is soliciting on the street, “indecency” is not of primary importance, while if the issue is traffic safety, it is the soliciting in general that is relevant rather than the “indecency” in particular. Exposed female body parts are
rendered dangerous; one is led to conclude, not because of traffic safety, but as explicit displays of female sexuality in public.

This particular category of bilinen bayan embeds a logic that marks active female sexuality and the unrestrained and improperly dressed female body as threatening to the general organization of public life. Public displays of femininity have been strictly tied to the historical process of nation-state making and its modernization projects (Chapter 2), and it is impossible to think of this particular operation of the Misdemeanour Law as detached from such historical context. The same logic goes for the category of travesti in its functioning to regulate the bodily production of a public. As constructed by the police, both categories, of travesti and bilinen bayan—materially realised with their related documentation in the form of the bonus system chart and forcible production through the usage of fine tickets—were deployed to diminish and limit trans people’s and female sex workers’ lives and bodily expression, and thereby shape the moral and sexual production of space.

To address the fundamental issue of governance here (also posed in the questions of MP Onur), what, in fact, is the function of the police? Or, from a more anthropological perspective, what does the creation of the travesti and bilinen bayan categories, and hence the police force’s self-anointed status as lawmaker, tell us about the organization of current modern state power at the intersection of law, violence, and sexuality? I find Benjamin’s *Critique of Violence* (1978[1921]) helpful here.

Following Max Weber (1948[1919]), Benjamin argues that modern state formation is organized around its struggle over the monopoly of violence, and that this leads to the state’s attempt to criminalize each and every possibility of counter-violence (which would pose a threat to the existing order). With the state as an organized monopoly of violence by law, it follows that the realm
of modern law—with all its legal norms, practices, and institutions—originates in and is preserved by violence.

In order to further explicate the relation between violence and law, Benjamin emphasizes the duality in the function of violence: lawmaking violence and law-preserving violence. Lawmaking violence can be summarized as an instrument and mediation in the founding of law, while law-preserving violence is the form of violence used to maintain and preserve the existing law, which was founded by lawmaking violence. Benjamin argues that the display of this duality is demonstrated in different forms as instituted by the modern state, of which the police is one.

For Benjamin, the nature of the modern state perfectly manifests itself in the police institution, which suspends the distinction between lawmaking and law-preserving violence by embodying both. The police intervene frequently in situations where public security is allegedly at stake and where a legal ambiguity or issue in need of clarification is present, thus acting as de facto lawmakers. For example, police officers arbitrarily stop and search certain people on the street, or remove people from public places if they are perceived as posing a “threat” to public order. Depending on several social factors (i.e. race, class status, sexual identity, etc.), the alleged “threat” can gain quite flexible definitions, endowing police officers with a range of possible actions. Or, employing a somewhat circular logic, the use of illicit violence by the police as a means can be legitimated by its ends inasmuch as their legal actions constitute the illegal ends through the legal character of the means. To clarify how legality is employed in the service of illegality, one can list the disappearance or torture of people under police custody or the receipt of bribes as examples. In other words, police authority both consists in and is derived from its combined executive and legislative operation, the simultaneous use of lawmaking and law-preserving violence. Elaborating on the dialectical relation between these two forms of violence, Benjamin proceeds to present an
insightful analysis of modern state power. The bonus system and the crime type designed for trans people provide an exemplary demonstration of this, of the way in which the institution of the police embodies the dialectical relation between the two forms of state violence.

First, the police function as a lawmaker by inventing the categories of travesti and bilinen bayan, when there is no such category in the existing legal framework, and then punishing social actors according to these categories. By identifying trans people and sex workers as criminals, the categories declare them to be misfits, deviants who pose a threat to the existing heteronormative and sexual order. At the same time, the institution of the police functions as a law-preserver because the newly created categories serve to conserve and continue the sexual and gender organization of the present social order, which is also inscribed in the existing legal order through a separate set of legal codes and norms (including civil law and the prostitution code). The technical (legalistic) approach of stopping and ticketing becomes an effective, rational, and profitable tactic that presses violently upon the bodies of trans people, hence including them as abject into the public life while excluding them from the possibilities of full civic life. Overall, the entire bonus system demonstrates how the state’s power to produce itself as exception to its own laws enables the police on the street to make the law they then preserve by criminalizing the very appearance of trans women in public.

Thus far, I have focused on the role of police violence in shaping the conditions of trans women’s lives. In its various but distinctly governmental (sometimes intimate) forms and modes, this violence continually shapes trans lives and their sense of selves and their bodies and at all levels, from the socio-cultural of the most public domain to the inner and depth psychological of the most private. Of course, the relationship between “the state” and trans lives extends into other institutional spheres, including medicine and jurisprudence (as indicated, above). The following chapters bring these institutional actors and practices, as well as trans men’s
experiences into the heart of my general discussion on the entangled workings of the nexus of law, intimacy and violence to form the state’s sexual power to regulate and control gender and sexual difference and nonnormativity. Delineating the history of “transsexuality” as a medico-legal category and its contemporary deployment, the next, Chapter 5, largely draws on trans men’s experiences and relations with state actors within the juridical and medical domains.
- Are you a homosexual?

- No, absolutely not! I’m a woman. Don’t you see it in my eyes, my looks, my scent, and my manners? Well, there are some redundancies on me but they are not that significant. A surgery would fix the problem and they would no longer overshadow my femininity. I will then be able to attain my femaleness that I’ve been aspiring for.

CHAPTER 5

SEXUAL AND INTIMATE MATERIALIZATION OF STATE:

THE TRANS BODY AS A MEDICO-LEGAL PRODUCT

It was the 18th Annual Pride Week in Istanbul. I was sitting in a packed room, waiting for the panel to start. Titled “Transgender Body, Transition Process,” and organized and hosted by LambdaIstanbul, it brought together two psychiatrists and one trans man. The audience were especially excited by the prospect of a conversation with these medical authorities, because trans people often struggle with the intricate medico-legal process governing sex reassignment surgery (SRS) in Turkey. SRSs in Turkey include trans people’s bottom and top surgeries, ranging from genital reconfiguration to breast implantation for trans women, and breast removal for trans men. A medical report provided by psychiatrists is one part of the complicated and painstaking process

that makes SRS legal and permissible for an individual. It comes after approximately two years of psychotherapy, and without it, one is not authorized to have a legal SRS, which is the only way for trans people to have their ID cards re-issued according to their reassigned sex.

The psychiatrists in the panel had run these sorts of psychotherapy sessions, and produced medical reports authorizing these surgeries. Among the panel audience were people who had received medical reports from them. But as the panel and its subsequent Q&A session proceeded, I could observe a general disturbance among the audience, especially during the discussions around psychotherapy sessions, the rules about hormone intake, and the legal procedures concerning sex reassignment process. A gap between trans peoples’ understandings of their sex and sexual transition, and the doctors’ approach to sex was evident, and widening, reflecting a larger problem that also informed psychotherapy sessions. The questions of what sex, sexuality and gender mean, and how sex reassignment should take place, had different answers depending on who was speaking: the psychiatrists or their so-called trans “patients.”

The proof and production of one’s “true” sex also involves other medical and legal actors. Medical certification functions as a prerequisite for producing legal scripts of one’s sexual identity, commensurate with her or his sexuality and gender identity. During the Q&A session, the medico-legal measures of the sex reassignment process were harshly criticized by trans people for their strict reliance on particular notions of the bodily time, gender identity, and the sexed body, as well as for how these notions led to rigorous criteria for evaluating trans people and their proof of their “true” sex. Medicine and jurisprudence with regard to sex reassignment were challenged for carrying specific temporal and bodily assumptions about sexual transition, and about being a woman or a man, and for punishing people unable to comply with such rules.
Focusing on the workings of this medico-legal process to diagnose and treat “transsexuality” in Turkey, this chapter examines how the categories of sex and gender are integral to the formation and operation of the intimate workings of Turkish state power as the state seeks to govern and regulate not only bodies and sexuality, but also subjects’ intimate conducts and desires. I analyze the medico-legal production and configuration of “the transsexual body” also as a site for the materialization of the state as a heteronormative one. This materialization demonstrates itself in three specific attempts to control, “straighten up” and "fix" the indeterminate/ambivalent trans body so as to integrate it into the normative space of sex and gender with the help of “normalizing gaze and judgment” (Foucault 1995, 2004): first, in terms of sexual identity; second, in terms of sexual orientation; and third, in terms of their familial orientation (i.e. how trans people "properly" relate to their family).

Trans people, however, are more than passive recipients or subjects of such medico-legal discourses and practices. On the contrary, they actively negotiate, interpret, produce and desire various configurations of sex, gender and sexuality within a multiplicity of options, ranging from relatively normative configurations to new and radical imaginings. Sometimes what the state wants for/of them might overlap with their desires for, or imaginations of, the properly sexed body, but propelled by different aims and purposes. Hence, throughout, I also discuss those imaginings and configurations, by analysing how trans people respond to and experience the temporal and bodily characteristics of this medico-legal sex reassignment process. First, I begin with delineating the Turkish history of “transsexuality” as a medico-legal category, and show how its emergence also represents “a central cultural site where meanings about gender and sexuality are being worked” (Valentine 2007:14).
**Legal Strivings for Recognition: Bülent Ersoy’s Story**

“Transsexuality” was absent from Turkish law until 1988, when, Bülent Ersoy, a famous trans woman singer finally won her legal case to change her ID card to a female one as a result of a seven-year long legal struggle. Bülent Ersoy entered the music scene with a male body in 1971, and nine years after, she publicly identified as a woman with a desire for men. Owing to her countrywide celebrity, she attracted a high level of public attention. The mainstream Turkish newspapers, one after another, would report about her enigmatic sexual and gender identity, sometimes by appealing to public opinion of random people on streets, and sometimes by investigating her about how she felt, experienced and lived with her body as a sexed, gendered and desirous being. The opening excerpt to this chapter is from an interview with her for a popular magazine in 1980, when the public was excessively occupied with the mainstream media’s recurrent news about her body, her sexuality and her desire.

By January 1981, under the prohibitions and restrictions introduced by the 12 September military government, Bülent Ersoy was forbidden to perform as singer upon revealing her “true” sexual identity as woman (see Chapter 3). The military government’s measures caused Bülent Ersoy to flee the country for nine months. During her stay abroad, she not only performed in several cities across Europe, but also had an SRS in London, a city which was, at the time, reputed by trans people to be the best place for SRSs due to its alleged pioneering and well-educated plastic surgeons. Meanwhile in Turkey, SRSs were illegal and used to be secretly practiced by a few doctors in Istanbul in unhealthy conditions. In fact, prior to 1988, there were several legal cases involving trans women, who appealed to lower courts to change their sex on
official records after having their SRS either in Turkey or abroad. Despite the legal approval of those pleas by lower courts, the Supreme Court rejected them all (Öztürel 1981; Atamer 2005).\textsuperscript{84}

After nine months of self-imposed exile, when Bülent Ersoy returned to the country, her arrival was met with great enthusiasm in the mainstream media. She was presented as “woman (\textit{kadın})”.\textsuperscript{85} Public attention reached its peak and everybody started to take a role in the media’s tempting call to judge, approve, disapprove and comment on her new body and female identity. One interview with a random woman on the streets of Istanbul demonstrates perhaps the most interesting comment of the time: “My only hope is that she better takes good advantage of womanhood, rather than abuse it”\textsuperscript{86}—meaning she should behave like a modest, proper, and chaste woman and live up to the dominant feminine roles rather than display active female sexuality and improper feminine behaviors (see Chapter 2).

However, although she had an SRS in accordance with her gender identity and no longer represented a source of confusion or enigma, Bülent Ersoy was still not allowed to perform as a singer. The mayor of Istanbul mistook all transgendered people in Istanbul for being gay and forbade them to take the stage for public performance. For the mayor, they were merely “gay men dressed up in female outfit” and posed a notable threat to public order and moral life (see

\textsuperscript{84} In 1980 and 1981 a renowned professor of forensic medicine, Adnan Öztürel, published two articles on these legal cases. Pointing out a high number of local “transsexual cases” in Turkey, he linked the then-illegality of SRS to a specific article in the Turkish Criminal Law, which stated that those who do operations on men and women that annihilate their reproductive capacity, and those who give consent to such operations on their bodies, are subject to 6–12 months of imprisonment (1981:267). In 1983 this article was modified, criminalizing only cases that lacked individual consent for sterilization by the sterilized.

\textsuperscript{85} To convey a better feeling of how the public announcement of Bülent Ersoy’s womanhood resonated, one should read the word “woman (\textit{kadın})” as representing both sex and gender. In Turkish, there is a conflation between sex and gender, and there is no distinct vocabulary for sex and gender. The words \textit{kadın} and \textit{erkek} respectively translate into female/woman and male/man. However, depending on the context or the incident, sometimes gender is stressed over sex or vice versa. In this particular incident, it is sex which gains more emphasis but still there is an account of gender inherent to the media’s broadcasting.

\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Milliyet} Newspaper on August 31, 1980. (http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/B%C3%BClent%20Ersoy/)
Chapter 3 & 4). When Bülent Ersoy’s barrister objected to the prohibition on her public performance due to the fact she no longer had a male body, her lawyer’s objection was denied upon the basis that Bülent Ersoy was still a former eşcinsel (homosexual) who only became woman later on in “his” life. Hence, to have “fixed” her body was not enough; she must have been born as female. There was still something haunting about her desire and sexual orientation that eroded her womanhood and that still threatened the moral and sexual organization of the society.

Notwithstanding her SRS, the state would not yet recognize her as a female subject. In official records, she was still presented as a male subject without any official note or record of her female body or gender identity. Despite her continuous struggle to change her legal sex status to female, it took seven years for the state to recognize her as a woman and issue her a pink ID, which represented (and still represents) the ultimate indication of the state’s recognition of her sex, as well as her body.

The national ID is the most important personal document in Turkey. In the colloquial language, it is referred to as kafağađı (head-paper). As Çavlin Bozbeyoğlu (2011:68) points out, “the ID card is as essential for official existence as the head is essential for biological existence.” It is a lifetime document, and everyone is required to have one regardless of his or her age. The information on the ID card includes the person’s name, his or her parents’ names, birthplace and date, marital status, religion, and identification number. It is also issued in either pink or blue colors, depending on one’s sex at birth (see Figure 5.1). The colour of the ID makes

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87 Until 1976, the ID document was a 32-page notebook. In 2006, the ID card was modified at two levels regarding the presentation personal information. First, to declare one’s religion on the ID card has become optional. Second, individuals have had the right to declare themselves to be “single” or “married” instead of other alternative categories, such as “single,” “married,” “divorced,” and “widow.” For further discussion, see Bozbeyoğlu (2011).
gender the most immediately and obviously visible aspect of the card, signaling heteronormativity to be foundational to the organization of the state. Representing a citizenship agreement between the state and individuals, the ID card endows people with civic, social and political rights. It is the condition of one’s legal existence and inclusion in institutional life, such as education, health service, marriage and inheritance. Hence, it certifies recognition by the state, affecting one’s everyday life at multiple levels.

The fact that the Turkish state issues pink and blue IDs to its citizens represents a substantial political concern for trans people in their fight for their sex to be recognized by the state. In that sense, Bülent Ersoy embodies a key figure in trans people’s history in Turkey, since she became

Figure 5.1 Blank Pink and Blue ID Cards

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88 Source: http://www.aramam.net/tc-kimlik-numarasi-sorgulama.html
the first trans woman whose sex was officially approved by the state. No trans women were authorized to change their IDs from blue to pink until 1988. Over the course of seven years, she dauntlessly brought her case to the court and was constantly dismissed—four times in fact (see Ertür and Lebow 2012; Altıay 2008). Since there was no legal precedent pertaining to trans people, these cases, in the end, went to the Supreme Court and the authorities needed to deliver an opinion about this issue by rejecting Ersoy’s case based on existing regulations that did not recognize any individual right to choose one’s sex. According to their judgment, legal codes of the time provided no room for an “arbitrary” sex change, as well as any possible demand to change one’s sex in official records following the operation.

Nonetheless, Bülent Ersoy did not give up and continued to pursue her case by applying to the court for the fifth time. Thereafter she made statements, which were a noticeable indication of the level of pressure she felt to prove herself as a woman: “I am leading a corporally and spiritually proportional life. I am now a complete woman with everything. For four years, I have been going on with my life in an orderly and lady-like manner [referring to the proper displays of dominant femininity—see Chapter 2].”

In the midst of her struggle, she even worded a letter to the prime minister to ask for her legal recognition as a woman, as well as abolishing the prohibitions on trans women’s public performances. A few years after this letter, the repeal of interdictions in 1988 allowed “men in female outfit” to perform at clubs and entertainment places. The same year was also a landmark in trans women’s lives as the court decided to grant Bülent Ersoy her state-given sexual status, her pink ID. Her legal victory was made possible under the Motherland Party’s one-party

government, which won the elections in 1983 following a three-year long military rule, and introduced a neoliberal economic program to Turkey. Some authors argue that this neoliberal regime took advantage of Ersoy’s case to exemplify a new era, promoting individual rights, freedom and tolerance (Altunay 2008:215).

For Bülent Ersoy’s case, legal authorities resorted to a forensic report for the final verdict, and they were convinced of the forensics scientific testimony: “Bülent Ersoy has been leading a mature, peaceful, womanly life for seven years and her situation is observed to be permanent and continuous.” The same newspaper reports the published court decision: “[T]he plaintiff is observed to be a complete woman with all the features about her appearance, manners, gestures and voice.” With this decision, Bülent Ersoy was permitted and recognized to be a woman before the law and had a right to a pink ID.

The production and circulation of all these official documents and signatures related to Bülent Ersoy’s sexual identity is one example for “the incarnation of the state in written form” (Bubandt 2009:559) or its existence as “a spectral presence materialized in documents” (Das 2004:250–51). Through its final signature, “[its] writing technology” (Das 2007:163), the state marks Bülent Ersoy’s body to be a female one, and inscribes her to the domain of law. Perhaps the most symbolic act of her sex reassignment and its legitimate accreditation by the state was performed when the judge bestowed on her the pen with which he signed the verdict. Helene

90 Milliyet Newspaper on June 3, 1988. (http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/B%C3%BClent%20Ersoy/)
91 Although she was issued the pink ID, Bülent Ersoy has never changed her name to a female one. During my research, I haven’t come across any explanation on this matter. I can only speculate that it is because of her reputation gained under the Bülent name that she avoided changing her name to a new one.
Cixous, with her other Écriture Féminine companions,\(^{92}\) would have a fair amount to say about what this pen symbolically does and how it represents the ultimate state signature in qualifying one’s body with the “true” sex and gender. We can even take our analysis further and see the phallocentric meaning embedded in the judge’s gift pen to Bülent Ersoy, as it might be replacing the cut-off penis or occupying the reminiscing role of lost maleness. If we once again turn to Cixous and remember her call in “The Laugh of the Medusa,” we would more clearly see how the pen evokes the realm of writing as a male one, “from which women have been violently driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal” (1976:875). With Bülent Ersoy’s legal case, the heteronormative pens of medical and legal authorities have begun to inscribe trans people’s sex, gender, desire and bodies, causing their violent inclusion into the domain of law and transforming sex into state property.

The verdict on Ersoy’s sexual identity led to the introduction of the first legal regulations regarding transsexuality, achieved by attaching a new article to the 29\(^{th}\) clause of the Civil Code of 1926. The new article stated, “in cases where there has been a change of sex after birth documented by a report from a committee of medical experts, the necessary amendments are made to the birth certificate.”\(^ {93}\) This article made it possible for trans people to apply for a new ID after SRS. Subsequent to surgery, if a trans person could obtain a health report proving

\(^{92}\) Écriture Féminine, “Women’s Writing,” is a feminist literary theory that was pioneered in early 1970s by female French thinkers, including Monique Wittig, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Chantal Chawaf and Bracha Ettinger. By taking language and production of meaning as their major analytical domain, they argue how the language we commonly use is actually a male realm that reflects a worldview shaped by male perspective.

\(^{93}\) Amendment to the Twenty-Ninth Clause of Law no. 743, Turkish Civil Code, May 12, 1988. (The English translation of the code is taken from Deniz Kandiyoti [1998])
the operation and its results, they could provide that report to the court and easily obtain a new pink or blue ID.

![Figure 5.2 Bülent Ersoy after and before the sex reassignment surgery.](image)

The process was initially not strictly governed by multiple institutions, as is seen in the current situation. A number of prominent law specialists have criticized the 1988 legal regulation for exceeding intended results, causing a number of gaps and contradictions in practice. The legal codes were presented in relation to European countries’ (especially to Swedish and German) legal regulations on transsexuality. One noteworthy criticism was that this article in fact created room for “cinsiyet kargaşasi” (gender chaos) by allowing anyone to reassign their sex (Zevkliler 1988). As opposed to Swedish and German codes on transsexuality, which required a non-married status and state of infertility as pre-conditions for SRS, the Turkish regulation, and by implication the state, showed no concern for the issues of marriage and reproductivity in the design of the article (Zevkliler 1988; Sağlam 2004). Problems resulted: for instance, when people reassigned their sex, their marriage would automatically be annulled, as same-sex
marriage was (and still is) illegal in Turkey. Moreover, according to Aydin Zevkliler, a professor well-known as a commentator on the issue, if a person was married and/or had children, this situation should itself be proof of one’s non-transsexual identity, as such a person had “succeeded” in forming an intimate relationship with the “opposite” sex partner and reproducing by using her/his sexual organs. This meant there was no fundamental problem with the viability of his or her sexual organs at birth. Furthermore, Zevkliler argued, sex reassignment would cause damage to children’s mental health, as well as the family structure itself, the legal protection of which was prioritized by the state via numerous laws (see Chapter 2).

These legal debates urged the state to overcome such contradictions in law and ensure “protection of family life.” They provided justification for limiting sex change to those diagnosed as “hermaphrodites,” simultaneously having both male and female sexual organs, and those whose anatomy contradicted their inner sense of sex such that they adopted the feelings, instincts and behaviours of the opposite sex (Zevkliler 1988:267–70). Zevkliler interpreted sex change as an anatomical necessity for the former group, and as a “psikolojik, psikiyatrik, psikanalitik sendrom” (psychological, psychiatric, psychoanalytic syndrome) for the latter (1988:268). Alongside psychiatric evaluations, he also promoted the introduction of other medical experts, such as gynecologists, urologists, endocrinologists and general surgeons, into the domain of transsexuality as professionals who could provide legitimate evidence for one’s transsexual status.

Despite these discussions, the article on transsexuality remained unaltered until a change of government in 2002. When the AKP came to power with a neoliberal-conservative one-party government, it brought several amendments to the legal system, including modifications to civil law (see Chapter 2). Changes to the 40th clause in the Civil Code put the sex reassignment
process under rigorous medico-legal control and supervision, similar to the German and Swedish ones (Sağlam 2004). The results of the afore-mentioned legal debates were integrated into a strictly regulated sex reassignment process:

A person who wants to change her or his sex has to apply to the court personally and ask for permission for a sex reassignment. For this permission to be given, the applicant must have completed the age of 18 and must be unmarried. Besides he or she must prove with an official health board report issued by an education and research hospital that he/she is of transsexual nature, that the sex reassignment is compulsory for her or his mental health and that he or she is permanently deprived of the capacity of reproduction.

If it is confirmed by an official health board report that a sex reassignment operation was effected based on the permission given and in accordance with the purpose and medical methods, the court will decide for the necessary changes to be made in the civil status register.  

Prior to 2002, trans people did not need an official report to have SRS, but now a comprehensive medical report was necessary, with a particular attention to psychiatry and psychology. This report must prove “sex change” to be a necessity for the person’s mental health; with this report in hand, the individual appears in court to request permission to have the surgery. By the time the person appears in court, he or she should be unmarried, have no children and be sterile. After surgery, the individual is required to receive a report stating that he or she has a “proper” penis or vagina, and with this report returns to the court to complete the sex reassignment procedures.

94 The English translation of the code is taken from Yeşim M. Atamer’s (2005) work on the legal status of transsexuals in Turkey.

95 See Ayca Kurtoğlu (2009) for a detailed discussion of the denial of trans people’s biological reproductive rights and its role in the imagination of a sexual citizenship in Turkey.
and be issued his or her new ID. According to the former regulations, the court had no authority to decide on one’s reassigned sex, but rather functioned as a legal mechanism to confirm it; that has also changed.96

My point in this chapter concerns this proof of “transsexual nature,” a term stated in the legal codes on transsexuality. Medical processes in general, and psychiatry in particular, are promoted to achieve this goal. Gathering medical evidence of one’s transsexual identity, and in the end medical guarantees of the “true” sex represented by pink or blue IDs, is an arena in which the Turkish state actively—and most times forcibly—endeavors to re-incorporate the ambiguous trans body into the order of normality and “materializes” sex “within the productive constraints of certain highly gendered regulatory schemas” (Butler 1993:xii). We know from Foucault (1980) that the category of sex has a normative function from the very beginning; in other words, it is a “regulatory ideal,” as he terms it. In this respect, Butler asserts (1993:1), “‘sex’ not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce—demarcate, circulate, differentiate—the bodies it controls.”

I now turn to detailing this process, illustrating the medical steps taken by trans people to collect evidence of their “true” sex, and the ways the state’s medical authorities, particularly psychiatrists, examine these steps in the interim of transition. As will become clear, not only does the medical certification process function as a prerequisite in legal scripts of one’s sexual identity, but because medical authorities rely on particular understandings of gender in doing

96 Some lawyers I talked to during my fieldwork interpreted this modification as a positive development for its leverage to prevent random and arbitrary sex reassignment operations. For them, the previous ruling bound the court to legally approve the operation and issuing new IDs, a limitation that prevented its functioning as an additional layer of control.
their work, these understandings influence the gender identity, and at times, sexual desire and practices, of the trans people they authorize.

Setting the Trans Body for Medical Stage

The Turkish state insists, before, during and after sex change operations, that trans people modify their bodies and explore ways to prove their “true” sexual identity. This process involves many legal steps such as provision of a heyet raporu (comprehensive health report), which authorizes trans people SRSs. People, of course, can have these surgeries without an official permit; however, those operations are regarded as illegal. Yet there are doctors who take advantage of this legal procedure and see these operations as a lucrative business. Some of these operations, specifically the ones called “planing[duvar], operations” put especially trans women in horrible health situations. Planing operation is a term used to explain an SRS, which merely involves cutting off the penis, not replacing it with a vagina. In other words, the whole genital area looks like a flat plane after which the operation is named. Many trans women needed to have such planing operations prior to the legal regulation of SRSs and they suffered later in their lives.

However, these illegal operations do not give any right to trans people to make changes on their official records or get a new ID card because they are not supported by a heyet raporu. The heyet raporu can only be provided by a heyet, a board of doctors similar to the oversight boards in North American hospitals, at an education and research hospital. The heyet is composed of specialists from multiple departments, including internal diseases, general surgery, neurology, psychiatry, ophthalmology, ear-nose-throat (ENT), gynaecology and plastic surgery,
as well as the head of the board. In Turkey, heyet raporu is something that may also be required on other occasions. For instance, employers might request recent hires to submit heyet raporu to prove their health conditions. Or students have to provide their principals with heyet raporu when they need to take a leave of absence for long periods of time. Depending on each situation, the hospital creates a board, selecting different departments for each individual case.

In the case of trans people, psychiatric, urological, gynaecological, genetic, endocrinological and plastic surgical exams are required. All these departments serve the scientific evaluation of one’s sex and gender. Medical genetics, for instance, monitors trans people’s chromosomal combination to see whether they are intersex or not. Endocrinology, on the other hand, runs three different tests, namely liver and kidney function tests, a complete blood test, and a thyroid-stimulating test, both before and after hormone intake. These tests help doctors to observe the fluctuations in trans people’s hormone levels between their pre- and post-hormone conditions. Based on test results, an endocrinologist decides on the required level of hormone intake. Once each of these medical actors are scientifically convinced of the need for SRS, they then gather their individual reports to prepare a final heyet raporu, which includes the individual signatures of each above-mentioned specialist. However, the psychiatric examination represents the chief phase since, among all necessary medical steps, it carries out the most detailed investigation of whether one has gender “dysphoria,” or not.

The inception of this psychiatric examination dates back to 1987, when Şahika Yüksel, now a renowned psychiatrist specialized in clinical work with trans people, established the first special unit at the Psychiatry Department of the Istanbul School of Medicine, dedicated to the evaluation of “gender identity problems” (Yüksel et al. 2000). Later, mostly inspired by the
Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Associations’ Standards of Care, she introduced some psychiatric methods into her clinical work with trans people. One example is group psychotherapies, a product of a particular interpretation and application of Benjamin’s Standards of Care. Over the course of ten years, this psychotherapy method has spread to other psychiatry departments in public education and research hospitals.

These evolved standards are in some ways more customary than legal. For instance, two years of psychotherapy sessions are not set as obligatory in the law; what is mandatory is the provision of the psychiatric report for SRS. But psychiatrists refrain from providing such report before the completion of approximately two years of psychotherapy, and even when the psychiatrist is convinced about a trans person’s sexual identity, issuance of the medical report can still be arbitrarily postponed dependent upon the person’s financial situation. Unless one has the financial means to undergo surgery, she or he might not be granted a medical report for a long time.

Finances also play into other aspects of the psychiatric component of the heyet raporu. For instance, trans people can receive a psychiatric report from a private psychiatry clinic,

97 There are reactions against the pathologization of transsexual identity. Doctors in Turkey accept the Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorder set by Harry Benjamin. According to these standards, transsexuality is defined under as a “disorder,” a definition which has raised many reactions all over the world. However, the standard is under revision, and the next version is expected to modify this categorization. Authorities are uncertain about whether or not to keep the classification of “disorder,” because the label can help trans people access public health benefits. If they replace “disorder” with some other definition, trans people might be denied insurance coverage for their operations, for instance. Trans people have made proposals aimed at preventing such possible deprivations while also avoiding the claim of disorder. For example, SRSs could be categorized under health-related issues, akin to those necessary in pregnancy and delivery. Although pregnancy is not defined as a disorder, women’s health insurance still compensates them for related expenses. To medically define transsexuality in such terms would avoid any medically discriminative mechanism, while avoiding the risk of placing trans people in a financially disadvantaged position. For instance, “gender dysphoria” is one term proposed for replacing the term “disorder”.

98 The number of these hospitals is only a few, for example, including merely two in Istanbul and all of them are public hospitals.
although they still have to consult with public education and research hospitals for the running of other tests and for the final heyet raporu.\(^9\) They might do this because they might prefer individual psychotherapy. While private psychiatry clinics organize their psychotherapies into similar temporal intervals, they also offer individual rather than group psychotherapies. The benefit of this is to allow the person more time to talk about their problems in a one-on-one setting. But while group therapies at education and research hospitals are financially covered by public insurance, individual psychotherapy services at private clinics are excluded from insurance coverage. For this reason, trans people’s class background, as well as family support play a significant role in determining their psychotherapy experience. Whereas those with wealth have the option of private psychotherapy, those without wealth and family support have to undergo group psychotherapy provided by public hospitals.

My access to ongoing psychotherapy sessions was inhibited by both pragmatic and ethical concerns. Not all of my trans informants were involved in the state’s obligatory medico-legal route to have their sex confirmed. At the time of my thirteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in 2009-2010, the psychotherapy process was a more substantial issue for the younger generation of trans people than those older, as many of them had changed their IDs prior to the 2002 legal regulations. Some others had avoided and were still in the process of debating whether to undergo such a stringent medico-legal process. Thus, even though I spent time with

\(^9\) In Turkey, these hospitals are legally permitted to provide heyet raporu, but in practice the majority of trans people have their reports issued by public education and research hospitals. The reasons are threefold. First, trans people’s financial constraints influence their choice of hospitals; public education and research hospitals are more financially accessible due to the insurance coverage. Second, private education and research hospitals are recently established, meaning hospital personnel are usually unfamiliar with the transition process, and in any case are also few in number. Third, many hospital personnel are prejudiced against preparing SRS-related heyat raporu. Since beginning my fieldwork, and up until the moment of the final revisions to this paper, I have yet to hear of any trans person who has received a heyet raporu from a private education and research hospital. The two public hospitals in Istanbul, Çapa and Cerrahpaşa, remain the most popular ones among trans people seeking SRS.
more than twenty trans people, my knowledge of psychotherapy sessions is mostly based on the first-hand accounts of three psychiatrists, who were facilitating psychotherapy sessions, and five trans people, who either had completed or were trying to complete the psychotherapy process. They all worked at and visited the same hospital, thus being part of the same psychotherapy group.

The therapy groups are composed of 30-40 people and they meet for two hours once a month. Even though the average completion time is two years, it might slightly change from person to person depending on one’s needs and response to therapy. No one can join the group prior to the psychiatrists’ assessment of the person individually, which also give an idea of one’s needed therapy time. My doctor informants note that they continue to keep track of the person’s condition even after the person is accepted to the group; however, the frequency of one-on-one sessions is subject to change, relying upon again one’s psychological state during the transition process. For example, if doctors observe confusion or hesitation of some sort about having the sex reassignment operation, then the group psychotherapy takes longer, as one of the doctors told me during our interview.

Part of the psychotherapy consists of directions about hormone intake. Usually people are asked to provide their endocrinological, gynological and urological examination results at the end of their first year. As long as the outcome is fine, they can start with their regular hormone intake. Another function of the therapy group is to deliver adequate technical information about sex change surgery, as well as its subsequent transition period. Visits by a plastic surgeon and former therapy participants help current members of the psychotherapy group gain more

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100 I use last-name pseudonyms for psychiatrists, as my interactions with them always took the form in interviews in formal settings.
information on details, disadvantages and advantages of the surgery, developing technologies in plastic surgery, and according to the doctors, give them hope when they listen to former members’ pre- and post-operation experiences.

On the surface, the psychiatric support appears to be positive and to help trans people a great deal with their bodily transition; nevertheless, doctors’ and trans people’s accounts regarding psychotherapy sessions are strikingly at odds with each other. Whereas state psychiatrists depict psychotherapy sessions as merely supportive mechanisms, trans people offer varying accounts of the level of violence they claim that these therapies do to them. First I will review the doctors’ descriptions, and then portray how trans people experience these psychotherapies. I had three doctor informants, and all them were cis gender women and did their training with Şahika Yüksel.

**Sex for Psychotherapy**

In *Abnormal* (2004), Foucault announces: “[The] essential role [of psychiatric opinion] is to legitimize, in the form of scientific knowledge, the extension of punitive power to something that is not a breach of the law” (18). This section, in a similar vein, explores the work of psychiatry that tests (and while testing, simultaneously constructs) the evidence of the body’s “true” sex and delivers a prologue to trans people’s legal transformations to the opposite sex as the state’s sexed subjects.

One of the major benefits of psychotherapy, as stated by Dr. Bilgin, one of my psychiatrist informants, is to prepare trans individuals for their transition, including the emotional, psychological and social changes that they are expected to face in their post-op lives.
According to her, trans people sometimes have high expectations of SRSs that are far from being rational. For example, some trans people have a strong belief that the surgery will radically change their lives by resolving every problem that they have had to cope with regarding their gender identity. Or they think that their female or male past will no longer exist after SRS (Yüksel et al. 2000). Thus, the first goal of these therapies is to temper these expectations, and to ensure psychological wellbeing by putting other anxieties and tensions at ease.

In each session, psychotherapy begins with individual accounts of the previous month, and of its positive and negative experiences. Doctors highly value these accounts because they bring together trans people in different stages of transition. They share their experiences and problems acknowledging their own sexual identity, managing relationships with their families and coping with dominant gender roles existing in society. Some sorts of experiences are shared by many. For example, according to another of the psychiatrists I interviewed, Dr. Sözer, the two most frequent sources of distress are “coming out” to parents, and negotiating religious concerns surrounding operations and sexual life. More experienced members of the group become prominent figures in it, helping other, less experienced trans people with their doubts, and allaying their concerns. This process also reduces the loneliness of people who see their transsexuality as an exclusively individual problem, and experience isolation and alienation from their social environment. In short, from Dr. Sözer’s perspective, psychotherapy sessions resemble awareness raising groups, providing a supportive environment and source of empowerment for trans people.

On the other hand, psychotherapy participants’ willingness or tendency to talk about their experience varies from person to person, making this one of the main problems reported to me. For instance, Dr. Bilgin discussed a female-bodied trans man who came from a religiously
fundamentalist Islamic background, and hence needed to wear a headscarf to meet Islamic rules pertaining to the female body. His transition to manhood was regarded as far more complicated than many others because part of his public gender role alteration involved taking off his headscarf. However, pressure from his religious community was so drastic that he did not dare to take it off, let alone come out to his family. On top of that, he was pregnant at that time. As Dr. Bilgin emphasized, his experience could have been immensely informative for other participants if he had chosen to speak in the group. Yet, despite his two years of participation in the group, he resisted saying a single word, detailing his life story only during private sessions. Dr. Bilgin gave this example to stress the differences in each individual’s capacity to engage with group psychotherapy and benefit from it. While one enjoys attracting attention by speaking up a lot, another might be anxious or shy and prefer to speak less. The latter would avoid speaking about her or his problems and focus more attention on listening. So these dynamics affect each person’s receipt of psychological service. It is up to each individual’s capacity to personally benefit from this group and to contribute to the group.

One reason for doctors’ insistence on a two-year psychotherapy period is some trans people’s rush to have SRS. Doctors claimed that although the psychotherapy duration seems to be long, trans people who “graduated” (the word they use for completion of calculated psychotherapy time) from therapies usually provided positive feedback, saying they had greatly benefited from it. These graduates sometimes even continue to participate in the group, sharing their pre- and post-surgery experiences.

Psychiatrists also invoke a specific need for “models” for emulation, which they claim many trans people want to have during their transition period. These models provide trans people with examples/guidelines for how to be as a man or woman. One instance of this “modeling” can
be observed in terms of dress codes. When trans people come to psychotherapy, many of them do not feel obliged to dress according to the code they are expected to follow in everyday life (that is, the gender they are transitioning from), and feel freer to dress according to their “phenomenological sex” (Salamon 2010), that is, the sex that they perceive themselves to be. In this respect, the group psychotherapy space also functions, as doctors pointed out, as a stage: a place where trans people can observe each other’s physical appearance, identify mismatches to the appropriate gendered dress code, and settle their style accordingly.

For instance, Dr. Aysan recounted how some trans women who at the very beginning of their psychotherapy appeared “gaudy-looking” gradually changed into more reasonable and casual attire as their treatment expanded into its second year. When I asked her how to interpret this “gaudiness,” she framed it as an effort on the trans women’s side to compensate for feelings of inferiority, of having “fallen behind” womanhood. In this model, trans women try to “catch up” with a womanhood that they believe they could have already attained, if they had been allowed to live as women all along. In her view, these “lost” years of not being a woman profoundly shape trans women’s exaggerated performances of various gender roles. She thus saw the long duration of psychotherapy as necessary to make trans women understand that their sexual identity had nothing to do with high heel shoes or heavy make-up. Growing such awareness, she said, also increases self-confidence.

Another positive outcome of psychotherapy stated by doctors is improved skills of self-expression for trans people. One common exercise practiced during the sessions is role-playing, which focuses on interactions between trans people and their parents. Therapists highly value this method since, they believe, it develops the ability and courage trans people need to communicate with their parents, making a huge difference when they first come out to them. For
example, when the person comes out by saying, “I am a transsexual and you should accept me this way,” usually parents respond in harsh and disappointing ways. Therapies help them better communicate their sexual identity to parents.

Trans people’s relations with their biological families comprise an extremely troubled domain (see Chapter 7). For this reason, I asked the doctors if they did anything to help trans people with their family situation, and they mentioned organizing two psychotherapy sessions for trans peoples’ families every year. All family members but trans people can join these sessions. The main purpose is to bring families together to break prejudices and create a space for sharing experiences with each other. Previous medical research in Turkey also states that families lack sufficient information about transgenderism, and when they discover their child to be a trans person, they prefer to conceal it at all costs rather than speak about it overtly due to the social pressure they face (Polat et al. 2005: 390). So it is helpful for families of similar backgrounds to see how other families are experiencing the same “problem.” Then, as the logic goes, they stop thinking about themselves as being the cause of their children’s situation. Attendees of these meetings are usually those who are curious and not strongly biased against transsexuality; in that sense, they are the ones who manage to overcome their negative feelings, their transphobia. Strongly biased family members rarely appear at these meetings, which makes things even harder for their trans children because of an incessantly growing abyss between them and their children. Sometimes this gulf between trans individuals and their families causes them to renounce sex reassignment surgery, and ponder whether to continue with their current lives and the biological bodies they were born with. Dr. Bilgin indicated that she could completely empathize with this tendency, and she believed that even when trans people decide to live up to their cisgender roles they would never cease to be a transsexual inside.
Dr. Bilgin also talked about having witnessed an evident level of “homophobia” among group members. For example, she consulted trans people who felt thankful for not being gay or who evaluated their womanhood and manhood in relation to their desire for the opposite sex. It was interesting to hear of this because, as you will read in the following section, many trans people complain that doctors cannot make a clear distinction between sexual identity and sexual orientation, explaining the former in terms of the latter. This conflation of sexual identity and sexual orientation is also one of the most significant tensions.

In her work on transgenderism, Afsaneh Najmabadi (2008, 2011) points out a similar tendency to define sexual identity in terms of one’s sexual orientation in Iran. Here, same-sex practices are religiously and legally prohibited, but sex change is a religiously sanctioned, state-subsidized legal practice. To start the SRS process, a gender nonconforming person is required to undergo psychotherapy from 4 to 6 months. Najmabadi argues that the ban on same-sex practices and desires adds to the pressure on gays and lesbians, who might consider participating in SRS process and psychotherapy, to “transsexualize” themselves in the eyes of the state and receive a religio-legal approval for their same-sex desire, allowing them to practice it under the guise of heteronormativity. That is why psychotherapy is colloquially referred to as “filtering” in Iran, as it is used by the state, together with hormonal and chromosomal tests, to recognize and separate “true transsexuals” from those others (Najmabadi 2008:32). According to the Iranian religio-legal authorities, transgender people’s same-sex desires and practices are in fact straight because they were born in the wrong body and sex. Therefore, their pre-SRS same-sex desires and practices are diagnosed as symptoms of transsexuality, not homosexuality. Further, there is no religio-legal recognition of transsexual lesbians or gays (that is, trans women desiring women, or trans men desiring men), because the desire and sexual practice should always be straight. Same-sex desires and practices are perceived as markers of moral deviancy, and hence, gays and
lesbians are identified and filtered out through psychotherapy (Najmabadi 2008).

Najmabadi’s work is helpful for discussing how allegedly universal medico-legal models of sex transition are modified and shaped locally. While the state uses psychotherapy and SRS as a heteronormative corrective measure, queer people in Iran can manipulate it to more creative ends, creatively using their sex to live their sexuality. In a similar vein, trans people in Turkey negotiate, rework and contest the existing medico-legal models of transsexuality to establish their own diverse meanings and definitions of, and relations between, gender nonconformity, sex and sexuality. I next focus on how such diversity takes place within the psychiatric domain, in terms of trans people’s experience of psychotherapy, and their interpreting and shaping of medico-legal understandings of sex, gender and sexuality.

**Bodies that Speak the Time and “Truth” of Sex**

“If you are a mad person, then you cannot be a transsexual,” İlker joked, referring to the Rorschach and IQ tests that are the very first step in the institutionalized medical path to SRS. The Rorschach test records and analyzes people’s perceptions of inkblots to evaluate their personality characteristics and emotional functioning. Psychologists use Rorschach tests, together with the IQ test, to judge trans people’s mental health—specifically, any level of schizophrenia or tendency towards depression. An observation of either of these leads psychologists to declare trans people ineligible for SRS, preventing their participation in group psychotherapy as the second step of medical regulations.

Those who continue to group psychotherapy first meet the chief psychiatrist and her two assistants, who are responsible for the entire group. The assistants take notes, convey trans
people’s concerns to the psychiatrist, and prepare the authorization of the medical report upon the completion of psychotherapy. The main psychiatrist remains remote: she surveys both her assistants and the group, and makes the final decision, but seldom joins the psychotherapy sessions. When she does attend, she usually listens, observes and intervenes only if she finds it necessary. One of my trans man informants, who graduated from one of her psychotherapy groups, expressed his and his peers’ annoyance with her “law-like attitude,” alert, as Foucault (2004:22) says, to “the constitution of a doctor who is at the same time a doctor-judge.”

For trans people who manage to prove their mental health and become part of the psychotherapy group, the primary concern becomes the size of the group, amounting to some 40 people. There is a wait-list, as an existing client must “graduate” (or otherwise leave) before a “junior” one can enter. Further, the two-hour length of each session leaves only approximately ten minutes for each member to express themselves. What one can say in these ten minutes is not only limited by time, but also by the institutionally structured way of speaking of one’s problems. Trans people report that psychiatrists impose specific speech prompts on participants during psychotherapy, rendering them silent or unheard if they attempt to deviate. For example, the most popular prompt was reported to be approximately: “Tell us something positive or negative that you experienced in relation to your sex this past month.” The reply should be given in ten minutes, and people are silenced when they want to elaborate in more detail on, for instance, the connections between their senses of body or sex and the many spheres of everyday life. Enclosing the group dynamic with such a temporally and verbally rigid structure leaves trans people facing the risk of being frozen out of the group if they pass beyond the speakable boundaries. No matter what their excuse is, they are expected to conform to this institutional template.
Consider a detailed example of this verbal regulation, which comes along with depiction of other problematic issues essential to the psychotherapy. İlker is a 27-year-old trans man, a LGBTQI activist who is very well equipped to engage with gender and sexual issues. He had already graduated from psychotherapy when I met him. When I interviewed him, he had had his breasts removed, but still was looking for a trusted place to have his penis construction surgery. He frowned while talking about his psychotherapy experience and the compulsory legal regulations surrounding surgery:

İlker: You must wrap your entire appearance up into socially compromised norms of gender so that you can socially reintegrate into the society. All this process of psychotherapy is for saying, ‘Due to psychotherapy she or he obtained this proper look! This is our achievement!’ In psychotherapy, consultants always want to hear about themselves: ‘Are you content with the psychotherapy? Has it been helpful for you? How have you been feeling about psychotherapy?’ These questions are constantly seeking evidence of what they are doing to reintegrate people into society, for self-vindication. They brag about restoring us to society as desired females and males. For example, I have a trans gay friend. If he consults with them, he would never be able to get a report from them.

Asli: So do you mean you must be a straight person to be able to go there?

İ: Well, yes! At best, you can be a bisexual, but never a gay. What they inspect is whether you use your genitalia at birth or not. You know, they’re gonna give you an authorization for SRS. So if you are still using your sexual organ, then it should stay; you cannot cut it off, you cannot dump it, because it means you are at peace with your organ. In any case, you should be troubled with your body. You should be unable to use your genitals at birth...If I declare I am a man, then I am a man! That’s it!! What is the difference between the saggy boobs I had before and the current ones? Only fat came out of them. What has changed? Nothing has changed for me!
Extremely discontent with therapists’ approach to sex and sexuality, İlker claims that the entire purpose of the psychotherapy sessions is to produce sexed and gendered trans subjects fitting the heteronormative standards of Turkish society. To satisfy this aim, medical authorities attempt to treat sex in relation to the heterosexual usability of sexual organs and/or one’s degree of emotional attachment to those organs. For instance, if a pre-op trans man still takes pleasure from his vagina, despite feeling disgusted by it, then he is not considered of transsexual nature by medical authorities. Or, like in the Iranian context Najmabadi (2008) discusses, medical authorities in Turkey might treat sex and sexuality as the same in psychotherapy process, and simply define one’s correct sex in relation to one’s sexuality vis-à-vis a heterosexual norm. If a trans person has desire for a person of his or her phenomenological sex, then he or she is not viewed as a “true” transsexual person. According to this perspective, sexual desire should be heterosexual, and one should have sexual interest for the opposite sex after reassignment surgery.

While there are trans people who use similar heteronormative assumptions to understand their sex, at the same time there are others like İlker, who radically contest such understandings of sex, drawing clear boundaries between their sexuality and sex and complicating not only the relation between these two, but also the assumed stable link between the body and sex. These contestations are of great importance, as they demonstrate key details about the ways in which trans people in Turkey experience and negotiate medico-legal transcripts and practices of sex and transsexuality, configuring and imagining sex and gender.

Contesting the relationship between the body and sex has also a temporal dimension. Trans people’s understanding of their bodily time and the disciplinary time of the psychiatric therapy show discrepancies. As Elizabeth Freeman (2007:161) succinctly puts it, “[t]he body politics and power relations are made possible by manipulating time.” As discussed, one’s
“truth” of transsexuality is strictly tied to a disciplinary institutional time, entailing one to spend two years before medical authorities to prove him/herself to be a man or a woman. Within the temporal framework of psychotherapy, one’s past and present gender role performances and self-accounts of sex should comply with each other, presenting narrative coherence and persistence and submitting to a linear temporal logic. The psychotherapy timeline functions to make trans people achieve bodily legibility and internalize specific values and norms of gender. However, work on queer temporality insists on the analytical salience of temporal heterogeneity and “the present’s irreducible multiplicity” (Dinshaw et al. 2007:190)—not necessarily only for trans people but for everyone. In contrast to the stubborn medical timeline, which subjects sexual and bodily transition to a linear temporal discipline, some of my trans informants’ sense of sex and the body displayed a more flexible, multi-layered and interrupted understanding of temporality. Adem’s story is one portrayal of this phenomenon.

Adem, a 31-year-old trans man, works as a nurse in the emergency department of a hospital. He also describes psychotherapy as an oppressive use of power designed to mould individuals within a stringent medical configuration. Adem said that, as opposed to many girls, he never experienced a regular menstruation cycle after the age of 12, causing him a lot of stress and countless health problems. After grappling with these problems for 20 years, he was diagnosed with polycystic ovarian syndrome, which led to intensive hormone treatment, including especially high usage of oestrogen. However, ten years of treatment did not produce any concrete results. He kept feeling his body to be not a female but male one. He told his gynaecologist that neither the functioning of nor his feelings about his body had changed. He experienced increasing pain and he was taking painkillers non-stop. He no
longer wanted to continue with his life in pain and decided to have an ovarian removal surgery, following his doctor’s advice of last resort.

When Adem made the decision, he was in an SRS psychotherapy group. His gynaecologist asked him to get official permission from the group therapist to be able to legally perform this operation, and also forwarded a written note about his situation to the psychiatrist. The psychiatrist got angry with Adem for pursuing the operation, because ovarian removal surgery is considered one of the late stages of sex reassignment process, and hence should not be authorized until the period of psychotherapy is completed. But Adem’s gynaecologist had been convinced to give permission after recognizing this surgery not as part of sex reassignment process but as an issue of health. Adem’s ovaries were removed at the end of his fourth month in psychotherapy.

While he was on leave due to the ovarian removal surgery, Adem also decided to undergo a breast removal surgery, and had his breasts removed. When the therapist discovered that he had done this, she was furious, and they had a quarrel about the need to comply with the stringent rules of psychotherapy. According to these rules, the period of psychotherapy is organized into different phases: participants are expected to start hormone intake within the first six months to one year; then they are required to wait until the completion of their psychotherapy period to be legally authorized for SRS, whether it be breast removal/implantation or vagina/penis construction. Adem said that this argument was the first time that he had heard about these rules. He was given no information about the group temporal dynamics at any point during psychotherapy.

Adem left the hospital that day, after the dispute. When he called to arrange the next month’s meeting, he was told that he was no longer a part of the group, and that he had better
start looking for some other places to get his medical report. He was essentially excluded from the group for not obeying the rules of psychotherapy time, which determine when and how to intervene in configuring a body into a male one. He had interrupted its linearity by following his own personal, bodily felt time. As a significant element in constituting the “truth” of his sex, the normative interval of psychiatric time denied alternative temporalities of his body and sex. However, I should also add that it would be incorrect to define Adem’s personal, bodily time as completely his time because the temporality of his body and sex was also partly a “medical” decision, which makes this alternative temporality still, to a certain extent, institutional. My point is to draw attention to temporal ruptures and multiplicities in the institutional construction of bodily time.

Proof of “true” sex in this medical stage is also strongly mediated by the prescription of hormone intakes. The time I spent with elderly trans women presented me with some background information about trans people’s hormone intake. Prior to 2002, when there was no medical regulation, people could go to a pharmacy and easily buy hormones without knowing their side effects. They did not need any prescription. In the absence of sufficient medical instruction, trans people became advisors to one another in mapping out the medical route of sexual transition. Hormones represented one of the most crucial steps in this process, and many trans women started regular and heavy hormone injection as early as possible. Today, hormone intake is more seriously regulated, especially through the timeline of psychotherapy. Moreover, trans people have a stronger awareness of the medical side effects than they did twenty years ago. However, this regulation does little to consider trans people’s personal expectations, demands, desires and feelings regarding their bodies, compared to the importance attributed to the state’s designation of gender roles and “appropriate” body features.
According to therapists, the above-mentioned six-months-to-one-year waiting time is of vital necessity because they claim that trans people might demonstrate risky levels of hormone intake to hastily compensate for the difference between their body and the body they aspire to have. However, some trans people think that a hormone intake based on their own time frame helps them establish a more balanced and calm personality, as they gradually approach their body ideal or their imagined body of the opposite sex. In either case, hormone intake is tied to strict regulations that cause major disturbance among trans people, raising questions about rights to possession of and control over one’s own body. Adem’s words elucidate an issue also shared by other trans people:

When I asked the assistant about when to start with my hormone treatment, she said it would vary, from six months to nine months from the first day of the psychotherapy. Why would I wait that long? I am neither starting a new life nor trying to adapt to one that I have never been familiar with. I have been like this since my childhood. In their minds there is this logic: this person has been living as a female since he was born, and then he decided to change his sex from female to male. So we need to help him with his transition process from womanhood to manhood. However, this logic does not apply to me; I have been feeling and living as a man since my childhood! I have tried to explain this many times in the group.

While trans people like Adem insist on a more flexible time schedule for hormone intake, therapists deny them the felt temporality of their bodies (a temporality that is, at the same time, socially shaped), and rather force them to integrate into a particular institutional temporal norm. This temporal norm also operates to construct and advance normativity in their desired gender identity. The time and surface of the body are entwined with certain institutional norms and expectations, denying the self-interpretation of temporal and bodily accounts. Based on this
example, we can claim that trans people and psychiatrists disagree about the meaning of sex-reassignment surgery and hormone intake: trans people are claiming an enduring gender identity, and the surgery and hormones merely enable the body to match the sense of self; psychiatrists, in contrast, seem to see surgery and hormones as a ritual transforming of one gender identity to another. On the other hand, there are also trans people like İlker, who are against the enforcement of hormone treatment as part of the psychotherapy period, or against the enforcement of a properly sexed body in general. This issue came up several times in our conversations. İlker repeatedly showed his irritation at obligatory hormone intake, telling me how therapists would not issue a medical report for SRS unless trans people complied with the necessary hormone intake prescriptions.

Another significant complaint about the “truth” of their sex articulated by trans people involves consultants’ tendency to see their bodies in aggregate rather than as individual ones. As trans people foreground every individual’s uniqueness and singularity, they feel immensely perturbed when psychiatrists lump them all together as, for instance, members of the same case. Preferring to stress the distinctness of life stories and experiences, they feel that they were forced—sometimes subtly, sometimes not—down a prescribed path of gender identity during psychotherapy. This enforced “sameness” can be considered an effect of formulating transsexuality as a medico-legal category, produced and shaped within the intertwinement of dominant social norms of gender, sex, desire and eroticism. For example, Lale, a trans woman I briefly met one day at Istanbul LGBTT told me about her first visit to the group psychiatrist. When she mentioned that she was a trans lesbian, the consultant hesitated to put her on the wait list for the psychotherapy group. “She couldn’t make up her mind about me,” Lale said. She asked Lale to visit her a few more times in order to come to a decision. But Lale said she knew exactly why the therapist called her back:
They are teaching you how to be a woman according to social norms. Psychotherapy is so much focused on society’s expectations. They aim to reintegrate the trans individual in the society. Since this is the goal, they teach you social masculinity and femininity in psychotherapy…She is going to carve out a heterosexual woman from me, and build up proper feminine manners for me to efface any existing masculine attitude. In other words, my femininity must be precise!

In Lale’s case, lesbian desire falls outside of “proper feminine manners,” thus potentially disqualifying her for SRS. Her individual experience fails to conform to the generic “sameness” the process requires. At the time I left Turkey, she was still visiting the doctor for further “clarifications” about her sexual identity. This example shows how medical authorities, while criticizing trans people for confusing sexual orientation and sexual identity, fall into the same trap and explain sex in terms of desire.

In psychotherapy, consultants also examine trans people’s adjustments to homosocial environments and groups. For example, some trans men were asked how they feel in male-dominated spaces such as traditional coffeehouses and soccer games, or when they walk on streets late at night. All these questions signify a few of the hegemonic masculine values and behaviours in Turkish life. On the other hand, trans women might be questioned about their feelings while they are in places or engaged in activities that are regarded as feminine, such as going to hairdressers, shopping or doing housework. A female-bodied person might claim that he is a trans man, but it is important for therapists to see if he is bodily and behaviourally attuned to a masculine environment or group, or if he is capable of persuading others of his masculinity. Therapists seem to rely on the dominant social norms of gender and sexuality in doing so, and
make sure that each trans individual fits into proper gender roles as per social and cultural expectations.

Through psychotherapy sessions, trans people are constantly examined to see if they qualify to have “a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility” (Butler 1993:2). The space of psychotherapy is made into a site for testing trans people’s sincerity and capability to “pass.” For Sandy Stone (2006), one is considered as passing if one can live up to the dominant gender roles and make herself or himself accepted as a “natural” member of that gender. In this regard, psychotherapy turns trans peoples’ bodies into “the object[s] of a technology and knowledge of rectification, readaptation, reinsertion, and correction” (Foucault 2004:21), through the working of a homogenous and linear institutional temporality.

While fitting into those gender roles, it is also important to stick to moral, as well as “moderate” boundaries and not to display exaggerated performances of gender. For instance, one trans woman told me about two adolescent trans women, who were kicked out of the group as a result of their constant looking in the mirror and wearing lipstick during the therapy session. At another time, the psychiatrist got angry with some other trans women and showed them the door for not sitting properly with their mini skirts and exhibiting their underwear.

Lastly, trans people’s problems with their families are another salient topic in therapies. In fact, adjustment of one’s family to one’s sex is the most scrutinized dimension of the group therapy. They check if one manages to live with one’s family in peace, if one can persuade one’s family of one’s sex and make them reconcile with one’s sexual identity. Success of one’s therapy and the length of time spent to get the medical report for an SRS strongly hinge on the achieved sexual status in the family. In case the family members deny to recognize their children’s phenomenological sex or sexual transition, therapists refuse to accept the family’s attitude as a
problem and turn a blind eye to understanding this problem as part of a larger social and cultural network of heteronormativity that also shapes families’ approach to their children. On the contrary, they still keep placing the burden more on the trans individual to tackle the problems she or he is facing within the family. It is crucial to see how therapies, by framing the familial distress as an individual issue and forcing the trans individual to reconcile with the family, function to restore the dominant intimate order.

Even upon the completion of all these aforementioned steps, or so to speak, even when the psychiatrist is convinced about a trans person’s sexual identity, issuance of the medical report might still get arbitrarily postponed dependent upon the person’s financial situation. Unless one has enough means to undergo this surgery or is in good terms with her or his family, she or he might not be granted a medical report for a long time. There are people who still haven’t received their medical report after four years.

To sum up, the overall picture regarding psychotherapy indicates that medical standards utilized during both psychotherapy sessions and the authorization of the final medical report, manage transsexuality in terms of a rigid, dichotomous, heterosexual gender in which the sexual body matches the proper gender comportment, including desire for the opposite sexed and gendered body. In these spaces, the need for reconfiguring one’s genitals is tested in accordance with the presence or development of other aspects of bodily materiality. For example, Salamon (2010) argues that bodily features such as hairstyle, way of walking, style of dress, pitch of voice, and body shape and size are crucial elements of body’s materiality in determining one’s gender, indeed even more crucial than genitals themselves. These qualities, moreover, have an impact on sex attribution, which might have nothing to do with the existing genitals. To explain this point, Salamon refers to Freud’s observation: “the first determination we make about a person we pass on the street is an instantaneous male or female? and in nearly every case we
make that determination with no information at all about genital configuration” (2010:178). But the state makes all its legal assumptions on the basis of genital configuration, and requires trans people to reconstruct their genitals accordingly with the gender that a person successfully passes, thus rendering a particular production of bodily materiality obligatory. Some trans people might have a strong desire for reconfiguring their genitals according to their phenomenological sex; however, some might not. I will discuss this point later on in the chapter by illustrating changing and contesting accounts of trans people’s desires to have or not to have genitals that are considered appropriate with their gender identity. For now, I want to underscore the issue is not whether to support SRS or not. Rather, it is to show how the state regulations stubbornly insist on the equation of sex with genitals and the production of sex in a particular material form.

Starting from the next section, I want to bring my discussion to another level by suggesting that the medico-legal configuration of the transsexual body is also a site for the formation of the state as a heteronormative and intimate one. This intimacy partly involves the attempts of the state power to “straighten up” and “fix” trans people in terms of familial orientation—i.e. how one relates to family. To put it in other words, the state sets specific rules about trans people’s rights to family making and reproduction as part of their sex reassignment process. Moreover, while the state’s medico-legal techniques regarding trans bodies comprise, at one level, “the functioning power of normalization” (Foucault 2004), they, at another level, build up intensely felt proximities between trans people’s bodies and state power, making the state gain a specific material, sexual, and intimate content (Aretxaga 2003). I now turn to these intimate and phenomenological forms that state power take on and through trans people’s bodies.
Two Intimates: Medicine and Law

As I mentioned at the outset of this chapter, there are certain legal criteria for trans people to make an individual application to the court in order to get an official permission for SRS. One criterion (and the most salient one) is satisfied at the end of the medical process that I have been exploring so far: the applicant’s transsexual identity should be observed and authorized by assigned psychiatric authorities, who are required to prove that an SRS is necessary for the relevant person’s psychological health.

Sometimes, however, heyet raporu might not be given any credibility. There have been cases where judges simply dismissed the report and made their own decisions. In addition to the heyet raporu, judges also seek for the fulfillment of circumstances, including age and marital status. Namely, the applicant should be a minimum of 18, and should neither be married, nor have any children. There are two important consequences to these regulations: first, the state renders the SRS a matter of age, or adulthood; second, it makes sure that family, as the heteronormative space of intimacy, is kept “untainted” by disorderly subjects. In other words, the law delineates the familial space as an arena that should be devoid of those subjects with ambiguous sex/gender, whose anatomy and sex changes break up culturally configured alliances of sex and gender, thus posing a threat to the dominant organization of the intimate order. Thus, the state attempts to “straighten” out the domain of familial intimacy by introducing legal restrictions to trans people’s relations to this intimate domain.
In addition to marital status and age, the law demands trans people be permanently deprived of reproductive capacity prior to their SRS.\textsuperscript{101} In practice this means, trans men can’t keep their ovaries and uteri, and trans women can’t keep their penises and testicles, and their infertility should be documented by a gynecologist at an Education and Research Hospital. When I talked to trans friends about this regulation, they said that they did not even remember how many times they expressed their concerns in regard to this bylaw and declared it as being against “human rights.”

The issue of “human rights” is salient because it projects what it means to be “human” culturally and socially within the Turkish context, and how its legal definition is implicitly and explicitly conveyed through specific codes and regulations. Butler emphasizes the human as something that is produced and reproduced, and she rightfully contends, “gender…figures as a precondition for the production and maintenance of legible humanity” (2004:11). Hence, sex and gender function as one condition to produce who counts as human and what counts as human life. Within the defining parameters of humanity and humanness, it becomes important who is encouraged to give birth and rear children in a regime of reproductivity. Given the Turkish state’s strong emphasis on the reproduction of its citizens (see Chapter 2), it becomes ironical to see how the law, while forcing some individuals to reproduce, it, at the same time, bans others from reproducing via the means of obligatory sterilization. Trans people’s legal prohibition from reproducing should be interpreted within these legal terms that give the state the right to diminish, amputate and restrict trans people’s biological human capacities. Hence, the state

\textsuperscript{101} Some lawyers also argue for the marital status criterion as an efficient mechanism for maintenance of the family structure. According to these people, family represents the fundamental building block of society and should not be allowed to be undermined by people of “ambiguous” sexual identity. It is believed that people choosing to change their sex while in a marriage would cause an emotional, psychological and moral disturbance for the spouse and children.
implements medico-legal regulations that not only reshape and reconfigure the surfaces of trans people’s bodies, but also further expand to the interiors of their bodies, eradicating their reproductive capabilities.

Hence, reproductivity, or so to speak, biological continuation of genealogy or the family, becomes a privilege in constituting the hegemonic conception of what human has to be. Speaking of trans people, they are allowed to continue with neither a pre-operation reproductive life (remember the legal conditions of being single and not having any children) nor a possible post-operation one. In this way, SRS determines both their past and future, and regulations base themselves on a strict demarcation of what a temporal as well as intimate trajectory for a trans life should be. The scope of intimate forms that a trans life should and should not embrace becomes a prominent concern for the state, which forecloses the recognition and legitimacy of certain intimacies that have shaped or continue to shape their subjective investments into their lives. Of course, trans people do not reduce their intimate lives to the scope of, what Povinelli (2002) calls, privileged “modern” intimacy forms in state regulations that always orient themselves around classical kinship relations and entail a “descent group.” They invent new ways of relating themselves to their friends and community members or reshape already existing forms of intimacy, and thus, contribute to the newly emerging intimate links. I will be detailing this argument while exploring the trans friendships and community relations (see Chapter 7). For now, I want to focus on the very last step in the transsexuality jurisprudence.
Touched by Law

In this very last step, the state’s regulatory body develops perhaps the most violent proximity with the trans body by intruding and violating it. This violation relies on particular forms of touch on the trans body by the state actors. Before getting into the details of these state practices, an analysis of tactile state power deems it necessary to theorize touch as a means for constructing bodies, social worlds and lives.

Touch, as Segal (2009) demonstrates, has long been ranked as the most inferior among five senses. According to this hierarchical order, since Aristotle, senses have been listed from most to least valuable as vision-hearing-smell-taste-touch (Segal 2009:2). This list also coincides with another hierarchical division of senses based on the categories of “proximity” and “distance.” While the first two of the list are deemed distant and more valuable senses, the last three represent the “proximity” or “intimate senses” (Rodaway 1994:26) and are less valuable senses since they are regarded as “the furthest from thought, imagination and memory” (Segal 2009:2). There is certain rightfulness in ascribing touch with the status of the most intimate and direct of all senses because, as Rodaway (1994:41) points out, it is constrained by the grasp of the body and it always relies on reciprocal grounds, for “to touch is always to be touched.”

When we talk about touch, we should not restrict our understanding only to fingers. Haptic experience rather concerns the whole body or the whole skin covering the body (Montagu 1971). It is also a constant sensual account of our relationship with the world. Touch, as being “both passive and active,” is “a juxtaposition of body and world” (Rodaway 1994:41). Through our haptic relationship with the world, we also make sense of it. Touch is a form of “dwelling on the surface of the body of the other” (Segal 2009:6). When dwelling, it has a tremendous world-making capacity in marking surfaces with value and meaning, establishing boundaries, and
indicating borders. From this point of view, it connotes something beyond merely the physical; it is a corporeal situation charged with emotional, political, social and cultural processes.

A touch might presume a tactile relationship between two or more bodies. In its mutuality, it can open one’s body to other bodies. It is the most intimate cementing force of embodiment that Ahmed (2000b:47) calls us to understand as a lived experience with other bodies or “the social experience of dwelling with other bodies.” In this theorization one’s body can no longer be regarded as a privatized realm, but rather as a realm of incessant opening out to other bodies, and thus, as a realm of vulnerability. To delineate this process better, Merleau-Ponty (1968) uses the term “flesh,” which cannot be comprehended merely in relation to the materiality of the body, but is an outcome of complex relations between my body, the other’s body and the world altogether. Hence, it is not the body per se, but the mutuality of touching, or being both the subject and object of touch, becomes a phenomenological account of one’s lived experience.

However, bodies cannot be thought of as unitary under one category. A power differential between different bodies is intrinsic to the formation of this phenomenological cartography. Not every body is deemed to be capable of touching other bodies in this world of flesh. Moreover, bodies are conditioned, as well as conditioning themselves to one another within a set of unequal and uneven relations of power. These asymmetric relations also shape how “bodies are touched by some bodies differently from other bodies” (Ahmed 2000b:48).

A close analysis of touch requires a differentiation between ways of touching. For example, when we talk about touch, it is not always about an affective map of a tactile world that involves, for instance, rubbing, massaging, stroking, soothing, caressing, fondling, patting. Rather there is an enormously inimical side to what a touch can do when it takes violent forms
such as beating, slapping, kicking, hitting, punching, and penetrating. Within this violent economy of touch, our skins, as collector and registrar of tactile information, may function as not only an organ of protection but also that of exposure (Nancy 1997). Our skins shape and produce the very conditions of our vulnerability before life. In other words, if we apprehend violation, appropriation or exploitation as specific modes of touch, then touching one’s skin manifests itself as a means of subjugation.

Furthermore, some people may refuse to be touched by other people. In like manner, some people may refuse to touch others. Absence of touch can indeed be more destructive than its presence in certain social and political contexts, and transform people into subjects of numb lives. That is, touch can either animate lives or wither them away. To exemplify, we can think about social marginalization or incarceration. Hence, it is crucial to draw attention to what Ahmed reminds us as “economies of touch” (2000b:49; emphasis original) to ruminate on how each touch, depending on distinct and complex conditionings of bodies to one another, forms and deforms bodies.

Last but not least, the question of who is capable of acquiring the position of particular forms of touching is a critical one. This position of tactility can be both the constituent and product of specific forms of power, especially state power, taking both governmental and exceptional forms. Within this realm, the state might not operate its power on the grounds of mutual touchability, but, conversely, make sure that the active role of touching is solely ascribed only to its own actors. People might be deprived of their touching capacities, or they would not be able to find an addressee even when they touch, as is the case with an incarcerated individual to give an example. To be able to touch back still communicates a power position. Some touches are deemed to receive no response or they are far from being reciprocal. They are destructive and
communicate power and domination. Rape, for instance, is one of them. It is this form of touch that I am referring to when I talk about the very last step of sex reassignment jurisprudence.

As I pointed out earlier, even when trans people get their official permission and have their sex reassignment surgery, they are not automatically delivered blue or pink ID cards; they must go through one more medical check before the court decides whether to grant their sexual identity. After the SRS, trans people are sent to forensics to have their newly reconstructed genitals put under detailed scrutiny by medical authorities. This last check considers mostly trans women rather than trans men because the implanted vagina, not so much the grafted penis, is examined according to some standard measures. The state medical authorities insert an instrument into trans women’s vagina to ensure that it is “deep enough” before trans women have a right to apply for their pink ID.

This particular touch in the form of violation and penetration is overwhelmingly concerned with “law’s phallocentric imperative” (Sharpe 2006:621). It highlights how the success of sex reassignment is tied to a patriarchal, phallocentric and heterosexual assumptions of the female body, while also, by state mandate, being turned into a site of non-reproductivity. The female body is being defined by its capacity to be sexually penetrated and legally made almost equivalent to the vagina, which merely functions as a site of male heterosexual desire. The design of this regulation endows the state with a heterosexual masculine content, positioning it in the fantasy role of penetrator. In that sense, law does more than subject trans women to genital reconstruction for the purposes of approving their female identity. Legal regulations aspire to assure that a trans woman’s post-surgical genitals are an adequately penetrable vagina and that her desire is a heterosexual one. As Sharpe’s (2006:623) analysis in another social context demonstrates: “…not only is heterosexual functioning scripted as a prerequisite to legal
recognition. Rather, sexual function is understood as the end to be realized through the means of sex reassignment surgery. Here the value and meaning of surgery lies in the male to female body’s capacity to be sexually penetrated.”

So when a trans woman’s vagina achieves a desired capacity of penetrability, the state grants her the pink ID and bureaucratically incorporates her into its world of female citizens. Despite their reference to a different context, I think Salamon’s following words present a good summary of the situation:

What kind of a thing is sex in this bureaucratic exchange? It is curiously at odds with gender in this case, for no performance of gender is convincing enough, no display of femininity sufficient, to stand in for the designation of “sex” that is determined and withheld by the document [the ID card in the Turkish context]. Sex is something that the documents themselves enact, and sex becomes performative in the sense that the m or the f on the document does not merely report on the sex of its bearer but becomes the truth of and bestows the bearer’s sex . . . [S]ex is not private property, but rather property that belongs to the state itself. [2010:183; emphasis original]

A focus on the ultimate official construction of female sex through violation and penetration allows me to analyze touch as a political tool for the operation of state power. Gaze, in particular, has been extensively discussed as a political tool to understand the exercise of state power with regard to supervision and observation of bodies in myriad institutional settings (see Foucault 1988, 1995, 2004). Nevertheless, touch is still a less examined issue in the formation and operation of state power, and it plays a pivotal role in the institutional production of sexual difference, bodies, normative sexualities, desires, sex and gender.
My examination of this particular touch, that is, penetration of trans women by forensic authorities, suggests that the state in Turkey, as a patriarchal, heteronormative and masculinist order, plays a central role in the production and regulation of sexual difference, a normative domain of sexuality and gender, and “properly” sexed bodies. The state can become quite intimate with bodies of its citizens by incorporating pornographic practices derived from particular heterosexual desires and fantasies that ascribe the institutional actors the position of the penetrator. These intensely felt proximities between the state’s institutional actors and the bodies of its citizen are integral to the modern disciplinary practices and rational technologies of control. To remember once again Aretxaga’s stress on the “the intensification of bodies and intimacies that result from [the state’s] technologies of management” (2003: 406), insertion of an object into trans women’s vaginas is one example of this intensification, and shows how the tactile medico-legal practices allow the state to gain a specific content; that is, an active penetrating, masculinist and heteronormative body.

**Stories of Sex Reassignment Surgeries**

How do transpeople negotiate the state’s transformation of the body’s sex to their own ends? While the state produces myriad accounts of sex and body, how do trans people talk about and perceive their bodies during pre- and post-surgical periods both as individuals and as members of the trans community? In an attempt to provide some answers to these questions, now I turn to unofficial and phenomenological accounts of sex reassignment surgeries, accounts that involve trans people’s personal and communal perceptions of reconstructed genitals and body parts, as well as of their bodies in general.
During the time I spent in Istanbul LGBTT, stories of SRS were one of the most popular topics of conversations. While sitting around the table, smoking non-stop for hours, especially Sedef would start recounting one of the many horrible SRS stories at the beginning of the 1980s. Back then to have an SRS and get a new pink ID was strictly forbidden, thus resulting in a high number of informal SRSs. One person became very famous for these operations, and he was nicknamed Timuçin the Butcher after having destroyed many trans women’s genitals by cutting off the penis without replacing it with a proper vagina.\(^{102}\) I remember feeling shocked especially when Sedef told the sickening story about the medical conditions back then:

A friend of ours attempted to cut her penis off by herself…You know, it was not that easy to find a doctor to run the operation those days…It is still not an easy job but more or less you can find a way today…Anyway…What was I saying?? Ah yeah, this friend tried to cut her penis off but couldn’t succeed… After a few days, her scar got really bad. She needed to see a doc but, you know, she wasn’t able to visit any doc. So she went to this one, Timuçin the Butcher. He was already famous among us for practicing the operation… Sooo… she went and he put her on his table and started doing the operation. While performing the surgery, he peeled off the outer skin of the penis like a banana and threw that skin in front of his cat to eat…In fact, girls would not even call his place doctor’s office but a slaughterhouse.

Sedef, then, repeatedly said that to have a female body without a vagina placed many trans women in a depressive situation. I would say, during the time I spent at Istanbul LGBTT, these horror stories were frequently brought up while chitchatting. Sometimes trans women would portray these vagina-lacking operations as events in trans women’s lives that destroyed the chance of being a “real” woman forever, thus leading them into severe emotional and psychological despair. This anatomical lack would also play a role in drawing the limits of one’s

\(^{102}\) When trans women mentioned the lack of proper vagina, they more specifically meant at least an installation of a vagina hole (or vagina channel), which they could use for sexual intercourse.
capacity to become woman. Drawing on these anatomical cases, some trans women would tell personal success stories about their vaginas. The vagina represented the achieved status of “real” womanhood and placed them side by side with cisgender women in their sex-gender system. However, there are cases where this vaginal contract fails and biology can no longer stand as grounds for one’s sexual justification as female.

One day, when I went to Istanbul LGBTT, I was feeling extremely blue and distressed. After me sitting there for an hour, Esra noticed that something was wrong with me and she asked what the problem was. In fact, my problem was merely physical—I was having cramps due to my menstruation and was not feeling very well. That day, all the people in the room were trans women. For some reason, it never occurred to me that they did not menstruate. Words slipped out of my mouth: “You know, the usual womanly thing. I got my period.” Normally they would have something to say for whatever I said or they would start a conversation in relation to my words. While I was waiting for a kind of sisterly empathy, the room was in complete silence. Esra was the one to break the silence and told me that they did not menstruate like women. Suddenly the light bulb went on! Of course, they did not menstruate. They could not because they had no uterus. In point of fact, I knew this, but for a moment I had forgotten this physiological difference between my female body and their female body. I felt so dumb and apologized for my assumption. That was one of the rare moments I heard them speaking how there was still something that they “lacked” in being female, despite the SRS. Then Ceyda, with her usual humorous attitude said: “For goodness sake! What would I have to do with bleeding, cramping and getting depressed?! Also I don’t wanna get pregnant and tormented by cries and demands of babies. As long as my cunt eats up cocks I don’t need anything else!” And we all burst into laughter. Except for this moment, I never heard my trans women informants speaking
of female cyclicity, either as something to detest or something to perhaps desire for a sense of greater female “authenticity.”

One of the most sensitive issues with regard to SRSs is whether one will be able to have sexual pleasure or not by using their vaginas. Some of my trans friends said that vaginal sexual satisfaction and feeling of one’s reconstructed genitals might arrive years later. I do not know how many different accounts of late arriving feelings of post-mastectomical breasts I listened to. Based on their experience, some of the trans men would advise other trans men with breasts to wait for at least a year to feel their breasts after their operation. An average of one year is considered normal. Ilker told me, things are different with the penile operation and it might take up to three years for the person to start to feel his penis or to have varying levels of sexual satisfaction. Some people might be even unluckier and they would never be able to feel their genitals again at all.

A similar concern is also valid for trans women. During my fieldwork, I have closely witnessed two trans women’s post-operation problems. One of them, Beren, would visit the center frequently to ask for advice of the elderly trans women. The day I met Beren, she had the surgery a week ago. I don’t remember her seeing at the center but when I went there as part of my daily routine, I saw that they all knew each other from before. As opposed to many trans people I met, Beren was a 19-year old university student and from an upper-middle class family, who received immense family support throughout her sex reassignment process. Her case is really rare and everybody would consider her the luckiest person in the trans community.

Esra and Sedef, as more experienced trans women, asked her if she had any post-surgical urinary problems. Then I learned actually the surgery would cause lots of problems with the urinary tract. Sedef told about the cases when feces came out of trans women’s vaginas owing to
a fistula. Upon hearing these stories, Beren was horrified, but at the same time, relieved not to have had similar mishaps. Actually she bragged about her surgeon and how much money her family spent for the operation (it was approximately $8,000). She also used this monetary account as a proof of the originality of her vagina, and vaingloriously uttered: “I have the most expensive vagina in Turkey.” This account, marking her class privilege, lingered in the room as a reminder of the crucial role played by financial means in building up the most “real” female body. Her boast was not met with great enthusiasm in the room, especially given trans women’s economic situation in general. She suddenly changed the topic, and started asking questions about post-operation problems.

Her doctor had advised her not to have sexual intercourse for at least a month following the surgery. However, she was getting quite impatient because it was going to be her first sexual intercourse with her boyfriend, and she was extremely worried how it would be to have sex with female genitals. What she was curious about was less copulation itself than sexual pleasure she was expecting to have. Sedef said that she could have sexual intercourse right after the very first week following her operation, but it took her almost a year to have an orgasm with her clitoris. Then other people in the room joined the conversation and started to bring up other related topics such as ejaculation of some leftover sperm from the clitoris after the operation. Sevda told that she had post-surgical sperm ejaculations for a few days and then they stopped.

One of the most absorbing topics of discussion was the graft of a hymen during vaginal implantation. A strong symbolic value in connection to a woman’s chastity, the hymen plays

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103 Despite the relative progress that has been made in present SRSs, trans people still complain that doctors are not trained in medical school for these operations at all. Rather it is something that they need to learn and improve on their own. In that sense, it is very difficult to find a talented doctor, who would do the surgery at moderate or low rates. Beren’s doctor was known to be one of the best, but also one the most expensive operators in Istanbul.
varying roles in defining, controlling and concealing the female body from the heterosexual male
gaze across social worlds that live up to the orthodox interpretations of Islam. In simple and
quite general terms, while there is a wide social and patriarchal consensus in favor of men having
sexual intercourse prior to marriage, women are expected to remain sexually untouched and keep
their bodies “pure” for access of their husbands. The most significant marker of this preservation
reveals itself on nuptial night with “deflowering” of the woman. Tearing of the hymen and the
blood that comes out of this tear, signifies the validation of a sexually intact body. If the bride
has no blood coming out of her vagina, in particular contexts, she might face a wide range of
punitive practices from exclusion to homicide. It was striking to see how trans women, albeit in a
mocking way, also inherited this form of violence against the female body and mimicked the loss
of female virginity as part of becoming female.

While talking about Beren’s recent genital surgery, Sedef was the first person to trigger a
chat on virginity and the hymen. She first teased Beren for getting excited for being
“deflowered” by her boyfriend, and then she started laughing loud while telling how she had lost
her virginity to this young grocery man from the same neighborhood. He was her client. Then
everybody in the room started to talk about how they were “deflowered” themselves, and each
narrative precipitated laughter.

The virginity talk led to a comparison between trans women’s and nontrans women’s
vaginas. Esra started to talk about trans women’s vagina as “cold” while describing nontrans
women’s vagina as “warm.” We were back to speaking about what and how an “original” vagina
was. At that moment, being the only nontrans person in the entire room, I was picked up as a
reference point with my “original” vagina. Esra said: “For example, we cannot say Beren’s and
Asli’s vaginas are the same. Asli’s vagina is burning!” I was a bit disturbed by this conversation
and asked how she knew about my vagina. Then she told me she had penetrated both nontrans
women’s and trans women’s vaginas and she felt the difference in terms of their warmth. I could not say anything but felt obliged to smile.

While the above dialog reaffirms the already established meanings and roles in reconstructing the materiality of sex, the story below takes an opposite direction and fundamentally contests the materiality of the body as a condition for one’s sex. One of Ilker’s merits is his incredible skill in playing *oud*, a commonly used traditional instrument in Middle Eastern and North African music. He used to have one-on-one tutorials, and one of his students was a middle-aged male solicitor. Ilker told me about his feelings of constant discomfort and annoyance during the tutorials because the man would treat him like a woman, not as a man. The solicitor would ask him irritating questions by slightly expressing his straight desire for women, and sometimes even hit on Ilker. One day Ilker decided to confront him and recounted their interaction in the following words:

One day we had lunch together and I told him that I was a transsexual. He was so shocked that he could hardly swallow the morsel in his mouth. Then I continued: “You behave with me like this and that. I am extremely bothered by your attitude. I feel like a man myself, but you treat me like a woman.” There was a moment of silence, which was interrupted by his questions: “Well, for example, I am a man and I like women. Do you like women?” I said: “Positive!” He again tried to challenge me: “Are you sure that you are a man? Maybe it is something psychological. Maybe it is a matter of time; you might be feeling like a man temporarily, then you will feel like a woman again.” He kept asking questions. I guess he thought there was a problem with me and he could be able to solve it. He repeated again: “Perhaps it is a psychological problem. You can see a doc!” Then I replied: “Not mine, but perhaps your situation poses a psychological problem. You better see a doc!” He said: “No way! My maleness cannot be a psychological state. I have organs!” I said: “So I think it is even worse! Perhaps since you’ve seen your penis in front of you, you might have thought that you are a man. I urge you to go and see a doc! Despite my vagina, if I still feel like a
man myself, then my manhood is indisputable. But yours is dubious.” After this conversation, he never wanted to see me again [laughs].”

This conversation between Ilker and the solicitor is a perfect portrayal of how one’s sexual bodily surface is demonstrated as a site of evidence to reveal out the “truth” of one’s body’s sex. The solicitor’s words convey not only a social and cultural reference that minutely speaks all social and cultural accumulations of allegedly proper and normalized sex-gender combinations, but also how heterosexual desire, far from being external, is inherent to the production and reproduction of such combinations. However, in this example, desire still stands for a secondary source of evidence; when the solicitor detects Ilker’s absent desire for men, he then appeals to biological verification as the ultimate “truth” establishing grounds. What is genuinely remarkable about this dialogue is the way that Ilker undermines anatomy as a self-referential indicator of the body’s “true” sex, and acutely shows how sex is something more than and beyond biology. Hence, as Salamon accents, one’s body image (or a person’s perception of their own body) is not a structure, but a *structuralization*; “It is a creation and a construction and not a gift. *It is not a shape... but the production of a shape*” (Schilder 1950; cited in Salamon 2010:30). In other words, we read and attribute meanings to our bodies through cultural and social filters shaped by (trans)local understandings of gender and sex. This *structuralization* derives its force from incorporating a specific gendered and sexual logic that is produced and shaped by not only everyday life interactions and encounters, but also institutional and official spaces, discourses, and practices. To illustrate my point, here is another incident that took place during Ilker’s SRS trial. Ilker had chosen to trick the legal system by trying to receive permission for SRS without

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104 The same conflation between sex and gender in Turkish exists in this account, too. So I tried to place the words “man”, “manhood” and “male” appropriate to the meanings that were emphasized during the conversation.
undergoing sterilization. He had made an agreement with his doctor but things did not evolve as he expected:

What is important for the judge is the law. He wants to see the paper, the paper that certifies your infertility. It doesn't matter if it is really the case or not, but he wants to see it officially written. I had already arranged the agreement with my doctors, and the judge was going to give the permission to have the surgery as soon as he saw the record of my infertility. But the doctors did not want to write that I was infertile. They did not want to lie. Then the judge wanted to have two witnesses to support my case. My father brought two people from my home village. First the judge asked me to go out of the courtroom. Then he spoke a little bit with the witnesses. When he called me back, he started asking questions to the witnesses. One of the questions was: "Did ze ever wear a skirt?" This question drove me crazy!!! The witnesses said, "No, we have never seen hir wearing skirts, ze used to wear pants." The judge: "Did ze ever go to the coffee house?" The witnesses: "Ze was always with us in the coffeehouse." The judge: "Did ze use to gamble in the coffeehouse?"...He was asking about the most extreme cases of being a man!!! I have never done these things in my life. I was almost going to cry because I encountered something very remote from myself, very remote from how I feel as a man. I was so close to saying, "Forget about the report! I don't want your report anymore!" This made me feel very sad. If the judge had ever looked at my face, he could have seen that I was crying. But he kept asking: "Which games did ze used to play?" And the witnesses answered something really masculine. Those questions were so intense for me. Those things that I have never done and I would never and ever want to do!! The judge: "Did ze have female or male friends? Which one did ze prefer more?" Witnesses said: "He did not have female friends at all. He would always make friends with males." Even the man from my village later asked me, "What do the games you play have to do with your maleness??" After questioning the witnesses, the judge permitted me to have a sex change operation."

Since pronouns in Turkish are gender neutral, sometimes it is difficult to figure out if the speaker means a “she” or “he” while talking about a single person, as it was the case in this account. Hence, I use the gender-neutral pronoun “ze” and “hir” for this account.
Ilker, after recounting this story, told me how he was touched by his father’s friends’ support, who, despite knowing little about him, still agreed to support him by providing the necessary accounts of gender for the judge to return a verdict of Ilker’s “true” sex. All these answers speak to the rigid and stereotypical scripts of what it means to be a man in Turkey (see Chapter 2), and demonstrate how Ilker was successful as “passing” as a man in social everyday life. Hence, Ilker’s acquisition of the desired bodily surface is officially tied to his adequacy and capacity to give an account of the dominant performances of gender that are considered appropriate features of his phenomenological sex.

It would be wrong to say trans people themselves are not part of this process of materialization, as well as structuralization of the body along with dominant understandings of gender and sex. Of course, not every trans person takes a radical stance like Ilker and contests the very anatomy as evidence of one’s gender, and even sex. As previous accounts of trans women describe, for some trans women, the vagina epitomizes an organ without which one’s womanhood fails to “materialize,” i.e. lacks content or remains as a hole. On the other hand, the vagina denotes something extremely negative in some trans men’s descriptions. While chatting with them about sex reassignment surgeries, the vagina was no longer a source of aspiration, but, quite the reverse, sometimes a source of disgust or merely a nonfunctional, burdensome organ. However, technical aspects of penile assignment surgery place many trans men in a more arduous situation compared to trans women since sex reassignment surgery of penis implantation is a more difficult and painstaking operation than vaginal implantation. It approximately takes 17-18 hours, and the state declares a trans man as 30% disabled when the operation is completed.
The doctors state that the person becomes physically weaker due to the loss of skin parts that are cut and utilized for building up a penis.

There are also many more risks involved in penis surgery, the most significant one of which is tissue incompatibility. In this scenario, both the tissue used for the penis implantation and the hard labor put into creating a penis, can easily be wasted. The doctor I interviewed about sex reassignment surgery announced that we should interpret this as a loss of tissue. The human body does not have much compatible tissue to produce a penis. Ankle tissue is the best for producing a prosthesis. The skin and fat surrounding the penis can be acquired from several parts of the body. Depending on from where you obtain it, the penis will vary in appearance. To build up the outer skin layer of the penis, doctors either try to use removed breast parts since those parts are wasted after mastectomy or utilize parts from the front of the arm. If there is an incompatibility between the prosthesis and the tissue taken from one’s arm, then those detached skin parts are completely wasted and irrecoverable. Then the doctor needs to do another flap surgery to lift some tissue from the other arm. This might also cause permanent aesthetic problems because the spot where the tissue is lifted from looks sunken and changes color. There are also people who are disturbed by this appearance since it becomes quite visible especially during the summer. Some trans people feel ashamed of these scars or marks as they think that they display an evidence of their former sex to the social world. However, those kinds of operations can be carried out in various types of surgery and it does not necessarily mean a sex change operation.

Problems related to sex reassignment surgery are not only about individual bodily risks, but also about institutional prejudices and availabilities. By law, every hospital should perform sex reassignment surgery as long as one provides the court decision for the operation. Nevertheless, this is not the situation most of the time, and doctors reject trans people on the
grounds that their hospital would be stigmatized by performing such surgeries. The state, which is involved in regulating every single step of sex change operations, withdraws its leverage when it comes to implementing regulatory tools to pressure hospitals to run the operations. This sense of betrayal or abandonment by the state is articulated in one of my trans informants’ words:

The state doesn’t get itself in any of the troubles we are facing. It looks as if it is intervening in everything but, in fact, doesn’t do anything except for causing lots of legal impediment. It does nothing about either doctors or hospitals. It never holds doctors responsible for destroying one’s body. However, we face lots of legal barriers set by the state.

Up to this point, the overall picture demonstrates how the corporeal is set as an official stage for “materialization” of sex by the state’s medico-legal discourses and practices. One should be cautious not to read into this statement by interpreting it as a call for a project of ultimate “de-materialization” of sex and gender, which I can see as a kind of both theoretical and political possibility. I want to emphasize that materialization can take myriad ways and forms, and the problem occurs when one form of materialization becomes the norm, forecloses other possible forms and provides the only available way of recognition in the dominant sexual and gender order. To be recognized, people might also desire to incorporate these norms. But it is of great importance to remember, “I may feel that without some recognizability I cannot live. But I may also feel that the terms by which I am recognized make life unlivable” (Butler 2004:4). Hence, as Butler (2004:3) suggests, we need to develop a critical relation to these norms, and “the capacity to develop a critical relation to these norms presupposes a distance from them, an ability to suspend or defer the need for them, even as there is a desire for norms that might let one live.”

I suppose the body is one and perhaps the most important condition for developing such a capacity because, fortunately, the body is not something fixed, passive and stable but rather
something fluid, active and unstable, so that it always exceeds the limits or boundaries that are determined to restrict it to the sites of particular inscriptions and representations. In that sense, the stories in this chapter demonstrate a generous account of bodily capacities. A closer look at them draws attention both to the remarkable gulf and to the overlaps between how transsexuality and the trans body are envisioned in medico-legal discourses and the practices of the Turkish state, and how trans people sense and live their bodies and bodily selves. Bodily experience and the body, with its tremendous capacities, will always exceed its official and unofficial objectifications (including trans people’s own self-objectifications) that define it as a writable, observable, and controllable object. In fact, the next chapter problematizes a similar issue by focusing on the writing of the trans body into the domain of law through trans killings and LGBTQI organizations’ attempts to legalize “hate crimes,” and discusses the unjust repercussions of legal verdicts, scripts, documents and signatures.
My son was always ostracized because of his sexual preference. My son wanted to continue his education, but they didn’t allow him. They couldn’t find room for my child in this enormous world. So now they find him guilty, but aren’t those who consort with people like him guilty as well?  

Irem’s mother, September 25 2010

CHAPTER 6

CONTESTING CALCULATIONS OF JUSTICE:

THE CRIMINAL LAW, HATE CRIMES AND QUEER LIVES

In September 2010, Irem, a trans woman sex worker was found dead in her house. She was lying on the ground, stabbed 44 times and cleaved deeply from throat to abdomen. Her murderer was a 22-year-old man whom Irem had met via Internet. He was caught by the police due to his hospital records of the medical treatment he needed for having accidentally cut his hand during the homicide.

It was neither the first nor the last time. Irem was one of the 73 trans women, who were viciously murdered by men between 2002 and July 2013 in Turkey (see Chapter 1). These men

siğdıramadılar evladı. Öğlüm-suçluadaonarladüşüpkalkankışırsuçlusuçluğidemil mi?”
were typically either their lovers or their clients.

When the police completed their investigation and caught the culprit of Irem’s murder, he confessed as follows:

We had been seeing each other for a while. When the incident happened, I was paying one of my visits to her place. I drank a bottle of beer. I had sexual intercourse with ‘him’ (Kendisile cinsel ilişkiye girdim). Then ‘he’ asked to have sex with me (Sonra o benimle ilişkiye girmek istedi). I didn’t accept. We had a quarrel. When ‘he’ cursed me, I went insane. I got hold of a knife and stabbed ‘him’ twice. I don’t remember the rest . . . Not to leave any trace behind me, I took the laptop, cell phone and some jewelry, and I ran away.”

During some other trans women’s murder trials, the suggestion or request for “homosexual” intercourse by the victim was one of the most recurrent pleas that appeared in the perpetrators’ confessions. In past criminal cases, defendants used the offer or existence of same-sex intercourse between the parties to justify their murders. Many alleged that they met the victim via internet, and hence, had no idea the victim was a trans woman, in their words, a “male,” since the victim had not had SRS and still had a penis. When they discovered “the fact,” they killed the trans women. Despite the overt display of hate motive based on one’s gender and sexual identity in these confessions, these accounts were considered mitigating factors in the judgment and the perpetrators received a lesser punishment on the grounds of “undue provocation” (haksız tahrik).

Going back to Irem’s case, the culprit makes an interesting point to take advantage of the principle of undue provocation. He says “I had sexual intercourse with ‘him’ (Kendisile cinsel

\footnote{http://haber.mynet.com/iremin-katil-sanigini-yakacak-rapor-552989-yasam/}
"ilişkiye girdim),” which might suggest that the culprit took “active” (penetrator) and/or “passive” (recipient) role in the sexual intercourse. However, the way the next sentence is phrased in Turkish, “Then ‘he’ asked to have sex with me (Sonra o benimle ilişkiye girmek istedi.” makes it clear that the culprit first took an “active” role in the sexual intercourse, but in their next sexual intercourse, Irem was asking him to take the “passive” role. This account indicates that the culprit was seeking reduction in his punishment not on the grounds of “homosexuality” per se, but the role that he was asked to take in his intercourse with Irem, a point that I discuss below at length.

In contrast to some other trans murder trials, there was a strong LGBTQI activist presence at Irem’s and effective political campaigning around her case to publicize this homicide as a hate crime. In an attempt to put pressure on the Turkish judiciary to define Irem’s murder as a hate crime, the LGBTQI activists problematized its actual understanding as an individual crime and aimed at its politicization. While the trial continued, the lawyer of Irem’s case had requested her SRS report from the hospital. According to this report, Irem had testicular removal surgery as part of her sex reassignment process, and hence, she was deprived of reproductive capacity. Based on this documentation, the presiding judge held that it was impossible for Irem to have had sexual intercourse with the defendant as a male because Irem did not have testicles. However, neither was she regarded as a female before the law. The removal of her reproductive capacities placed her in a gender gray zone, or, to put it another way, a “queer zone,” within which no legal category of sex would apply to her. There could not be any incident of same-sex

108 The logic that informs the judge’s decision here is vague. It is physiologically possible for men to have erections without testicles, but maybe the judge doesn’t know this. So it is not clear whether the judge assumes that the lack of testicles would cause lack of erection or, alternatively, male reproductive functionality (rather than erectile functionality) at the heart of the judge’s construction of male gender.
intercourse. As a result, the defendant’s testimony was deemed false, and the absence of the potentially mitigating factor of same-sex intercourse led to his twenty-eight years of imprisonment.

Some LGBTQI activists thought that for the first time some justice was served on trans people’s side. But they were also quite aware that the space of justice was not merely the court space; on the contrary, it lay somewhere else beyond the court in the social field, or to put it more explicitly, in everyday life in their relations with myriad institutional and non-institutional actors, including legal authorities, medical actors, police officers, landowners, natal family members, neighbours, LGBTQI and non-LGBTQI friends, clients, partners, total strangers, etc. Hence, I am concerned less with the numerical accounts of court decisions (i.e. numbers of imprisonment years) that are supposed to bring trans people closer to justice, than with the question of how such calculations are made possible and justice is presented in mathematical forms. For instance, what would be the suitable just calculation of punishment if Irem had testicles? How would the judge deliver justice if Irem’s sexual relationship with her murderer were deemed a same-sex one? Past analogous cases suggest that justice would have been calculated quite differently and the murderer would have served a lesser sentence.

Part of this chapter’s goal is also to show how queer subjects, possibilities and practices that are sunk into complete silence and invisibility in civil law, emerge as legal matters, and thus gain judicial definitions via the terms of criminal law. Yet an attempt to achieve this objective inevitably triggers other notable questions: what does this element of legal visibility cost to queer, specifically trans people’s lives? What kinds of political contours emerge in queer politics? And on a directly related note, what kinds of openings and closures does this legal definition entail pertaining to queer understandings of justice?
In short, this chapter draws attention to the tense relationship between law and justice within the context of LGBTQI politics in the urban setting of Istanbul. I will also explore the Turkish criminal law and the ways it is implemented as a significant source of injustice in the lives of LGBTQI people, especially for those of trans women sex workers in Istanbul. Doing that will allow me to further discuss how the calculations of justice in the form of law generate foreclosures of specific desires, sexualities and bodies, thus simultaneously producing and shaping unjust lives. A closer look at trans women’s homicides will show the ways in which law takes a role in cultivating a culture of impunity which leads to the continued killings of trans women by implicitly announcing trans women as criminal bodies, rather than developing effective sanctions against their perpetrators.

**Just Futures, Legal Presents**

“What is the truth of justice?” In his speech, *Force of Law* (1992:1), Jacques Derrida poses this question to discuss the tension between law and justice. According to common understandings of justice, people usually base their justice claims on inscription, interpretation and utilization of specific laws, thus deriving a definition of justice from calculable grounds. As Derrida reminds us, however, justice always exceeds law and calculation: “Law (*droit*) is not justice. Law is the element of calculation, and it is just that there be law, but justice is incalculable, it requires us to calculate with the incalculable…” (Derrida 1992:16).

The chief question for Derrida then becomes how to approach and understand justice in the face of calculation:

“. . . justice, as law (*droit*), seems always to suppose the generality of a rule, a norm or a
universal imperative. How are we to reconcile the act of justice that must always concern singularity, individuals, irreplaceable groups and lives, the other or myself as other, in a unique situation, with rule, norm, value or the imperative of justice which necessarily have a general form, even if this generality prescribes a singular application in each case?" [1992:17, emphasis original]

One answer that Derrida gives is deconstruction. To put it differently, for him, justice itself lies in the very deconstruction of those said calculations and laws. One should always keep in mind that justice cannot be found in judgments, decisions, or more explicitly, within law itself. When Derrida talks about the deconstructability of law as a name for justice, he requires us to bear in mind that any legal judgment cannot be just or represent justice. On the contrary, with each legal decision of judgment, justice is deferred. With reference to this definition of justice as a moment of deferral, Ahmed underscores a salient point about the temporal element in Derrida’s understanding of justice. She declares: “. . . [justice] is also an opening towards an unlivable future, in which one lives ‘with’ the need to re-justify to and for others who are always yet to come.” (2000a:55). This remark is crucial because justice is never only about the present but rather it is also about the past, which is sedimented within the present, as much as the future which inhabits yet-to-come subjects who will be affected by the decisions and judgments that are made in the present.

The deferral of justice, however, does not mean that people should stop investing their energies into law making processes or legal struggles because there is always the threat of the worst calculation (i.e. fascism can be listed as one of those worst calculations). Derrida is very precise on this matter:

That justice exceeds law and calculation, that the unrepresentable exceeds the determinable
cannot and should not serve as an alibi for staying out of juridico-political battles, within an institution or a state or between institutions or states and others. Left to itself, the incalculable and giving (*donatrice*) idea of justice is always very close to the bad, even to the worst for it can always be reappropriated by the most perverse calculation. It’s always possible. And so incalculable justice *requires* us to calculate. [1992: 28, emphasis original]

But, at the same time, he constantly warns us that the law itself should not be assumed as a ground for securing or achieving justice. No matter how radically progressive the legal decisions or judgments might be, they will always escape justice. Actually it is possible to interpret this seemingly unbreachable gap between the law and justice as the very condition of political struggles for justice. Part of our political struggles for justice emanate in tandem with legal formulations because law might at times be the very condition of injustice pertaining to specific lives and bodies, representing a product of calculated forms of particular histories, social and cultural worlds, and unequal power relations. That is to say, law is also the space of closures and limits of lives, desires and bodies.

In her discussion of Derrida’s article, Ahmed states that Derrida does not provide us a positive model of justice by pronouncing ‘what is justice’ or ‘what kind of criteria should be applied to make a decision more just’. Justice, for him, is always and already negated in the present yet gleams as a possibility of futurity due to its deferred nature. However, citing Ahmed we can claim that Derrida’s take on the deconstruction of law offers us a way to think about injustice because “an injustice occurs when a (deconstructible) constitution is used to found a judgment in the name of justice” (2000a:56).

I want to return to Irem’s court case to elaborate the role of law in creating injustice yet under the guise of justice. As I described at the beginning of this chapter, Irem’s murderer
confessed his crime, but defended himself as being provoked by Irem because he was allegedly asked to be sexually penetrated by her. If we have a closer look at the culprit’s confession, until the very moment of Irem’s request to take an “active” role in sexual intercourse, there is no sign of disturbance in his account regarding the sexual affair between them. That is to say, there seems to exist no threat to his gendered self as a straight man until the very moment of the putative sexual proposal. However, when he was asked to be penetrated, or in other words, “passive,” then the form of sexual intercourse became something destructive to his straight self, thus insulting his manhood. There is an issue at hand here: in the eyes of the culprit, the nature of sexual intercourse and the roles taken as “active” or “passive” define masculinity and femininity (see also Bereket and Adam 2006). A feeling of threat or insult with regards to one’s gendered self (hitherto it has always been the masculine self imperiled) would be legally addressed as an “undue provocation.”

The legal concept of undue provocation deserves further discussion. Undue provocation is defined in Article 29 of the Turkish Penal Code as a mitigating factor in the punishment of culprits, who experience temporary psychological malfunction due to victims’ unjust acts or behaviors just prior to their death—thus leading to the crime. There are certain conditions for a crime to be charged as caused by undue provocation. First, there should be an adequate provoking act prior to the incident. Second, the mentioned act should be undue (haksız). Third, the defendant must have acted in the heat of rage or violent grief. Fourth, there should be a

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109 The correspondence between the active-passive distinction and gender identification has been widely examined by anthropologists. In the Brazilian context, Don Kulick (1997, 1998) discusses that sexuality is central in defining the gender of travestis. Travestis are considered men when they take an active penetrator role in their sexual intercourse with men. They are, however, regarded as “not men” when they take the recipient or passive role in their sexual relations with men. For further cross-cultural ethnographic study on the role of sexual acts in constituting gender identity, see Unni Wikan (1977), Richard Parker (1986), Tomas Almaguer (1993), Mark Johnson (1997) and Megan Sinnott (2004).
causal link between the provocation, the rage or violent grief and the homicide. Fifth, the homicide must be a reaction triggered by this rage, anger or violent grief and last, the act of crime should be directed to the subject provoking the act. Upon satisfying these conditions, culprits receive penal reductions.

In Turkey, undue provocation is usually associated with honor killings. Until 2005, when the new Turkish Penal Code took effect with the amendments in regards to honor killings, sentences for killing women in the name of honor would be reduced by one third. Fathers, husbands, brothers or boyfriends who killed their daughters, wives, sisters and girlfriends to protect their honor, would benefit from reduced punishments due to undue provocations (Demirler and Gümüş 2004). Prior to the legal amendments of 2005, feminist organizations struggled to have honor killings categorized as first-degree murders. Nevertheless, with the legal changes in the new Penal Code, the category of “honor crimes” was replaced with “crimes of tradition,” and the killing of women in the name of tradition was regarded as a first-degree murder with a sentence of aggravated life imprisonment. This new situation, while opening a

110 This information is accessed on a Turkish legal website. For details please see http://www.turkhukksitesi.com/showthread.php?t=14535
111 For a more detailed theoretical, as well as political discussion of honor crimes, please see Nahla Abdo-Zubi and Shahrzad Mojab (2004), Violence in the Name of Honour: Theoretical and Political Challenges.
112 What resonates with this new naming is establishing strong links between women killings and specific traditions of an ethnic identity, the Kurdish identity, in Turkey. This understanding and legal inscription also reflects the historical, political and social tensions that have been present for a long time between the Turkish and the Kurdish people in Turkey. Modernization projects in Turkey have always been hand in hand with a strong reaction to religious, as well as Kurdish identity. Socially imagined boundaries between the Turkish identity as the developed, Westernized and educated, and the Kurdish identity as the backward, Eastern and undereducated reflected themselves in the inscriptions and implementations of legislations. Especially the legislations around “crimes of tradition” allow the Turkish people to imagine themselves as modern subjects in favour of greater gender equality between men and women as opposed to the Kurdish people who victimize their women through honour killings. However, a close look at the Turkish judiciary system, which grants reduced sentences for perpetrators of honour killings, reveals how this so-called “tradition” has also been integrated into the legal system. Although measures were introduced in September 2004 to prevent these reductions, juridical decisions are still rooted in “traditional” concerns for women’s modesty. For further analysis on the institutional production of “tradition” in regards to
passage to sentence crimes that were committed with communities’ or families’ decisions, still was not effective in punishing individual crimes, for example, on the basis of jealousy or honor. In that sense, since 2005, there has still been a space for undue provocation as long as an individual commits the homicide. The most prominent victims of this legislation are women, gays and trans people. For example, some court cases from 2008 and 2009 show that even trivial issues were judicially approved as adequate reasons for provoking men to kill their wives. Here is a list of several accounts through which the culprits, who killed their wives, managed to receive reduced sentences based on undue provocation: “I offered her some fruit juice, but she didn’t take it”, “she flirtatiously asked a man about time”, “she wore jeans and tights”, “she cooked only pasta for a month” and “she didn’t want to have sex with me and pushed me out of the bed.” Unbelievable as they might sound, these testimonies were accepted as provoking acts by the judges.

In 2010, for the first time in Turkish Criminal Law, the distinction between honor crimes and crimes of tradition was nullified due to a decision made by the Supreme Court. Two brothers from Kayseri, a middle-western city in Turkey, killed a man, whom they suspected of having a love affair with their widowed mother. The local court treated the brothers’ criminal act as provoked by their mother’s moral turpitude, which was thought to stain their family honor, and the court decided to see this condition as a mitigating factor in their punishments. Hence, the two brothers were sentenced to only six and ten years because of undue provocation. When the

honour killings, see Dicle Koğacıoğlu (2004).

113 http://iscicephesi.net/kadin-sayfasi/hukuk-koesi/642-haksiz-tahrik-nedir-gercek-magduru-kimdir
Supreme Court of Turkey heard the appeal of this case in 2010, they reversed the local court’s judgment because the motivating factors for the murder (i.e. to protect their mother’s and family honor as stated by the defendants) were the same as those of crimes of tradition. On the grounds of this similarity, the Supreme Court overruled the previous decision and declared that the mother’s behavior did not represent an adequately provoking act and consequently, sentenced the culprits to life imprisonment. It is difficult to guess how the Supreme Court would decide if the mother had happened to be a still-married woman; however, with its judgment, this case has become precedent for deciding honor crimes. From now on, the court will have to evaluate honor crimes and crimes of tradition as one and the same, and therefore, deliver the same punishment, that is, life imprisonment. In short, the merger of two different penal categories puts an end to the sentence reductions due to undue provocation.

Despite this legal improvement on behalf of women, there is not much legal restoration for LGBTQI people. The aforementioned use of undue provocation as a mitigating factor is still extremely effective in determining sentences for the culprits of gay and trans people’s killings. Despite the existence of some court decisions that sentenced the culprits to aggravated life imprisonment, these court judgments amount only to a few and do not apply to many other similar cases. Part of the reason is that in each case the delivery of justice is strongly tied to the individual judges’ decision-making mechanisms, which are to a great extent shaped by the social and cultural values they hold individually pertaining to sex, sexuality, gender and family. Justice is then not an abstract truth or statement. To delineate the ways in which these values play into making legal judgments and destruct the alleged “neutrality” of law, we should examine which circumstances and testimonies succeed as undue provocation in queer settings.

114 http://haber.gazetevatan.com/yargitaydan-namus-cinayeti-devrimi/306140/7/Haber
Wanton Proposals

A majority of the court decisions about gay and trans people’s killings show that the proposal of same sex relations is an adequate reason to create the conditions for an “undue provocation” (Doganoglu 2009). Some of the cases involve confessions by culprits that they were offered money in return for same-sex intercourse. Culprits use these claims to show how they were humiliated, insulted and driven crazy by such “undue” words or acts. Many court cases demonstrate that these accounts were widely accepted by the judges as valid mitigating factors because culprits might have easily found themselves in a furious mood, enraged or having lost their self-control. Some judges even evaluated a proposal for homosexual intercourse as molestation and/or sexual assault.

Under the Turkish penal code, acts that can be considered undue provocation include extorting money, insults, breaking and entering or otherwise violating the private residence, wounding someone by stabbing, limiting one’s freedom or threatening someone, raping and beating. Proposing same-sex intercourse finds its place under the same legal category that embraces these examples. This categorization imbues the queer subject and queer sexual practice—which otherwise have no voice or visibility in the sphere of law—with a criminal aspect. Therefore, it can be argued that undue provocation also constitutes the very terms that queer possibilities appear within the law, yet in a criminal form that deprives them of and cuts them from their rich potentialities. Queer forms of intimacy or sexual acts, as Narrain points out, find no “safe habitation” within the space of law (2011:260).

Another instance of queer appearance within the terms of criminal law can be traced via the following incident. During the court case of a woman’s murder by her husband, the Supreme Court based its judgment on striking circumstances. The woman victim and her husband used to
live separately from each other, and the woman was staying with a trans woman friend of hers. While the court was judging the case, the following phrases could be read in the court records: “a woman who lives with a person called travesti, who would hang out with random men in bars and clubs” or “…according to objective criteria, the victim’s choice of life style might rightly cause the husband to think that he would be cheated on by his wife” (Doganoglu 2009:23). As a result, the victim’s residential state (i.e. being a trans woman’s housemate) was legally considered an adequate provoking act for the husband to kill his wife.

The same logic was prevalent in Irem’s case until her medical reports reached the court. Until then, her body was appraised as a male one and her alleged proposal to take the active role in sexual intercourse with the culprit was listed as a proof of insult, sexual assault and molestation. However, once the evidence of her bodily surface made its way to the court space, the judge re-interpreted the sexual relationship as a non-same-sex one, since she did not have testicles. So the judge rejected the demand of the defendant’s attorney to take undue provocation into consideration, while deciding on the sentence. This way, as opposed to definition of undue provocation that was derived from the culprit’s previously mentioned accounts, the court decision inscribed the provoking act not on the basis of the sexual act, but rather on the bodily materiality and the meanings attributed to this materiality. In other words, they passed judgment on the body not the act.

According to Article 10 of the Constitution of 1982 as amended in 2001, all individuals are equal before the law without any discrimination, irrespective of language, race, color, sex, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion and sect, or any such considerations. However,  

115 http://www.unesco.org/most/Inturke.htm
as is obvious from the above court cases, this holds true only on paper and does not represent the truth for practical life. Sentences that culprits receive also reflect the victim’s sex, which also shapes what type of sexual acts or desires are regarded legal, while others are foreclosed and seen as precipitating the construction of criminal subjects. Therefore, through the judges’ court decisions, the desires or sexual acts that fall out of the heterosexual domain are inscribed as improper, and hence, perpetrators who punish these desires or sexual acts deserve lesser penalties. Consequently, what we witness is the state’s failure to uphold the right of non-discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Again another Article in the Constitution states, “Everyone has the right to life and the right to protect and develop their material and spiritual being.”¹¹⁶ This legal code is constantly contested, and each victim’s right to life is weighed differently. To be more explicit, the culprits are penalized to a varying degree contingent upon who the victim is. So the victim category itself is bound to social and cultural values and norms even though it claims to be a legal, hence a “neutral” one. Strictly speaking, certain people are legally treated as more worthy of the victim category. The logic of undue provocation, and the sexual and gender norms from which it derives its justification, are also an implicit account of how particular lives are worth living, while others are deemed less worthy. Hence, rather than being a uniform category, life itself is a contested domain. It is salient to think about the legal phrase, “the right to life”, not as a rule that universally and equally applies to everyone, but rather as a very particular form of calculation that functions to privilege and secure certain modes of life over others. ‘Who has the right to live?’ and ‘What kinds of lives deserve to be given the right to live?’ are constantly debated and contested zones of struggle. From this perspective, undue provocation can be understood as a

tool to generate various formulations of “the right to live.” This is also an implicit construction of what constitutes a life as well as the state’s ability to inject itself into aspects of life as it constructs and reconstructs it.

Remembering Derrida once more, it should be underscored that Irem’s court case, and the ways in which judgments were made in regards to this case, present us with the production and stipulation of a specific model of justice and definitions of what would constitute justice for Irem’s lost life and her mother and friends who have to cope with this loss. To put a name, “heterosexuality” becomes the model of both life and justice that the court advances. When Irem’s medical results reach the court, the judge renounces the sexual intercourse as a same-sex one and the change in the type of sexual intercourse reflects itself as an aggravating factor, rather than a mitigating one for the punishment of the culprit. Undue provocation is immediately nullified as soon as the sexual intercourse is medically proved to be a non-same-sex one. Hence, there could not be any source of insult or molestation. Once again, we should recall Rubin’s (1993) diagram of sex value system, and see how this value system determines the decisions made about life and death: homosexuality as “bad”, “abnormal” and “unnatural,” and heterosexuality as “good”, “normal” and “natural”. That being said, undue provocation is a legal medium, which distributes these values accordingly over the matters of queer lives and deaths.

Before concluding this section, some points need to be addressed concerning the role of undue provocation in rendering queer subjects and queer sexual acts visible yet in a pejorative fashion within the terms of criminal law. As Narrain and Gupta (2011:xxvi) astutely put it, criminal law becomes the space of “hypervisibility” for queer subjects, while they do not even count as subjects in civil law. The same goes for the legal regulations in Turkey: queer people are neither mentioned nor outlawed in all types of law, except when a “carnal copulation in a
manner against nature” takes place. This “unnatural intercourse” becomes the very condition of
the queer person’s emergence as a legal subject. However, as underscored by some scholars
(Dave 2011, 2012; Govindan and Vasudevan 2011), all visibility is not the guarantee of
empowerment or transformation. Hence, part of the struggle for queer justice in Turkey is to
open up myriad spaces of legal visibility and extend the already existing ones for LGBTQI
people, whether it be through hate crime legislation or access to civil rights. However, this legal
struggle also has its own problems because of the mechanics of closure and exclusion of
multiplicity of voices that are inherent to the constitution and inscription of laws. In the rest of
my chapter, detailing these legal struggles, I will be scrutinizing how they shape LGBTQI
people’s definitions of and struggle for justice, and how these definitions and fight for queer
justice are contested in the complex circle of politics, which involves state actors, different
LGBTQI groups and trans people themselves.

**LGBTQI Organizations and the State**

The targeted killing of trans women represents a noteworthy space to bring together state
institutions and actors and trans people as political actors. It is important for trans women to hold
the state responsible for nearly all the murder incidents since the state’s security forces and
judicial institutions show little interest in finding and punishing the criminals. Even when
perpetrators are caught and sentenced, the state fails to take the necessary precautions to prevent
similar incidents (i.e. killings of LGBTQI people) from happening again. In their struggle with
this violence and interaction with the state, LGBTQI groups deploy a particular language of
justice. In this section, first, I want to lay out the constituting elements of this language; that is,
the elements that are based on hate crimes and human rights. Second, by approaching this
language as a specific calculation that seeks to function as a justice-serving mechanism, I will problematize what kinds of closure it constructs, or even worse, what other forms of calculations are made possible, thus opening a larger realm of injustice. In other words, I will be exploring how a legal struggle for justice might also carry a great potential to have unjust consequences. Ratna Kapur’s admonishment is worth considering at this point: “legal analysis and strategies need to address law as a site of discursive engagement, and not merely as capable of promoting universal norms and values in which everyone will ultimately be included” (2005:20). Hence, looking at law also as “a site of discursive struggle” (2005:3) will be the trope of this chapter from now on.

Killings trans women is part of a broader pattern of violence against LGBTQI people in Turkey, and the state plays a major part in spreading this violence. Over the course of my fieldwork, the speeches of state actors contributed widely to the dissemination of hatred against LGBTQI people, and strengthened the already existing public prejudices. For instance, 2010 was marked by Selma Aliye Kavaf’s, Minister for Women and Family Affairs, speech that raised reactions among the LGBTQI community in Turkey due to her controversial comments on morals and values. Her opinions on homosexuality and gay marriage in particular mobilized many LGBTQI people to draw attention to “homophobic” feature of the Turkish state for months succeeding Kavaf’s speech. “I believe homosexuality is a biological disorder, a disease,” said Kavaf in an interview with the daily Hürriyet’s Sunday supplement, a major right wing newspaper. And she added: “I believe [homosexuality] is something that needs to be treated. Therefore I do not have a positive opinion of gay marriage.”117

Months after, resonances of Kavaf’s speech continued and she became the most addressed target of LGBTQI press conferences and declarations about hate crimes in Turkey. Different LGBTQI organizations gathered together to call on her to apologize to gay people because the words that she uttered as a state representative would contribute to the increase in hate crimes against LGBTQI people, let alone preventing LGBTQI people from being killed.

On April 15, 2010, a conference called “Equal Opportunities and Gender Equality: Experiences in Italy and Turkey” was organized in Ankara by the Italian Embassy, and two keynote speakers were: Maria Rosaria Carfagna, Minister for Equal Opportunities in Italy and Aliye Kavaf. When Kavaf was delivering the opening speech, LGBTQI activists from Kaos GL, who were seated in the salon, held up their posters with the following slogans on: “Apologize to Homosexuals! (Eşcinsellerden Özür Dile!)”, “Not Freedom of Speech but Stigmatizing and Targeting! (Düşünce Özgürlüğü Değil, Damgalama ve Hedef Gösterme!)”, “Don’t Hate, Apologize! (Nefret Etme, Özür Dile!)”, “It’s Not a Freedom of Speech But Direct Discrimination! (Nefret Etme, Özür Dile!" "Düşünce Özgürlüğü Değil, Doğrudan Ayrimciliktir!)”. Kavaf did not show any reaction. She continued with her speech, and meanwhile the protestors were interrupted by the civil policemen and the hotel’s security personnel, and dragged out of the meeting hall by force. Nevertheless, LGBTQI activists were glad to make their way into the media with their slogans.

118 An Ankara based LGBTQI organization from which trans people separated later on to found their own organization.
Meanwhile in Istanbul, LGBTQI political agenda was busy with protesting Kavaf and her supporters. Throughout my fieldwork, I participated in approximately eight rallies organized by Istanbul LGBTT against hate crimes and trans killings. As each of them took place, Kavaf gradually began to be addressed as the embodied form of official “homophobia” and “transphobia” that existed at the state level. By hailing Kavaf and her institutional affiliated position of power, people would curse or blame the state for hate crimes, and call on the state to apologize to LGBTQI people. In these protests, I was usually assigned the role of photographer for the website to boost the echoes of the protest, and the photograph below is from one of these rallies.

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In these rallies the state and its justice system were blamed for being the defender of hate and not protecting the lives of its LGBTQI citizens. On a wider political note, Kavaf’s declaration served as a litmus test to draw boundaries between different political camps and organizations as being either for or against LGBTQI rights in Turkey. As LGBTQI activists organized demonstrations to condemn Kavaf for her words, the discussion about whether to understand homosexuality as a disease or not gradually evolved into a more complicated phase by inciting conservative people to articulate the matter at stake, namely “homosexuality” (eşcinsellik), via deployment of a different terminology than a Western one. Hilal Kaplan, a young religious Muslim female journalist, who has become popular among Islamist and liberal intellectuals especially since 2009, spearheaded the discussion on how to talk about homosexuality in appropriate Islamic terminology. In her column, she wrote how she was immensely astonished by Muslim thinkers’
and politicians’ uncritical appropriation of medical language while they were speaking about homosexuality, a language that orients itself to Western norms and values of scientific positivism. She expressed her deep bewilderment because the same Muslim thinkers and intellectuals would generally keep Western terminology at an arm’s length and deploy an Islam-oriented approach when it came to explaining social, cultural and political issues other than homosexuality. So to speak, they were the militant fighters urging people to discuss these issues in the interpretive framework of Islam and proponents of struggle in discursive sites. Kaplan, however, was surprised that these Muslim thinkers and politicians had claimed the articulation of homosexuality as a disorder. Kaplan, through her column, was reminding them of the correct way of speaking on the issue, or the correct discursive strategy, that is the language of Islam, without resorting to Western terminology:

“... homosexuality is not a disorder but a sin; the fact that it is a sin is an adequate evidence to fight against its socialization and justification. ... In my opinion, from Muslims’ perspective, the main issue at stake should be to stress homosexuality as a drive of the flesh and Muslims should side with fighting against it.”120

Kaplan’s article created outrage among LGBTQI people because until then, she was known to be one of the most progressive people within the religious Muslim intellectual community. Her ideas about other politically sensitive issues in Turkey, to a certain extent, were celebrated within many progressive circles. After her article, Kaplan’s name appeared in demonstrations, press

conferences and protest letters for disseminating and in a way justifying hate against LGBTQI people, which would eventually lead to more crimes committed against LGBTQI people.

Almost around the same time with Kavaf’s speech, an essay was published by Yürüyüş, a journal that is known as the medium of an orthodox socialist front, HÖC (Haklar ve Özgürlükler Cephesi). HÖC was in the vanguard of organizing a political campaign for calling on the state to release inmates with cancer. As part of this campaigning, many radical, progressive and leftist organizations convened to form a platform and join their voices to put leverage on the state to set the ill prisoners free. LGBTQI organizations also showed solidarity and participated in the rallies. There was no problem with their involvement until a vote took place to decide on certain political strategies. Some organizations voiced objections to including LGBTQI organizations as decision-makers over more “serious” political issues than matters of sexuality, and the platform started a days-long discussion about whether LGBTQI organizations should be allowed to vote or not. As this discussion continued, Yürüyüş’s article came out, and it intensified the tensions even further by labeling LGBTQI people with perversion and sickness. Reverberations of the article created utter backlash against the platform, resulting in the withdrawal of many organizations from the platform. Among them, not to mention LGBTQI organizations, there were leftists and feminists. Until the piece in Yürüyüş, these groups were still debating whether they should have stayed and fought for raising consciousness about LGBTQI issues among some orthodox left organizations. This situation, however, created tensions also among LGBTQI organizations since some of the members insisted on leaving the platform immediately, while other remained, hoping to influence and perhaps change orthodox understanding of politics around sexuality. The disagreement between different LGBTQI people about whether to stay in

the platform or not quickly dissolved because of the overt forms of hate speech, homophobia and transphobia, together with the lack of even a small sign of the tendency to change their views about LGBTQ people, culminated in the separation of all groups with progressive sexual politics from the platform for good. This incident, similar to the one in conservative Muslim circles, caused the formation of cliques in leftist circles, and in a way, revealed a list of transphobic and homophobic leftist organizations, who were previously assumed to be the would-be supporters of the LGBTQI rights because of their own political history of state oppression.

In this political environment, the discourse of hate crime and human rights has gained a more authoritative voice, and become the most remarkable discursive currency to communicate violence directed to the LGBTQI people (trans people are always given a special attention) and the demands from the state, as can it be seen in the following statement:

We’re calling on the state. When will we be treated as equal citizens of this country? When will we be able to peacefully reside in our houses and walk on the streets without feeling the threat of being lynched, attacked, harassed and raped? When will measures take effect to rule out the hatred directed towards us? . . . We know that as long as the state and political parties keep turning a blind eye to hate crimes against trans individuals, this violence will continue. Protection of trans people and implementation of legal sanctioning mechanisms to prevent perpetrators are duties of the state.

We repeat it again: From now on the state is going to be held accountable for each trans homicide unless it develops efficient legal sanctions.

We demand:

The culprit of our trans friend’s, Didem’s, vicious homicide should be judged on grounds of basic human rights without appealing to mitigating factors such as “undue provocation” or “good behavior” in the sentence, as was the case with many other trials. The state must promptly make necessary amendments in relevant regulations to implement a
legal definition of hate crimes and count it as an aggravating factor in the judgments. [e-bulten 3, 2011]

This excerpt is taken from an e-bulletin published by Pembe Hayat, a trans majority LGBTQI Solidarity Organization based in Ankara, to widely publicize and increase solidarity around the protests against trans killings in Turkey. The language deployed in this declaration, that is the emphasized role of hate and hate crimes, needs a bit more historical contextualization in addition to the aforementioned political discussions around LGBTQI issues.

The deployment of hate crimes discourse is a recent legal political strategy that emerged in Turkey after a couple of homicides that took place in 2006 and 2007. The first one was a gay journalist, Baki Koşar, who was found stabbed to death in his house, with at least twenty knife cuts. As a result of the police investigation, his murderer was found to be a man whom he met via Internet to have sexual intercourse. The second incident was an assassination of a Turkish-Armenian newspaper editor, Hrant Dink, who published widely to promote peace between the Turkish and Armenian people despite all the threats directed against him by Turkish nationalists. On January 19, 2007, a teenage nationalist shot him to death in the street. His court case lasted for five years until very recently, January 17, 2012. It was a well-known fact that his murder was planned and involved shadow state actors. Despite a five-year-long political campaign around the Hrant case, the real culprits were not judged and his murder was legally announced not as an organized, but an individual crime, leaving thousands of people in Turkey once again in disappointment, despair and frustration about the state’s justice system.

Especially since Hrant Dink’s murder, the issue of hate crimes has emerged in political circles as a legal strategy to protect minorities in Turkey. Within this context, LGBTQI
organizations from different cities also launched a common platform in 2007 to gather reports on violence inflicted on LGBT people to frame it as human rights violations. Since then, reports are released on a yearly basis. This recent platform has set the stage for LGBTQI activists to gain political awareness and educate each other about hate crimes, and to strategize about how they articulate their political demands from the state. However, an examination of both the short history of hate crimes legislation and potent critiques of its underlying logic expose the possible dangers and foreclosures that are intrinsic into mobilizing “hate crime” discourse as a political strategy.

**Critics of Hate Crimes**

Hate crime as a crime category in criminal law first appeared in the early 1980s in the US. In Turkey, political activists against hate crimes unanimously accept the definition provided by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). This definition states that hate crimes are “[a]ny criminal offence, including offences against persons or property, where the victim, premises, or target of the offence are selected because of their real or perceived connection, attachment, affiliation, support, or membership of a group” (Karan 2010:56). In other words, hate crime laws aim at increasing the punishment for crimes propelled by certain hate motives such as religious, sexual and racial.

Several international reports (ECRI 1999, 2001, 2005; AI 2011; HRW 2008) included criticisms for hate speech and hate crimes in Turkey. However, the state response to these criticisms has been quite defensive. In responding reports, the Turkish authorities mentioned that legal regulations already existed to fight against hate speech and hate crimes in Turkey.
Although not formulated as “hate crime,” these laws do still exist. For example, Article 312 of the former Turkish Penal Code defined provoking the people towards animosity and hostility as a crime. Or Article 216 of the current Turkish Penal Code regulates the same act as a crime. However, research based on official statistics shows that these legal regulations, rather than protecting disadvantaged groups, function as a punitive mechanism for them (Karan 2010).

Various critics of hate crimes, whether intellectuals or activists, have voiced similar concerns around hate crime legislations across borders. For instance, New York based Sylvia Rivera Law Project is a collective organization which works for increasing the political voice and visibility of low-income groups and people of color who are transgender, intersex, or gender non-conforming. They have written many articles and letters to demonstrate their opposition to hate crime legislation because of the way the penal code is enforced in general. The penal code always targets marginalized groups in society (i.e. primarily people of color), and the implementation of hate crime laws was no different from the general operation of the penal system in the US context.¹²² Hence, hate crime laws might serve for re-stigmatizing and re-marginalizing certain minority groups rather then bettering their unequal position in society. In a similar vein, widespread references to hate crime laws might end up stigmatizing certain identity groups with occupying a victim position. Citing Gates et. Al, as Ray and Smith (2001:214) point out, with hate crime law, “to be a victim or potential victim [might become] a defining marker of identity.”

Jacobs and Potter’s (2000) work sees hate crime as a marriage between the state and identity politics. They argue that hate crime as a social-legal category should be understood as a

¹²² [http://srlp.org/fedhatecrimelaw](http://srlp.org/fedhatecrimelaw)
resulting category of identity politics, and it would only increase inter-group tensions instead of diminishing them. Moreover, hate crime laws extend the reach of the state by creating a new criminal category, legitimizing state sanctions (Jenness 2001:288).

Another additional critical issue is the strong existence of the risk that specific categories such as race, religion, and sexual orientation that are legally mobilized via hate crime laws might end up accumulating all races, religions and people with different sexual orientations as counterparts of each other by ignoring the existing power differentials among them. So far, as discussed by Jenness (2001: 293), this has, in fact, been the case in U.S. hate crime laws, through which “specific categories of persons (e.g., blacks, Jews, gays and lesbians, Mexicans, etc.) [are translated] into all-encompassing and seemingly neutral categories (e.g., race, religion, sexual orientation, national origin).” Hence, the norm of sameness is put into play, and minority and majority groups are treated the same—that is, as equally carrying the risk of being the target of hate motivated actions. There is no differentiation between marginalized and oppressed groups and groups with social and institutional power before the law.

Last but not least, hate crime laws define the problem predominantly as an individual one without necessarily drawing on wider social and cultural forms of oppression, which underlie individuals’ actions (Kohn 2001). On the contrary, the solution is presented as penalizing the individual. Through hate crimes legislations, the main motivation of the state’s justice system is to seek for the perpetrator to be punished, rather than improve the legal means to help the survivor and the community he/she belongs to recover from this violence. So there is no real effort to prevent similar incidents from happening again. We are left with one of the above-mentioned closures in the sphere of the social via legal means.

Thus, if the category and discourse of hate crime functions as a justice-serving
mechanism, then we should be vigilant in watching how new forms of injustice take place through the workings of this modality. Furthermore, as we have seen, hate crime legislation is a product of various legal calculations that prioritize individual over community, punishment over recovery, uniformity over singularity, and homogeneity over heterogeneity. On top of everything, it cannot translate a wider set of social relations of violence, oppression, and inequality to legal language without foreclosing or diminishing many other possible definitions of justice.

In my concluding remarks, I want to return to Pembe Hayat’s e-bulletin. In that excerpt, one can see that the appeal to the state fashions itself upon calculated legal demands. For example, it demands that the state should provide trans women with basic human rights and should introduce the category of hate crime into criminal law. At one level, Menon (2004) is right: this demand is part of a constant resort to legal calculations and means, which often end up increasing state control over people’s lives via new legislation. Yet in this excerpt one can also see that there is more than legal calculation and demand. The excerpt refers to a kind of justice that is beyond the sphere of law and is instead about everyday life. LGBTQI people pose a crucially significant question: “When will we be able to peacefully reside in our houses and walk on the streets without feeling the threat of being lynched, attacked, harassed and raped?” This question is an appeal to render the extraordinary very ordinary. It is about developing a capacity for an ethical, social and political relationship with the other that leaves no space for discrimination, exclusion, violence or hatred. Or to put it another way, it suggests that justice is deeply related to the continuous effort of constructing a life and giving it definition, a definition which never concludes, but instead keeps reproducing itself anew by incorporating past, present and future material, symbolic and emotional resources. In that sense, no matter how many legal calculations are made, justice is always yet-to-come (Derrida 1992); it is always deferred and it
is always excessive since it demands a singular judgment for each encounter, interaction or relation with a person in each moment. That is why it can never be captured within legal formulations.

So what do trans people actually do to attain their just claims to an ordinary life? As they go on the streets and call on the state to respond to their human rights, what else do they do to survive and maintain their lives and relations with one another? Violence in the form of death, hate crimes, casualties, injuries and destruction should not prevent us from seeing its constructive force, its role in making new worlds, creating new lives and transforming subjectivities. The everydayness of violence in manifold forms conditions the formation of quotidian, mundane or ordinary intimacies in trans people’s lives.

The LGBTQI community in general and trans people in particular develop their own ethic of caring, belonging and bonding that are being constantly shaped, contested and negotiated in the face of everyday forms of violence. This ethic of caring is rooted in their speech and action, i.e. in the “ways of speaking” and the “kinds of acts and manners of acting” that take place within the domain of the “ordinary” (Lambek 2010:2). One ethical form of relationship demonstrates itself in the discursive and practical transformation of their friendships into familial ties, yet by changing and deconstructing, or in other words, queering it. The conditions of this ethical, affective and intimate domain are not formed only by the violent deeds of the so-far mentioned institutional and non-institutional actors, but also by trans people’s natal family members who have abandoned and disowned their LGBTQI children. The next chapter, detailing trans people’s stories of damaged natal familial ties, explores their investments into the queer family form not only as an intimate survival strategy and a coping mechanism with violence in their everyday lives, but also as an “affective exercise of creative practice in order to live
differently” (Dave 2012:8) in a violent world saturated with manifold normativities.
Shoes were lined next to one another on the floor, ranging in colors: red, blue, brown, black and yellow. There were approximately ten pairs. Some of them were worn out, some looked in good shape. All were high-heels, either sandals or dress shoes. When Esra poked me in the arm, I was abruptly roused from staring at them. She humorously said: “Which one did you like the most? Just have it!” I smiled and made a face, showing a lack of interest in any of them. While I was gazing upon these shoes, left behind by Sibel, I was less trying to decide on the best pair for myself than ruminating on someone who had recently passed away, and her life those shoes carried in them. I was caught up in that very moment, thinking of Sibel whom I had not met even for a brief moment when she was alive. Shoes that once belonged to her were now sitting on the floor of Istanbul LGBTT waiting to embrace new feet, and walk with different bodies. This had been the traditional practice: when a trans woman died, her trans friends would collect objects and belongings from her house and exhibit them for people to pick according to their need. This redistribution of resources—or the gift economy of the dead—frequently took place within their network of friendship. So it felt strange to be offered a pair of shoes, even though I know that Esra was, in fact, teasing me.
I felt even more awkward when I thought of my presence at Sibel’s funeral the day before. The gacı had invited me to attend the funeral. I was invited despite not being acquainted with Sibel, nor was the invite for research: the purpose was to organize a well-attended funeral. After all, it was important to make a strong appearance at a trans woman’s funeral in order to meet communal, political and emotional responsibilities, which will be detailed in this chapter.

Trans women’s funerals provide them with one of the most significant arenas to bond with each other, or to strengthen already existing bonds. Behind this bonding lies the fact that many trans women were abandoned and disowned by their parents and other natal family members. By the time I attended Sibel’s funeral, I had collected numerous stories of abandonment of trans people by their blood families. This abandonment had shown itself not only when trans people were alive, but also when they died. Disavowal of a deceased trans body and refusal to organize funerals or practice rituals of death were prevalent among the biological family members of trans people. In such past occurrences, the trans people had often taken the initiative, re-claimed the body and organized the funeral, replacing the functional and emotional role of the family and announcing their network of friendships as the “real” family. This was also the case with Sibel’s funeral, which will be described later in this chapter. At the moment, I wish to underscore that the issue of death has been a sore spot that queer people have loudly spoken about, regarding their relations with their biological families. Such stories by either trans or other openly queer people are so numerous, and they frequently instruct each other of their desire to be buried by their queer, or in another term that use, by their gerçek ailes (real families).

As will be shown in this chapter, death, funerals and other intimate spheres in trans people’s lives become a space for developing alternative kinship ties and intimate links with one another. I will explore these intimacies and trans women’s accounts of characterizing their trans
friendships as their “real family,” and complicate their investments in this “real” family as an intimate survival strategy to cope with everyday familial violence of abandonment and disowning. By drawing on several communal practices among trans women, I discuss family as one of the most contested intimate sites in trans people’s lives, which gains specific meanings through queer alignments that are not based on biological ties. It is a constant process of shaping, contesting and negotiating queer ethics of caring, belonging and bonding. These contestations and negotiations, however, are strongly shaped within the intersection of legal regulations, institutional practices and dominant values and norms about the Turkish family structure. Hence, I also scrutinize the role of the state as the mediator and authorizer of particular forms of intimacies between trans people, their natal families and other social actors.

While exploring all this, I also seek answers for the following questions: How do trans people make use of the concept of family in their struggle and/or resilience against everyday violence of exclusion, abandonment, displacement and police abuse? How does this everyday struggle and/or resilience shape their understanding of friendship? What does it mean to think about the family as an alternative community? Does it remain, even in queer settings, a site for producing certain normativities? Or can we talk about new emergences or creations of crossings between the family as a form and other forms of relating, belonging and caring? Does that necessarily mean the foreclosure of other alliances and coalitions, or can we think about the family as a form, which enables and produces particular intimacies, bonds and cares that would otherwise go invisible and be silenced?
Revisiting the Turkish Family Structure and Morality

As Christopher Lasch (1976) has indicated long ago, the family is presumed to be “a haven in a heartless world.” Lasch’s work has been pioneering in showing that the universal formulation of the family as an emotionally isolated private space is, in fact, an illusion. How families are lived is strictly tied to other domains of social life, placing them within a broader set of practices and ideologies. Thanks to the early feminist and anthropological work (Chodorow 1978; Fineman 1995; Collier et al. 1982; Peters 1965; Firth 1965), we now know that the family is a product of social, cultural and economic circumstances that are crosscut by class, gender, ethnicity, and race within a particular historical context.

In Chapter 2, I detailed the historical, cultural and social characteristics of the dominant family model in contemporary Turkey, a nuclear family model that is based on heterosexual marriage between consenting adults. Remember that from the beginning of the modernization projects of the early Republic to the AKP’s contemporary neo-liberal policies and regulations, a life oriented around familial norms has been a long-term state project for legal regulations, and sexuality has always played a crucial role in the legal promotions of a social life based on family. Family as a site for reproduction of gender and sexual inequality has been secured by institutional practices and regulations.

States have always had keen interests in the organization and production of family life by infusing the family with detailed legal regulations. States have also always functioned with gendering and sexing logics, standing for one of the most potent sources of gender inequality within families (Das 1995; Das 1996; Rajan 2003). As previously discussed, the Turkish state is not free of such logics, and has a long tradition of using law as a mechanism to regulate women’s sexuality and effectively attaching them to the demands of family, men and the state.
In the hands of the state, family has always been an ideological issue, the dominant design of which is always meant to exclude certain members of the society. States, by using law, have always heavily shaped families and effectively used ideological apparatuses to promote the ideal family form, together with the ideal roles for family members. We can, for example, straightaway name a few of these regulations: who can marry whom, who can be a parent, who can adopt a child, who can divorce and on what terms, and who has inheritance rights are the first examples to come to mind. In Turkey, too, the state clearly demarcates such regulations. Consider the obligatory sterilization law for trans people going through sex reassignment process (Chapter 5). This law guarantees that Turkish transsexual citizens are deprived of reproductive capacities and are thus unable to play one of the most significant dominant roles in family life, that of reproductive subjects. Moreover, same-sex marriage is not legally allowed.

In Turkey, the emphasis of state policies and programs on “the Turkish family structure and morality” has always led to the values and practices of family-making and “the proper family life” to have strong currency in social life. The AKP government’s policies and regulations have just strengthened their effects and pressure in everyday life. Currently, those lives outside the normative family structure are recognized less, and hence, they deserve fewer shares from the state resources such as legal and financial protection. That is to say, the state uses dominant notions of family as an ideology to exclude certain members of society. Official discourse, while privileging the discourse of family, denies recognition to other people unless they represent themselves in the normative familial terms. To repeat it once again, this normative family has a particular content: it is heterosexual, reproductive and based on economies of care not only for the nuclear family, but also for extended family members. Both children and parents have debts towards each other, and they altogether as citizens have debts towards the state through their social reproduction. The Turkish meanings of social reproduction are strongly
produced and mediated through familial, as well as kinship relations and terms. As will be clear later in this chapter, this family structure has strong effects on trans people’s lives and forecloses various intimate possibilities for them. The next section scrutinizes this issue of debt by demarcating its affective and intimate conditions.

**Inheriting the Affective Debt**

One of the most popular definitions of the family conceptualizes it as a domain formed by ties of love and affection. Emotional work such as love, affection, care, interconnectedness and demands are considered to compose the alleged nature of the family. However, contemporary anthropological works contest the so-called understanding of familial emotions as being natural (Brown 2009; Ahmed 2006; Berlant 1997; Scheper-Hughes 1992). Likewise, it is also a well-known fact that for many people the family constitutes a source of coercion and tension. In the most extreme cases, the family begets various forms of violence from domestic violence to honour killing. Or it structures myriad forms of quarrels and disavowals of its own members, as has been the case with many of my trans informants’ relations with their blood families. Hence, the production of intimacy between family members is frequently coupled with strict rules of producing, ordering and regulating particular lives, bodies and desires. The family, with all its emotional, material and symbolical work, draws borders between different lives, bodies and desires in terms of inclusion and exclusion, or membership and non-membership. Most families necessitate the internalization of these norms by its members. In other words, dominant understandings of family as a hetero-reproductive unit also imbue it with certain affective or emotional orientations and norms around inheritance.
When Ahmed (2006) talks about queer lives and desires within existing dominant hetero-reproductive family structures, she astutely argues that to be a family member demands one to follow the family line, that is, the naturalization of heterosexuality as a line that directs bodies to desire the body of the opposite sex. Inheritance of this family line is also the condition of family love. To articulate her point more elaborately, Ahmed resorts to Marcel Mauss’s concept of gift, which is comprehended as “voluntary” in its face value but, which, in fact, is “given and received under obligation” (Mauss 1969:1; cited in Ahmed 2006:86). Linking the gift to sexuality, she analyzes heterosexuality as a gift given to children by their families, a gift that becomes an inheritance:

Heterosexuality is imagined as the future of the child insofar as heterosexuality is idealized as a social gift and even as the gift of life itself . . . Heterosexuality becomes a social as well as familial inheritance through the endless requirement that the child repay the debt of life with its life. The child who refuses the gift thus becomes seen as a bad debt, as being ungrateful, as the origin of bad feeling [2006:86].

Hence, when a child fails to inherit a desire and orientation for a hetero-reproductive future, she/he risks the affective capital provided by the family. Of course, what could also be lost is the material support and resources that the family provides. But what I try to underline here is how the presumed nature of emotions and affective ties that supposedly form the family are rigidly linked to the satisfaction of particular sexual, social and cultural conditions. Among these conditions, there lies not only sexual orientation, but also sexual identity. In other words, most families require their children to inherit and integrate not only heterosexual desire, but also the body at birth into the construction of their selves so as to be recognized as those families’ respectful members. The family continues to love and care for their children as long as
heterosexual desire and “proper” production and preservation of the body are satisfied. When children exercise “negative agency” (Wardlow 2006)—that is to say, when they refuse to make their bodies part of the dominant social and intimate projects produced, imagined and pressed upon by their families in particular and the society in general—their “negative agency” might be met by another form of “negative agency” exercised by their families through the refusal to practice certain familial obligations and sustain affective ties.

Trans people’s stories of abandonment and disowning by their biological families in Turkey provide substantial ethnographic data to support some of these claims. For instance, trans women’s experiences with disease, death and funeral ceremonies are charged moments that demonstrate how family love and care are strongly tied to the construction and continuation of “properly” sexed and gendered bodies (i.e. bodies that fit in the existing heteronormative familial order). The continuous reproduction of these “properly” sexed and gendered bodies can be understood as a debt towards the heteronormative family. During my fieldwork, many trans women stated that parents commonly disavow the deceased body of their trans child by refusing to organize funerals or practice rituals of death that are mainly practiced by the deceased person’s relatives as an essential cultural duty. This cultural duty is considered one of the many obligations that families have towards their children, obligations that also include emotional care and financial provision until the child reaches a certain age in their adulthood. These obligations, however, are conditioned by children’s debts towards their parents: unless the child

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123 Even though a person in Turkey is legally considered an adult when she/he reaches 18, the cultural and social definitions of adulthood in Turkey are contested and greatly vary across gender and class differences. For example, popularly, children of middle to upper class families might still enjoy their families’ financial protection until they establish themselves as standing on their own feet. On the other hand, children of poor or underclass families might find themselves as bearing adult responsibilities (i.e. working and earning money) at an early age. Moreover, women might not be treated as adults enough until they marry to men, and even in some cases, until they give birth to their first child.
follows, in Ahmed’s terms, the family line, the family might stop paying their debt to their child, as is the case with the abandonment and disowning of trans children and their death.

**Stories of Trans People with Blood Families**

“My name doesn’t matter at all. We buried our names that were given by our families together with our parents. We make men call us whatever name we desire. Sometimes when we get drunk, we even forget those names.” These sentences passed Gizem’s lips, a trans woman of 35 and a sex worker. Each trans person I met during my fieldwork had a second name, which they decided to take either after they “came out of the closet” or when they started to work as a sex worker. In some cases, these chosen names have become their primary and real name, symbolically erasing the life associated with the name previously given to them. For some, naming anew is also part of their sexual “rite of passage” (Gennep 1961), through which they progress into “new” sexual lives. Most of them had difficulty opening up a space for their lives within their existing blood family domain. Hence, they either had to leave the family home or they were kicked out.

For the blood families of many trans people, it is almost impossible to accept not only queer lives, but also queer deaths. For example, the blood family’s disavowal of the deceased trans body and their refusal to organize funeral rites is a common frame of reference trans women use to talk about their razed relationships with their blood families. I remember being terrified when I first heard the story of a dead trans woman who was disowned by her blood family, and buried in cemetery for the anonymous at their request.

The precarious condition of the trans body and/or trans life, in the Butlerian sense, renders these lives “not quite lives” and casts them as “ungrievable.” These lives can be “‘lose-able,’ or
can be forfeited, precisely because they are framed as being already lost or forfeited; they are
cast as threats to human life as we know it rather than as living populations in need of protection
from illegitimate state violence and [social discrimination and exclusion]” (Butler 2011:383).
Numerous trans women told me that they were already symbolically and socially dead to their
natal families, even when they were alive. The day they came out to their parents, they were seen
as dead and lost just because they countered the proper production of an imposed
heteronormative life and body along dominant notions of a family form. Consequently, when
they actually die they are not grievable at all, and their biological families do not claim their
deceased bodies. On those occasions, rituals of death and funerals were re-claimed and practiced
by the deceased person’s trans friends, or as some say, her/his queer family.

However, there might be instances when the natal family doesn’t even allow their child’s
trans friends to organize the funeral. For example, for the above-mentioned trans woman who
was buried in cemetery for the anonymous, her trans friends had raised funds to buy a grave and
bury her at a regular cemetery. Nevertheless, their attempts to facilitate a funeral for their friend
were met with rebuffs by the blood family. The biological family had insisted on her burial
among anonymous people, and enforced their ultimate negation. That was the ultimate negation
of blood, in other words, all intimate bonds that were made possible through the meanings
attached to blood.

This negation could not be possible unless the state recognized the blood family as the
only inheritor of and intimate actor upon the trans person. In the absence of a will, the biological
family is the only actor to inherit the property that is left behind by the deceased. So trans
women told stories about some biological families who did not hesitate to deny funeral rights to
their trans children but, at the same time, claimed their wealth without question. Without using
the state-given, legally recognized intimate authority to their trans child’s body, the family would have no right to produce the ultimate verdict about the child’s dead body, nullifying all alternate existing intimate bonds and claims that are established between the deceased and her friends. Hence, the family’s negation in the above incident was not just an act that broke the ties merely between the blood family and the trans child; it was also destructive of other available intimate links, denying the trans subject a burial ceremony organized by her trans friends. Negation of intimacy was made possible by the state’s inscription of intimacy as a family asset bound by blood, and assignment of the blood family members as the only legal intimate actors to have right over the trans person’s body. As the incident demonstrates, this legal form of intimacy can become deadly, capable of killing the person even further or beyond her/his physical death. The biological family, as it is recognized by the state, can be one of the most deadly models of intimacy.

To announce a person’s body anonymous (or homeless) might lead to its delivery to medical schools for use as an experimental cadaver, especially in big cities like Istanbul. Ceyda, a trans woman of 45 whose ties with her biological family have long been destroyed, mentioned several times that she would donate her corpse as a cadaver to be used in anatomy courses at medical schools. As she said, there would be no problem with such a donation because she had no family member who would contest her will and claim the body to organize a funeral ceremony. When she saw me hanging on her every word, she started to give a detailed visual account of her future dead body. After the donation, she imagined her body floating in the pool of dead [ölü havuzu], a pool which was located in the basement of Cerrahpaşa Medical School in Istanbul and filled with a solution of chemicals to preserve dead bodies for long-term use as cadavers. I was shocked to learn of the existence of a pool full of floating dead bodies. Then she told me those bodies belong primarily to mentally sick or homeless people. Later, I discovered
more detailed information and an analysis of this arrangement between the Council of Forensic Medicine and the Medical Schools in Aslıhan Sanal’s ethnography *New Organs Within Us* (2011), a work mainly about organ transplantation in Turkey. In one section of her work, Sanal explores how mentally ill people have been denied full personhood and rights over their own bodies since the early years of the republic because they were dependent on others and did not have mental health. When they died, they were deemed homeless unless a relative claimed them or the anatomy lab demanded them (2011:121). In that case, they were buried in the cemetery for the anonymous *[kimsesizler mezarlığı]*. With the recent release of a circular by the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors in October 2011, the Council of Forensic Medicine linked the bodies that fall under the category of homeless to cadaver regulations even more stringently. According to this procedural change, the Council of Forensic Medicine has decided to deliver to medical school those bodies not claimed by family members within fifteen days succeeding death, placing these cases under the category of anonymous.\(^\text{124}\)

Some people request that upon death their bodies be donated to medical schools for anatomical use and dissection. Yet such cases are few in number, and, moreover, even when a person donates her/his body, most of the time the donor’s family members are reluctant to fulfill the donor’s will upon her/his death. The natal family has the last word and right over the dead body of their kin. Hence, some medical schools had to return the corpses to families, which insisted on organizing a burial for the deceased.\(^\text{125}\) In this context, it is significant to delineate the body of the dead as a social body that has been (re)produced and shaped within the relations


of kinship and family. The burial rituals represent the last obligations to the deceased, but also a social obligation for the family to present itself as a family to the society in general.

I think Ceyda, while talking about her yet-to-die body, was playing with these two accounts of dead bodies behind the cadaver regulations: unless she donated her body, there was already a chance of her being regarded as anonymous, thus, donated to medical schools since there was no blood family member to claim her body. Likewise, when she donated her body, there was again no “legitimate” intimate actor to contest her will and take her body back. According to Ceyda, the state might or might not recognize the years-long relations that have been developed between her and her trans friends. If they did not recognize this relationship, the state would claim the body as its own and decline to return the body to Ceyda’s trans friends for a funeral. Moreover, she was also not sure if her trans friends would be able to mobilize enough people and raise funds to buy a grave from a regular cemetery, because those spots were extremely expensive. So in her mind, she had already comforted herself by donating her body as a cadaver to medical students. She said, “at least my body could contribute to something scientific.” Astonishingly, Ceyda’s words can be interpreted as another instance of the medico-legal intimacies of the state. Yet again trans people may end up entrusting their bodies to the hands of the medical establishment unless they have legitimate intimate actors to claim them. The same medical establishment that enables trans people to transform their bodies to match their felt sexual identities, then ‘takes these bodies back’ at death. The anonymous or disowned body returns to the state—another aspect of the gift economy of death.

On the other hand, there are trans people who had broken their ties with their biological families, but then had a chance to repair them to some degree. Melis, for instance, is one of them. One day, as we were chatting about her family, she told me her family didn’t contact her for a
long time. They accepted her after years of contempt. She repeated her family’s words to me: “We know what you are. We know that you are homosexual. We accept you as you are but Iskenderun [her hometown, a Southern city] would never welcome you. You would bring disgrace on us. Our society, our social environment wouldn’t accept you.” Her family moved to Hatay, the neighbouring city to her hometown, Iskenderun. Nobody in that town knew that Melis was a trans woman. Whenever she went to visit them in Hatay, she said, her family immediately picked her up from the terminal and quickly put her in the car so that nobody would see them.

Then a sad expression sat on her face for a few seconds, and she told me that her mum had to move between different cities three times because of her. In the end, they bought a house by the sea mainly with Melis’s money. They started to go there together. Her family introduced her to their neighbours and friends as their former neighbour from Istanbul, who was visiting them. Or at other times, she was introduced as a relative from Germany. She said, “My family says, this is ‘my bro’s daughter’,” and she added happily, “They never address me as a son, but a daughter.” Despite all this hardship, she was proud of gaining the recognition of her natal family.

Later on during our conversation, she admitted that her reconnection with her blood family was made possible due to her financial gains. Once she disclosed the amount of money she made through sex work, her family forgot about past tensions and disputes, and decided to continue their familial relationship upon the condition that she would not visit them frequently and she would buy a house distant from their neighbours’ gaze. This is the above-mentioned house. She also alleged that her brothers have gone on a pilgrimage to Mecca—thus fulfilling one of the five pillars of Islam—with her financial support. I was told of similar cases in which trans members, disowned by their natal families, sent money to them with the hope that money would resolve all these conflicts sometime in the future. These families assented to remittances as long as their trans children did not visit them in their hometowns. I came across similar
findings in the ethnographic studies of other scholars. The families of male *jotas* in Mexico (Prieur 2007) and *toms* in Thailand (Sinnott 2004) tend to become more tolerant and supportive once their gender nonconforming children start earning money and make a financial contribution to the natal family budget.

With some families in Turkey, money loses its importance and trans women have invented new strategies to keep the emotional bond, particularly with their mothers. Yelda, for instance, is a very good looking trans women at the age of 47. Among my trans interlocutors, she was one of the most invested in a stereotypical feminine look, wearing high heels, mini-skirts and heavy make-up. The only way she could maintain her ties with her biological family was by impersonating her previous manly appearance every time she visited her mother. She would change into a man’s outfit, wear a cap to hide her hair, remove make-up and draw thicker eyebrows and something reminiscent of a moustache on her face. She told me that this was the only way to keep her bond with her mother.

Although some trans women succeed in maintaining their relations with their natal family members (though mainly thanks to monetary transactions), the majority of my informants had severed connections to their blood families. In response to their conditions of life shaped by abandonment and disowning, trans people constantly negotiate and contest the family as a form, as well as its gifts and debts, and invest in their friendships as their “real families.” In the next section, I provide an ethnographic account of Sibel’s funeral to portray one of the many occasions within which abandonment, gift, debt, family and trans friendships weave into one another to produce an intimate possibility in trans lives.
In Death We Bond

It was a bright sunny day in May. I reached the mosque for Sibel’s funeral at around noon. There was already a big crowd of trans women gathered in the narrow street surrounding the mosque in Kumbaracı Yokuşu in Cihangir. Some trans women followed the Islamic tradition and came to the funeral with headscarves, while others were bareheaded. They were scattered on the street, as well as sitting in the teahouse next to the mosque. Random people passed by, directing curious gazes at this crowd, surprised to see many trans women in front of a mosque. Out of many possibilities, the combination of a mosque and trans women would perhaps represent the least thinkable one in the popular imagination. For many, a trans woman represents a “pervert” by denying the Allah-given body and converting it to that of the opposite sex. The popular interpretation of Islam in social and cultural life in Turkey commands that people’s bodies—both body surfaces and internal organs—come from and belong to Allah. In that sense, the body is Allah’s emanet to humans, that is, Allah entrusts it to humans for their life course, and hence, humans are responsible for taking good care of their bodies until returning them back to Allah upon their death. That is why a significant dimension of religious bodywork includes keeping it clean by avoiding certain substances that are considered polluting, such as blood, urine, faeces, semen, etc. Contact with any of these unclean things necessitates ritual washing. Ritual washing is also required at those moments when Muslims prepare to appear before Allah to do their prayers. The body before Allah should be as clean and pure as possible and reflect how it is held.

126 Despite its various interpretations, to be present at the funeral ceremony with a headscarf is a dominant religious practice among Muslim women. Even women who do not wear a headscarf in their everyday life, usually attend funerals with their headscarves.

127 There are multiple doctrines of Islam in Turkey including Shi’ism, Sunnism, Sufism and Yazdanism. Here I use the phrase “popular interpretation of Islam” to point to the most prevalent denomination in Turkish social life, Sunni Islam, and the discrepancy between popular and scholarly interpretations of its theology. In this context, I refer to the publicly acclaimed or dominant understanding of Islam as synonymous with Sunnism.
in trust. In short, one can never posses the body; on the contrary, one’s religious relation to “her/his” body is always mediated through dispossession and an obligation to return it to Allah as pristine as its form at birth. Hence, to see trans women at a mosque, or so to speak, to see people, who have challenged Allah’s ascription of sex and configuration of the body, invokes puzzlement on part of the people who believe in popular interpretations of Islam.

Everybody was waiting for the obsequies to start right after the noon call-for-prayer. Subsequent to the regular prayer, the funeral prayer was to be performed. As Islam is practiced in Turkey, only men perform the funeral prayer in the mosque, while women wait for its completion in the family home of the deceased, or outside the mosque. In Sibel’s case, the family home was a complicated issue for reasons that will soon be made clear. Hence, her friends, or in the terms of many trans people, her real kith, kin or family, clustered on the street.

My eyes searched the crowd for the people I knew. Then I saw Ceyda sitting on the teahouse patio with her friends. Ceyda had just arrived from the lustration of Sibel’s corpse. Washing the dead body is another religious ritual to make sure that the body is returned to Allah in the most possible clean and pure form. That is why the dead body is meticulously washed, cleaned and enveloped in a white shroud in the mosque, and then placed in a coffin prior to burial. The deceased’s family members are responsible for this ritual. This way, they also pay their last respects to the deceased before the funeral. However, according to Ceyda, the funerals of many trans women lacked such respects normally paid by the family. For example, she recalled how many times she had to wash, clean and wrap the dead bodies of her trans friends in cerement since many families had completely abandoned their trans children and did not want to touch their bodies. Washing and cleaning the body of the deceased takes place when the body is believed to be capable of being cleansed. Yet the biological family’s refusal to wash the trans
body demonstrates an understanding of cleanliness in a spiritual sense, which trans people are believed to lack, thus being symbolically marked as “polluted” beyond any cleanable capacity. Hence, some immediate family members refuse to touch their child’s trans body so as not to be polluted themselves.

Sibel’s case was no different. Sibel, a close friend to many trans women in Istanbul LGBTT, had a cerebral haemorrhage a few days prior, while she was soliciting at night. After her immediate hospitalization, gacıs from Istanbul LGBTT started to visit and care for her, taking turns to do so. They were the ones to inform her biological family about her situation, though the biological family paid little attention to Sibel as she stayed in the hospital. In fact, it was Sibel’s trans friends, not her immediate family members, who visited her in the hospital most often, and cared for her during her stay. They were the ones who were in continuous contact with the doctors and nurses, and it was they who took responsibility for the bureaucratic procedures related to Sibel’s hospitalization.

By that time, I had already spent a lot of time with gacıs in Istanbul LGBTT, but unfortunately I had never met Sibel since she never visited the center. But her name had regularly been a point of reference in conversations, especially during her stay at the hospital. Gacıs complained about Sibel’s family not taking care of her even during her last days. The only relative to visit Sibel was her sister, who had visited only once. She had told the gacıs that she would not visit Sibel again. Sibel had lost consciousness immediately after the incident. In the following days, there was no sign of healing and her friends had lost hope that she would recover. After a few days, Sibel passed away.

With Sibel’s death, the main question had become how to—and who should—organize the funeral rituals and material resources for the burial. The trouble was not only the
aforementioned lavation practice, but also to find a mosque to arrange the ceremony, as well as to purchase a gravesite in the cemetery. Ceyda, when she talked about the lustration of Sibel’s body, told me how it had been difficult to find a mosque to do the funeral and prayers for Sibel since most of the imams rejected organizing a ceremony once they discovered the deceased was a trans woman. Those imams had either refused to do the prayers right away or consented to do it as long as Sibel was referred to as a male during the prayers. Of course, Sibel’s friends didn’t accept the latter option. At last they found a mosque located in Cihangir. Remember from Chapter 3 that this neighbourhood had long been used to trans women’s presence, sex work and nightlife, until their violent displacement. However, there were still some trans women residing in this neighbourhood.

After hearing this story of rejection by several imams, I decided to pay attention to how Sibel would be addressed in the prayers; in other words, whether as merhume or merhum, which would link her, respectively, to a female or male sex. However, I did not need to wait for the imam’s prayers to figure this out: I saw the coffin, which was covered in a green pall with a headscarf placed on the side where the person’s head would rest. In Turkish Muslim funerals, a headscarf is placed on the side of the coffin over the location of the head if the deceased is a female. So the imam of this mosque had recognized Sibel as a female.128

Meanwhile, we kept sitting and talking until the regular noon prayers were over. I could see that many people were meeting with each other after a long period of separation. Sibel’s death was not the only topic of conversation; people were trying to catch up and reconnect with each other. There was a moment when someone asked if anyone from Sibel’s blood family was

128 See Figure 7.1 for an alternative situation regarding the imam’s prayer.
present at the funeral. In response to this query, one of the two non-trans women sitting beside our table introduced herself as Sibel’s sister. She was the sister who had refused to visit Sibel in the hospital after visiting only once. She said that their mother was with her as well.

As Ceyda and I walked towards the mosque gate, we saw Sibel’s mother sitting in a chair in front of the mosque and accepting people’s condolences. Sibel’s mother, her sister and I were the only non-trans women in the funeral. I offered my condolences, along with other people. Sibel’s mother and sister were wearing headscarves and sunglasses, covering their faces as much as possible. I wondered whether it was to cover their sorrow and crying faces from the public, or to hide their transphobic fear or shame because they were among many trans women and did not want to be seen with them by outsiders.

At that point, I saw Esra approaching me with a camera in her hands. She asked me to record the funeral scene. The funeral meant a lot for all of them since it was one of the few occasions that trans women could get together and learn how they had been doing since the last time they saw each other. It was also an important political register of the Istanbul LGBTT because the gaciss had made a lot of phone calls to mobilize trans people for the funeral. I took the camera and started shooting. I cannot say I was really willing to record the funeral, due to the fact that my presence with a camera put me in an even more alienating situation. I was worried that I would make people feel uncomfortable, and I could see in their eyes that they were a bit suspicious of what an unknown non-trans woman was doing with recording faces, especially at a funeral. So on several occasions I needed to call Esra’s name to ask some irrelevant questions regarding the recording so that I could give other trans women the message that Esra had asked me to shoot the footage.
When Sibel’s mother and sister saw me with the camera, they reacted and asked me not to shoot them as part of the footage. I said OK, and after a while, with great relief, I handed the camera to Esra.

I could hear people speaking about Sibel. I started to talk with another trans woman who came from Eskisehir, a Middle West city, just for the funeral. She was not the only person who traveled to Istanbul for the funeral, but there were many others who had lived in Istanbul before and made friends with Sibel. Everyone, one way or another, was pronouncing the word “death” as a strongly expected possibility and an ultimate reality. But the emphasis on death was not in natural terms, which would eventually catch everyone. Rather it was a reference point for a so-called “ordinary” everyday life, which was actually embedded in extraordinary conditions that are shaped by many forms of constant violence. In other words, most people at the funeral were haunted by the possibility of hate murder since they had already lost many friends to this hatred. In a way, they found Sibel lucky for having a cerebral hemorrhage and not going through such torture. One trans woman, for instance, told me how she had to collect five friends’ dead bodies from the street on the same night a few years back. However, I was still amazed by how they talked about death in a highly normalized way, as something banal and something that could happen suddenly, anytime. They knew they were taking a risk and working under the constant threat of dying.

While we were having such an intense conversation about death, the time for the prayer arrived. After the men’s prayers in the mosque, it was time for everyone to assemble around the coffin and behind the imam on the street. I remember seeing only one man, Sibel’s sister’s husband. It occurred to me at that moment that Sibel, as a sex worker, had a life with hundreds of men, and now there was no single man present at her funeral other than her sister’s husband.
How would it feel for her if she could see this picture? As I was immersed in such thoughts, the imam said the usual prayers and asked for people’s helal. To ask for people’s helal for the deceased person is one of the routines of Muslim funerals. It is for the attendees to give blessings to the dead person, and is the last chance to forgive the deceased for misdeeds before the burial. When sending someone off to the graveyard (i.e. in Islam, a passage to the other world), it is rare that somebody denies their blessings to the deceased, and usually everybody loudly and collectively accepts to give their blessings when they are asked by the imam. Sibel’s prayers took perhaps twenty minutes and everybody in the crowd gave their blessings. Then people divided into groups to get in their friends’ cars for the drive to the burial site. Since the cemetery was at the outskirts of Istanbul, it was not an easy job to reach it unless you had a car. There were not many vehicles available, so I decided not to go in order to leave a spot for another trans woman. We decided to meet after the burial at Istanbul LGBTT to eat helva, another ritual for the dead.

Traditionally, halva of the dead [ölü helvası] is a dessert prepared with flour, sugar and butter, and cooked and served by the deceased person’s family for the participants of the funeral following the interment. As people eat helva, they also talk about the departed and remember her/him. For Sibel’s funeral ceremony, one of the trans women was assigned the role of cooking sufficient portions of helva and bringing it to the center before others arrived from the cemetery. This meeting was scheduled for 6p.m. When I went to the center, everybody was already back. I had not seen the center so jam-packed before. No one from Sibel’s blood family was present. As people started to talk about the burial, I learned that neither the mother nor the sister went to the cemetery for the interment. They left for their home after departing from the mosque. Esra told me later that the mother and sister asked her to tell other trans women not to come to visit them in their houses to present their condolences. They would not welcome them inside the house. I also found out that the grave was bought with the money pooled by trans women and Sibel’s
blood family contributed nothing. As Ceyda told me, this was not the first time they pooled their resources and bought a spot for a deceased friend in the graveyard; they did the same thing for many other transwomen who had died and been disowned by their blood families. And she said, “What did you expect? When I die, they gonna do the same thing. After all, we are each other’s family! We are the family!”

Sibel’s funeral partly explains what family generally means for trans women and how they contest it to survive their disowning and abandonment by their natal families. In other words, it shows how trans women deploy the family as a form but strategically re-work and re-make it through queer alignments other than biological ties. In this way, particular intimacies, bonds and care that would otherwise remain invisible or be silenced are enabled and produced, intimacies. Yet one should be attentive to not taking the queer family or living up to certain codes of family as a constant point of reference in trans people’s lives. Rather the emphasis on “real family,” or what I analytically call queer family-making and bonding, becomes stronger in those violent moments of everyday life when trans people face exclusion, displacement, and abandonment. While discussing family and death in the lives of lesbians in India, Naisargi Dave (2014:170) notes, “queer family is built of loss, necessitated by deaths both figurative and literal,” but such queer family also enables an intimate space of friendship to flourish. In the next section, I further explain my use of the queer family concept and discuss why it is analytically useful to understand the intimate and ethical dynamics of trans friendships.

The Queer Family: A Site for Intimate Failures or Potentials?

Queer studies have contributed a great deal to the understandings of kinship and family (Lewin
1993, 2009), and some of them have promoted alternate models of family. Weston’s book, *Families We Choose* (1991), characterizes the pioneering work within those studies by providing a detailed ethnographic description of gay men and lesbians in the San Francisco Bay Area, who constructed “chosen” families as a substitute for blood bonds by deploying their own notions of kinship.

In her book, Weston (1991:38) emphasizes the role of agency in constructing chosen families in comparison to the absence of agency in biological families, which bolsters the sense of blood as an indisputable fact in linking people to one another as kin. According to her informants, blood family represents only one possible type of kinship and there are other ways to form kinship. She presents a generous account of gay and lesbian people’s investments choosing their family members by drawing on “symbolic demonstrations of love, shared history, material or emotional assistance, and other signs of enduring solidarity” (109).

The queer family that my trans informants talk about is close to Weston’s definition of the families we choose. The meanings that are attributed to the queer family, and how it is referred to and experienced among trans people, demonstrates an opening of a space within which trans people (especially trans women) invent new intimate strategies or manipulate the existing ones to cope with the violence in their everyday lives.

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129 When Weston talks about the verb “to choose,” she also problematizes it for its connotations of individualized and bourgeois notions of freedom and will, and points out the role of circumstance in shaping and making particular choices available (1991:111). In a more recent work, she furthers the critique of “choosing” as follows: “The very language of chosen families employs a predictable, pervasive cultural rhetoric of voluntarism that draws on individualized notions of freedom and will. Kinship may be constructed, but that does not make it a blank slate on which actors—be they transgender, gay, bisexual, or straight—can write whatever they please” (2005:132).
Figure 7.1 An imam and a few men practicing the burial prayers for a trans woman who died of AIDS in Antalya, a southern city in Turkey, in 2013. Her body was kept in the morgue for two days but none of her family members claimed the body. After two days, her trans friends took her body from the morgue and organized the funeral. The newspaper heading states, in his prayers, the imam addressed her as a man, not a woman. (Milliyet, 04 April 2013)

While I draw on trans people’s (and at large, queer people’s) understandings of the queer family, I avoid thinking of two contrasting forms of family: straight vs. queer families. Obviously, not all heterosexual (or straight) families are coherent in their structures. As I previously mentioned, in reference to their organization, they are crosscut by class, as well as gender, ethnicity, and race (Rapp 1978). Along with these social and cultural axes, as Weston (1991:27) emphasizes, there
can be “differences in household organization, as well as differences in notions of family and what it means to call someone kin.” Similar dynamics are also relevant to the formation of queer families. Like straight families, queer families vary to a great extent depending on cultural and social factors such as class, ethnicity, and race. Moreover, becoming a queer family member does not necessarily mean a complete detachment from one’s blood family, as demonstrated by Melis’s and Yelda’s relations with their natal families. Some people do not feel obligated to choose, and they continue their lives by participating in their blood and queer families.

To further exemplify, among my informants, there were people who were afraid of rejection by their blood families, and hence tried to keep their transition as a secret, leading both a straight and queer family life. Even among those who had completed their transition and received new IDs, there were still those trans men who had inherited the family line and got married in order to have a “proper” family life, thus assimilating into the familial normativity. I tried to reach them via other trans friends, but they refrained from speaking to me because they were reluctant to identify as trans men and were careful to hide their trans identity. After the sex reassignment process, they had completely incorporated themselves into a heteronormative order and detached themselves from their trans friends. Therefore, it is crucial to think about trans people’s investments into queer family-making not as a coherent whole that all trans people are committed to, but as a more multi-faceted process within which people might drastically change their investments.

My deployment of queer family needs another important remark. As previous research about trans people in other social contexts shows, one of the most salient responses to everyday violence is forming communities (Kulick 1998; Reddy 2005). In Turkey, a similar process shows itself in the investment of constructing trans friendships as a form of family, as Sibel’s funeral
vignette illustrates. In that sense, the reference to queer family is notably analogous as much as
dissimilar to Weston’s chosen families. In Weston’s work, even though chosen families form a
sort of network in their interaction with one another by crossing household lines, there are still
established feelings around the sense of a nuclear home, which becomes central to couples’
relations and which other gays and lesbians might enter and exit as lovers, friends and/or
solidarity partners. The nuclear homes still maintain themselves as nodes, or bases, within a
larger network of queer kinship. In that sense, the link between a sense of home, nuclear
structure and the family keeps its significance in Weston’s queer families.

However, among trans people in Istanbul, people are invested less in maintaining nuclear
structures of family-making in relation to the space of home, than in making the family a form
which brings many trans people together through LGBTQI organizations. That is why, Sibel’s
helva was cooked and served at Istanbul LGBT instead of any other house. In other words, the
trans people’s network, which already has come into existence through political struggle and the
spaces that were created by different LGBTQI organizations over coterminous and episodic
periods of time, also defines itself as the queer family. As I have learned, many members of these
organizations address the organizational space as their home as opposed to their individual
dwellings, and request in their will that they be buried by their queer families, addressing the
LGBTQI community at large. So now I turn to how trans people draw on the relation between
family and home, and what they mean by home or multiple homes.
Home

One of the dominant definitions of family has a lot to do with spatiality. Often used interchangeably in Turkish, the family and home each strongly symbolize the other. Although home does not always mean the family, the family always has strong connotations of home and/or the space of home. According to the dominant understanding in Turkey, the material conditions of home, the practices within home, and the symbolic meanings attributed to these two elements construct home and the family at once. For instance, living under the same roof, having supper together, doing and dividing work along the axis of gender division of labour, as well as creating and investing in particular sentimentalities (i.e. sense of security, love etc.) can illustrate how home is attributed certain meanings and functions. Consistent with this definition of home is the notion of domesticity.

It is difficult to link these various aspects of home and the notion of domesticity to trans women’s sense of their queer “homes.” Home has various meanings for trans women and it is sedimented in their lives at multiple levels. For example, one dimension of home is associated with Istanbul. I have observed that Istanbul was spoken of as a home on a more general level, within which sexually marginalized communities can find more comfort, and at least, the right to exist—though still in a limited and diminished sense as my previous chapter demonstrates the prevailing threat of trans murders generally in Turkey and particularly in Istanbul. Istanbul as a home to many trans people finds its expression in Melis’s words in one of our conversations:

We got used to here. This place has become our home. Istanbul has become our home. Now I am at peace with my family and I go to Hatay from time to time. I cannot stay with them longer than a week. I get worried about here. I meet with my friends and acquaintances here in Istanbul. They understand me. I understand them. We don’t see a single homosexual in Hatay. You cannot meet with anyone over there.
As is clear from Melis’s words, a home is not merely an empty space, but it becomes a place actively produced through social relations made possible by the creation of a sense of collectivity, intimacy, care, and mutual recognition. Istanbul, by embracing diverse groups of people, becomes a home for many trans people since it recognizes and joins them in its urban texture. However, this spatial recognition cannot be generalized to Istanbul as an entire city but specific to particular neighbourhoods, as was discussed at length in my first chapter on the displacement of trans people and the sexual production of space.

When it comes to the understanding of home as more of a sheltered and concrete space, most of my informants have houses of their own, where they reside individually, but they would rarely speak about those places in relation to their queer family. On the other hand, these same people, who are also active members either Lambda or Istanbul LGBTT, see these organizational spaces as their actual or “real” homes. These organizational spaces are also affiliated with the formation of the LGBTQI community, or queer community in the queer family form. References to queer family and home coincide with the energies invested, and times spent, in those organizations. However, the meanings attached to trans homes and trans family and their definitions have changed historically. For example, Sedef mentioned that in the 1990s, when state violence against the trans community was more acute, trans people would more commonly live together. Trans women were not dispersed as individuals, as is the present situation (see Chapter 3). The motherhood mechanism was more effective because common spaces of life linked trans women together more strongly. As Sedef said, the sense of community as well as of trans family was massive, empowering trans people’s resilience in the face of state violence. Trans women used to live closely with each other in order to not be left alone while fighting against the police and transphobic members of the public. Hence, political concerns and
collective resistance were factors in establishing clusters of trans women to reside in the same neighbourhood, as well as in shared homes. Construction of the sense of community and trans family used to go hand in hand as a response to the violent operations of the state which included efforts to displace trans women from their livelihood. As Sedef says, the trans women of the 1990s were more militant and they attacked the police when they were raided or put in custody. The sense of community and solidarity among trans people was more pronounced. Acting as a grand family most of the time, they knew each other more intimately. However, according to Sedef, the situation is not the same anymore. In my conversations with her, she touched upon this issue of long-lost moral community several times.

Sedef believes that younger trans women came into the possession of a freer sexual environment, which Sedef’s generation struggled to create. According to Sedef, the younger generations have no respect for the older ones. They might be aggressive with them or even rob them. This is not only Sedef’s concern; a reluctance to share the same apartment with other trans women is something that I have been told of often while talking to trans women. The most frequently listed reasons trans women give for such disinclination is that they find the majority of other trans women to be emotionally unstable, jealous, eager to fight, and addicted to alcohol. These characteristics or expressions can be seen as embodiments of the insecurity and precarity of trans existence. Hence, many prefer to see the space of the LGBTQI community center as a home for their queer family.

As can be seen, age difference and intergenerational tensions shape relations among trans people, particularly for trans women older than 40, who have had vastly different experiences of violence with the police, as I elaborated in my first and second chapters. In other words, history as a collective experience draws boundaries and produces tensions between different age groups among trans women. These borders become even more overt in trans women’s understandings of
home and political struggle. Moreover, the re-workings and re-makings of the family are never devoid of tensions, contestations and even violence among trans people themselves. For some trans people, the meaning of queer family—or even trans friendships—does not go beyond strategic moves or decisions that might bring material gains (i.e. shelter, money, food, clothes, or more customers). At times, it also functions to confirm particular notions of familial normativity. Hence, it is crucially significant to avoid romanticizing such queer intimate alignments and draw attention to their problems as well. Now I will elaborate on these issues.

**Trans Motherhood**

Kath Weston argues that “[q]ueer sorts of families configure relationships, however creatively, from historically available materials” (2005:132). Reappropriation, reiteration, and the strategic use of existing kinship forms by sexually marginalized communities has been an attractive topic for anthropological research with the case of fictive kinship relations among *hijras* in India serving as one of the most compelling examples. The intricate kin network within the *hijra* community relates *hijras* to one another as “sisters,” “aunties,” “mothers,” and “grandmothers” (Nanda 1999a; see also Cohen 1995; Agrawal 1997). Gayatri Reddy (2005:143) argues that the formation of these fictive kinship roles is central to *hijra* identity as well as their reproduction of material, symbolic and social life. The *hijra* community is based on two main forms of fictive kinship ties: the *guru-cela* (teacher/leader-disciple) relationship and the mother-daughter relationship. The *guru* position conveys intergenerational seniority and gained experience within the community. *Gurus* may adopt several *celas*, who are expected to be respectful, obedient, and loyal towards their *gurus*, and serve them. In return, *gurus* provide *celas* with clothes, food, and other basic needs, and teach them *hijra* manners and mores (Reddy 2005:156–7). The mother-daughter relationship in contrast is based less on obligation and responsibility and more on
affection and love. A hijra’s guru and mother might be the same or a different person.

In a similar vein, trans women in Turkey deploy an existing kinship form, motherhood, reconfiguring it to establish intimate bonds with one another. The mother-daughter relationship between trans women in Turkey can be thought as a combination of the guru-cela and the mother-daughter relationships among hijras. When a new and inexperienced young trans woman in her transition period enters the urban queer world in Istanbul, an older or more experienced trans woman takes care of the new member and teaches her the ins and outs of dressing up, wearing a proper make-up, doing sex work, and, in general, how to become “more female.” This new member also has to learn the strategies of coping with everyday sexual violence in the streets, especially that of the police and her clients. New members usually stay with their “mothers” in the same house until they prove to themselves that they have learned enough and that they can survive on their own. Until then, they are expected to obey the rules set by the mother. Depending on who the mother is, the rules might be strict or loose. The relationship between mothers and daughters might also transform into an exploitative one if the mother forces the daughter to pay extra money for household expenses, including rent or grocery shopping. Mothers might even ask their daughters to share the money they make from sex work. Hence, money plays a significant role in the formation of this kinship: money not only secures a trans woman a choice of being a mother to another trans woman or not, but also becomes the expression of mother-daughter bonding in some relations. This mother-daughter relationship, in that sense, has its own unique familial gift-debt mechanism: whereas young trans women’s introduction to the queer life and their cultivation into its gender and sexual world functions as a gift provided by experienced trans women to new trans members of this queer world, the latter group might be expected to return this gift in myriad financial forms.
Some of these mother-daughter relations are based on strong consent. For example, a trans woman might convey her intention to stay with an older trans woman of her choice and request to become her daughter. On those occasions, it can be referred as the consensual formation of kinship between two trans women. However, in other situations, trans women might lack the option of choosing their mothers. Sometimes the new member has limited opportunity to meet other trans women in a short time, and might agree to offers made by older trans women to adopt her as a daughter. Explicitly, the mechanism works in such a way that trans women have as trans mothers whoever happens to be available for mothering, or in other words, whoever agrees to mother the new member in that particular moment. Additionally, this is not a necessary condition; whereas some trans women have mothers, others might not need or refuse to have one. For example, despite Sedef having been a mother to approximately thirty trans women, she herself had no mother. Mothering is usually meant for those in need, or those who do not have any social or economic capital to survive within this world.

Yet not everyone who needs financial and social benefits tends to immerse herself in such a relationship. Some trans women define this relationship essentially as a ridiculous and harmful one. Özge, for instance, is one of them. According to her, neither the mother nor the daughter sincerely takes care of each other. On the contrary, she claimed neither of them could tolerate each other:

There is extreme jealousy between them…They are usually jealous of each other’s clients, money, outfits, physical appearances; in other words, everything! Because both of them are trans. None of them is actually a real mother or a real father. They are in fact the same. They both do the same job. In this environment, it sounds ridiculous for me to call someone mother. How can a trans be my mum? Perhaps this way: Let’s say I enter this world and I don’t know anything. Then she comes and guides me properly. If I am persistent and demand to enter certain social environments, then she should help me. If I don’t have money, then she should finance my breast implantation. She should pay for my
nose surgery. She should pay for my bayanlık [femininity] operation. Then I’d call her my mum! I’d work and pay her back my debts later. But if I stay in her house and defray the cost of rent and food, and if I fund my breast and other surgeries with my own money, that is, if we live in the same house just as housemates, then it pisses me off to be called as “the daughter” just because she is older than me. How am I supposed to be your daughter? They are getting on my nerves.

Özge’s account is significant because it demonstrates that investments into making a queer family are contested and not embraced by all trans people. Özge, first, denies the possibility of a nurturing trans mother for another trans woman, and questions the viability of forming a “real” family outside of blood relations. The question, “How can a trans be my mum?” she poses, hints at the prevailing familial normative logic in society. The notion of family is strictly linked to blood ties. Yet she then recognizes the possibility of a trans mother-trans daughter kin relationship as long as this bonding brings material gains. In other words, monetary compensation or provision becomes the indicator of family making, and the family would become more “real” given that it provides financial security or gains. Hence, she differentiates between monetary relations and gifting, that is, deferred payment, and defines the family as the immediate financial provider.

For those who consent to motherhood, it is practiced on a temporary basis. In other words, trans women do not remain daughters of those mothers for the rest of their lives. For example, Sedef was a mother to Aysu when Aysu first stepped in this “world,” as she framed it. Whenever she spoke of Sedef’s motherhood, it was always in the past tense. So motherhood also has a functional role for a limited length of time. Once the young trans woman is ready to stand on her own feet, it means that the mother has completed her mission. While the mother-daughter relation may be over, respect for the mother often becomes a long-lasting emotion that is
mentioned continuously among trans people. In other words, the obligation to reciprocate the gift might take an affective form. But still these relations might not be taken for granted as stable, as is apparent in the case of Aysu and Sedef. Soon after my departure from Istanbul in the summer of 2011, they had a big fight and stopped being allies.

On the other hand, as Özge’s account also demonstrated, the relations between younger and older members of the trans community do not depend only on formations of supportive intimate bonds. Negative emotions also shape those relations and the most effective one is jealousy. Melis, for instance, while talking about the trans community in general, routinely told stories about other women’s jealousy with regards to her clients. Usually, Melis’s age becomes the source of her friends’ sarcastic conversations. She was 52 years old at the time of my fieldwork, and she claimed that many of her friends were surprised when she attracted two to three clients in a row on a typical workday. But she stated that the reason that she had regular clients was because she was less selective than others, and she accepted low-rate deals in order to pay for rent, hydro and food.

These relations of jealousy are not unique to the lives of trans community in Turkey. In the Brazilian context, Kulick (1998) observes similar forms of jealousy for boyfriends and each other’s clients among *travestis*. Jealousy, combined with distrust and suspicion, strongly shapes their everyday lives, and renders their relationships with one another fragile. Even though most *travestis* live and work together, they are in continuous competition with each other, not only over boyfriends and clients, but also over money, beauty, and femininity (Kulick 1998:42). In a similar fashion to the Brazilian *travestis*, there are other tensions and sources of dispute within the trans community in Turkey. To explicate, spiting each other is a common practice, especially among clubber trans women. This attitude mainly concerns imitations of each other’s dress code. For example, when someone buys a new, attractive dress, another trans woman may immediately
go and find the same outfit. This can be considered a valid reason to get into a fight. Another example of competing over clothing involves the clothing brands. Trans women who do not wear brand names are exposed to humiliation by friends. These consumerist tendencies compose only one dimension of a wider environment of rivalry among trans people. For example, for those trans women who have “husbands,” the thought of losing their “husband” to another trans woman might fill them with dread. Competition can even lead to informal collaborations with the police in order to report friends who are engaging in illicit sex work, a snitching incident that happened several times in the past. This can be done to take revenge for some perceived slight or if it is believed that a friend is making more money. Yet these collaborators, when discovered to be traitors, are singled out and excluded by other trans people and their relations with the community is severed. I heard several names that were constantly called out as traitors because of their past collaboration with the police. So, these “traitors” are forever marked and haunted by past experiences, and this situation shapes their relations with other trans people on a continuous basis.

As in Weston’s conceptualization of chosen families discussed earlier, LGBTQ people are agents in constructing their families, yet this is in an environment limited by several social conditions. Even though I have problems with Weston’s implicit definition of agency, which is interchangeably used with a subject who chooses, the concept of agency becomes useful when its capacities are linked to wider social, cultural and political economic structures that make certain acts possible, while disabling others. An analysis focused only on agency might fall short in understanding how particular deeds and preferences become available and why people are invested into some modes of life but not others. My intention is not to explore friendships and

trans women usually address their boyfriends as husbands.
family making as deterministic processes. Nor is it to explain everything in terms of trans
type of capacities for action. Gamze, a trans woman of 42 who used to work as a journalist
prior to her sexual transition, summarizes this long-existing agency-structure dilemma
elaborately:

When you become a transvestite, you start seeing only trans people. You are isolated from
the society. Your non-trans friends stop calling you. They even stop walking with you on
the street. You get surprised. You look at yourself and say: ‘I actually look better; at least I
became a woman. Then why does this person [her non-trans friend] avoid me?’ Because
society thinks that you are a sex worker by default. When a friend walks with you, he is
mistaken for a pimp or someone who has something to do with sex work…but I also
understand them. Long back trans people had told me: ‘The more you become a woman,
the lonelier you get.’ I didn’t believe them. But now I see they were right in saying that.

Being surrounded mostly by trans people or investing fully into trans friendships is not always
something that is aspired to by all trans people. Some trans women, like Gamze, describe this
situation as a necessity rather than a personal choice. This necessity finds its expression most of
the time in trans women’s experience of various forms of violence. Despite the existence of
negative feelings such as jealousy, contempt and anger among trans people, there is one
unwritten rule that binds them together in its inviolability: when the police force is the foe, they
should unite and stand firm against the police through their long-established intimate and
political bonds. Otherwise, they believe, they would disappear, as it is nearly impossible to build
resilience against everyday violence on an individual basis. Gamze, for instance, was always
present on each political demonstration, party and gathering that trans women organized during
my fieldwork. She was also at Sibel’s funeral from the beginning to the end. So even those, who
complain about rivalries and disputes among trans people, mention the role of existing solidarity
and cooperation among trans women in the face of state violence, exclusion and discrimination.
Conclusion

Jack Halberstam (2011) insists on abandoning the family as a site for social, emotional and political potentials. Whether in “homo” or “hetero” contexts, he argues that maintaining the family as a useful model or form of intimacy leads to normative understandings of time and transmission, and introduces and empowers reactionary formations of human interaction. Halberstam contends, “as a kind of false narrative of continuity, as a construction that makes connection and succession seem organic and natural, family also gets in the way of all sorts of other alliances and coalitions” (2011:71). According to him, persisting in the family as an intimate form propels gays and lesbians into marriage politics and forecloses other ongoing notions of kinship. Hence, he advocates a complete disavowal and forgetting of the family as a useful concept. Then this purposeful forgetting of family, lineage and tradition might condition a new possibility and make a place for the new.

I partly agree with him. Some of the established intimate ties among trans people may uncritically reflect natal bonds. But I find Reddy’s emphasis quite remarkable, and agree with her that these normative intimate forms can also be examined as “instance[s] of how, at particular moments, our socially produced worlds sometimes become naturalized into "new" forms of caring” (2005:168). Moreover, I still find it important to analyze what people creatively and/or strategically do with the existing notions and models of kinship and family. This chapter deals with that matter by elaborating on trans people’s negotiations and contestations with the normative constructions and dominant understandings of family as a form, and shows how they re-make and re-shape the prevailing cultural notions of family to cope with everyday violence, exclusion, abandonment and disowning. Trans women’s introduction to Istanbul’s urban queer
world, and their survival, as well as respectful and recognizable death in this world, are made possible through the intimate workings of their trans friendships. The multi-faceted dynamics and practices of queer family-making, that is, reclaiming their friends’ funerals and bodies from blood families, state actors and religious figures, and reappropriating kinship terms like motherhood, open intimate spaces in their lives and establish intimate bonds with each other.

Before ending this chapter, I want to challenge the “evil” natal family image a bit, as recent years in Turkey have witnessed the opening of promising spaces to forward the troubled relationship between queer children and their blood families to better ends. For example, LISTAG, an organized group of queer people’s biological family members formed in January 2008 has been struggling to create more support and solidarity for queer people from their biological families. For many of these families, LISTAG states on its website, it was at first shocking to discover their children were gay or trans, but it has also been an educational process to discover and combat their own prejudices. Their fight against “homophobia” and “transphobia” is centered upon raising consciousness about the discrimination, exclusion and violence that queer people experience, informing society and state actors about queer people’s problems, and calling other families to support them and their children in this struggle. To do this, they organize regular monthly dinners both with family members and their queer children at a group member’s house, informative debates with the help of volunteer psychiatrists, special meetings with those parents who want to meet them privately to share their experiences and problems, and discussion panels at universities and NGOs across Turkey. Though currently they are marginal in numbers, LISTAG members have managed to add new members to their body as a result of hard political work they have been doing in the midst of violence against queer people. These families show great effort and political energy because they also have to bear accusations born out of dominant discourses about the typical and “proper” Turkish family that
was detailed earlier in this chapter. Fellow citizens sometimes blame these parents for being the cause of their children’s “perverted” character. What LISTAG members do is to struggle to erase this image of “pervert” that stigmatizes their children and themselves. Of course, the majority of trans people are not lucky enough to have such biological families, and instead keep investing more into the intimate survival strategies that I have discussed in detail.
Of course, trans people are far from constituting a unified and harmonious group. Even the category itself is relatively new and may be disputed (e.g., from an anthropological perspective as a Western construct). The previous chapter might give a false impression that, despite some small tensions among trans people, and more significantly, despite the prevalent cruelty of transphobia and homophobia in everyday life in Turkey, still, trans people in Istanbul lead a generally peaceful life together through their friendship networks. It is true that, at most times, LGBTQI people unite and bond with each other and take collaborative action when there is a threat at stake against trans people’s lives. However, the established networks of intimacy, solidarity and friendships do not necessarily preclude considerable forms of conflict, disagreement and quarrels. Consequently, and inevitably perhaps, this ethnography of trans lives in Turkey is incomplete and does not fully grasp the thickness of trans lives and various dimensions and dynamics in their relationships with queer, as well as non-queer others—and that above and beyond the fact that “Ethnographic truths are…inherently partial—committed and incomplete” (Clifford 1986:7).

I am aware that in prioritizing the state’s role in shaping trans lives and subjectivities, my ethnographic story has unavoidably included some shortfalls in touching upon the tensions,
contradictions, controversies and disputes among LGBTQI people. Especially, I am concerned that this work does not give the sense of a romanticized account of trans people’s lives and political struggle in Turkey. Thus this last chapter intends to draw attention to some of these issues, yet still without a premise or promise to capture all those details and factors that would produce the “thickest” possible ethnographic description. Touching on some of the tensions, controversies and disputes among the LGBTQI community in Istanbul, this section might add another layer up to the story, thickening it a little.

**Among the LGBTQI Movement**

During my fieldwork in Istanbul, Pembe Hayat has been the chief supporter of Istanbul LGBTT, although it was located in Ankara. From endorsing each other organizationally in their press conferences and letters of protest to employing mutual consultancy with regard to violence and discrimination against trans people in Turkey, they would stand as the strongest political allies and act collaboratively when a larger LGBTQI political campaigning was at hand. This cross-city solidarity between Ankara and Istanbul was primarily based on the sense of a larger trans community in Turkey, whose conditions were announced to need special attention than those of other LGBQ people. In fact, both Pembe Hayat and Istanbul LGBTT were founded by trans people as a result of this need. They stated that they had to abandon their former LGBTQI associations due to the LGBTQI community internal hierarchy and transphobia experienced, or at least claimed to be directed against them by some people in the movement.

When my friend Alper first introduced me to Istanbul LGBTT, I remember being indirectly questioned about my links to the organization from which they had separated, Lambda.
I had no idea about the conflict between the two organizations. With no political links to Lambda, in my naiveté I had mentioned some of my friends from Lambda. It took a while for gacis to be sure about my impartial position, because there was always talk about people who would visit both organizations and gossip. People trying to develop good relations with both organizations would be treated with suspicion, and I observed a total lack of trust on their side even in people who would try to reconcile the two organizations. Mediators would be suspected of collecting information and leaking it to the other group.

Recalling Nicola Parson’s (2009:8) emphasis on gossip as a political instrument with crucial public effects, it may be said that gossip functioned here as a discursive strategy to mark, or even establish, borders between two different LGBTQI groups. It also attributed certain features to each group through which queer politics and ethics were constantly debated and demarcated. It is important to remember Lambek’s (2010:2) emphasis on the immanence of ethics in speech, “the wellsprings of ethical insight [that are] deeply embedded in the categories and functions of language and ways of speaking.” From this perspective, gossip, besides functioning as a political tool, also conveyed ethical insights in the social world of the LGBTQI movement. For both LGBTQI groups, it constantly defined correct ways of doing LGBTQI politics and being ethical within the LGBTQI community at large. The examples in this section will further clarify this point in detail.

Another crucial element of rumour and gossip is that element identified by Das and Addlakha (2001:521) and dubbed “the lethal quality of voice.” Gossip can both make and unmake subjects within the discursive realm of speech. As a modality of talk, it can be quite destructive, as was the case between the two groups here. Certain things that did not actually take place gained currency through particular forms of discursive realities, which had actual material...
effects by creating new enmities and severing the old relationships among people.

Yet gossip is not merely detrimental; by its participatory nature, it also functions to form bonds of intimacy between those who partake in its processes (Parsons 2009: 34). In the case of the tension between Istanbul LGBTT and Lambda, gossip did not only unmake or break relationships, but also established inter-group solidarity and constituted new bonds among the members of the same group by discursively uniting them against certain members of the other organization. And it further served in defining what the LGBTQI community meant for its different members.

Later on during my fieldwork, when I developed closer and more intimate links with some Lambda members, these tensions became even more discernible. My correspondence with Lambda was not research related. I had already been involved in some feminist projects with women from Lambda, and we were also working together towards the organization of Feministival, the first Lady Fest-like festival for women in Istanbul. This project aimed to bring many women, trans women, cross-dressers and trans men together. At least, we were able to work together in the initial weeks of preparatory meetings. The differences in investments in the different political projects and imaginings caused some women’s withdrawal from the organizing committee.

With my involvement in this project, there was always a risk that my position would come to be regarded as that of a wanderer and talebearer between Lambda and Istanbul LGBTT. I was working closely with women from Lambda for this festival but for a long time it felt as if I was doing something wrong to Istanbul LGBTT by not disclosing my relations with the women from Lambda. This became quite apparent when even people who attempted to reconcile the two organizations were suddenly denounced.
At the beginning of my visits to Istanbul LGBTT and still unaware of these tensions, I casually mentioned some names that I thought could be helpful in establishing further connections and building stronger rapport. However, some of the names were already scapegoated as building enmity, distrust and discrimination against trans people, and thus having severely fractured the LGBTQI movement from inside.

Once I was “caught” by Sedef with two of my friends from Lambda in the street, and we started chatting while standing. She gave me those meaningful looks by carefully eyeing my friends, whom she knew from Lambda long back. Neither looked very warmly at the other. Frankly, my concern was less about their distance with each other than what Sedef was going to tell others in Istanbul LGBTT after running into me with the “enemy.” This encounter motivated me to disclose my individual relations with some of the Lambda members, and I decided to use Feministival as an excuse to bring my relations out of the closet.

One day, while we were all in Istanbul LGBTT, I started to talk about Feministival and how it brought many women from various political, as well as apolitical circles together to organize something for ourselves. I stressed how gacıs’ input would be of great value if they were accepted as part of the festival. In the end, I was able to convince some of them to take part in the organization, though they lost interest after the first meeting. Some of the gacıs later told me that they had attended the first meeting because they did not want to offend me since I regularly attended every protest they organized, as well as stood in solidarity with them. Although they did not want to be part of the Feministival organization, it still meant a lot for them to be asked to join the organization because there was always questioning around why they would not be consulted, invited or called to certain political gatherings—they sensed an unspoken and implicit rule of exclusion keeping Istanbul LGBTT outside of general political
events and gatherings, whether they be organized by leftist, feminist or other LGBQ people.

The issue of consultation within and among political communities is perceptively discussed in Dave’s work on queer activism in the context of India. Dave (2012:303) describes battles over consultation as processes though which people come to see themselves as subjects of political communities. However, circulation and distribution of knowledge, and practices and subjects of consultation in a political movement also constitute a value system, according to which political actors of the same movement are assigned disparate positions. Lines drawn thus might result in dissensions, which, in turn, create trust and unity issues among activists in—members of—the same political movement.

Of course, the distrust that trans people had is grounded not only in consultation issues but also in the history of their organizational experience within LGBTQI politics generally. Accounts of transphobia that many trans people had faced as members of different LGBTQI organizations were widespread. I was frequently told that when trans women brought their complaints to the table, they had had a lot of fights, and it was this that had led them to decide to separate from their former organizations. They were blamed in the LGBTQI community for being overly sensitive, and many believed that non-trans members of the community used the issue of sensitivity as a ruse to delay and evade the internal conflicts and discrimination. Not until 2009 was the word “transphobia” mentioned in the announcement of both national and international LGBTQI solidarity networks organized in Turkey. Some trans people think that they were perceived as the obstinate dissidents of the movement.

Other sources of the tension, as stated by some trans people, involve exclusion of trans individuals from decision-making mechanisms, employment opportunities in the organization, and as shares of European Union funds for human rights’ projects. The funding issue especially
was a pivotal source of distrust, and it was this that triggered the trans women’s separation from the other LGBTQI organization. While Istanbul LGBTT people were still members of Lambda Istanbul, many fights broke out over the non-transparent distribution of project money. Gossip used to communicate that particular people in the organization profited, while others were kept at the level of volunteer positions, giving their labour for free. Gossip targeting these figures stereotyped them as those who presented themselves as intellectuals, knew English and had expertise in information technologies, and thus those who were actually professionals in coordinating EU or locally funded LGBTQI projects. They were characterized as politically sterile, capable of organizing paper-based politics but not grassroots activism, and thinking of politics as merely all about organizing a few meetings.

In this market economy of human rights, most of the trans people would fall behind in the necessary skills demanded in order to maximize the money desired to flow into LGBTQI projects. Self-interest seeking motivations were likened to the hegemonic “white Turkish”\textsuperscript{131} elitism, as sustaining the LGBTQI movement via the means of neoliberal economy. The entire monetary logic of LGBTQI politics, which orients itself economically, and thence organizationally, around the funded project (i.e. using LGBTQI human rights issues as an income-generating tool), it was felt, became destructive in the way that it shaped people’s political energies and the extent to which it defined political and ethical issues within the LGBTQI community. Thus, some of the trans people questioned how such financially motivated people would be able to represent a, so to say, “bloodstained” vigorous political movement.\textsuperscript{132}

\textsuperscript{131} “White Turk” (beyaz Türk) is a pejorative term of uncertain origin but comparable to the US “WASP.”

\textsuperscript{132} Some trans people deploy the word “bloodstained” to stress the role of death (targeted killings) in shaping the conditions of trans politics, and hence, the role of blood spilled from trans people’s bodies in marking the spirit of the LGBTQI politics in Turkey (which thus frame the LGBTQI movement as bloodstained).
In the midst of these internal-group tensions, gossiping functioned as a political tool that drew borders between emerging different LGBTQI camps. The issue of European funds was a prominent one, and trans people thought they could not get their share of these funds even though they claimed to be the most needy people due to the existing discrimination against them in the work environment. Most of them had no option but to sell sexual services, but even this caused a problem since, with the establishment of their own separate organization, aspersions were cast with accusations that they were starting a “business,” organizing for monetary rather than political gain. This was met by great outrage by trans majority LGBTQI organizations.

Money and funding also set the terms for my introduction to Istanbul LGBTT. As mentioned (Chapter 1), when Alper introduced me to his friends in Istanbul LGBTT, he was leaving Istanbul and requested that I finish an incomplete project proposal to be submitted to a European Organization for funding. Istanbul LGBTT, by then an organized initiative, was under threat of closure for financial reasons, and it completely depended on member donations. I was immediately placed in the position of having the necessary linguistic and academic skills to write a project proposal. Unfortunately, I had no experience of this, except for writing my own dissertation proposal, and found myself struggling to orient their project around certain policies with a special focus on NGO language (mobilizing terms like “advocacy” or “promotion” of “(human) rights,” “development,” “resource management,” “building/improving capacity,” “education,” etc.) in the very last few days before the submission deadline. Months later, we received a negative response from the organization. With the project proposal rejection, monetary distribution and financial resources among different LGBT organizations were once again at stake, and some people even doubted the rejection; they thought that others from the “oppositional” LGBTQI group might have blocked their proposal by smearing Istanbul LGBTT with unofficial emails sent to decision-makers or talking to them in person.
This strain of suspicion and gossip has been a prominent element throughout the course of my fieldwork, structuring a range of different interactions, relations and positions, including my own. Yet members of both groups accepted the need to meet towards the very end of my fieldwork, and made peace with each other. One year later, when I returned to Istanbul in 2011 for the summer, I was extremely glad to see that old tensions were dissolved, former “opponents” had become close friends, and several collaborative projects and campaigning programs were on their political agendas.

Nonetheless, until the very moment of peace, the LGBT movement was marked by frictions and fractures that put the meaning of an LGBTQI community into question. For instance, when a trans woman was killed, each group would organize its own campaign and protest. The place for the protests would be usually the same, but the timing would be scheduled so that an unwanted encounter would be prevented. Moreover, many other new tensions would build around these protests because after each protest, the names of the supporting non-LGBTQI groups would be subjected to close scrutiny. Divisions among other, feminist or leftist organizations became a source of fissuring among radical groups, as well as those internal to the LGBTQI movement, according to who would take sides with whom.

Once, for example, subsequent to the killing of a trans woman, Istanbul LGBTT took immediate action and made an emergency call to progressive organizations to assemble and call on the state to respond. This time gacıs decided also to invite Lambda to put their signature under Istanbul LGBTT’s press conference—but Lambda did not attend this press conference. Rather they organized their own separate protest and mobilized it more comprehensively than Istanbul LGBTT by including many other organizations’ names on their letter of protest.

When Pembe Hayat and Istanbul LGBTT were founded, they were accused of creating
divisions in and weakening the LGBTQI movement, a movement already marginalized in the wider political arena of Turkey. According to trans people, however, these two organizations represented a crucial channel through which, for the first time, they could become the essential subjects of an organization and convey their problems and experiences without being underrepresented, silenced or excluded. Hence, contrary to the majority of non-trans LGBTQI activists who saw this trans people’s separation as a mistake, I noted how Istanbul LGBTT was articulating its initiative as “a vital need for survival by those who were fighting for life itself.”

Indeed, it is a matter of survival, because, as I have argued in this dissertation, the materiality of an average trans life, or the mode of life, has specific characteristics that are markedly more difficult than a non-trans life. One of these is strongly tied to the temporality of an average trans woman’s life. Sex work, as the most common way of making money among trans women, forces them to schedule their shifts between ten at night and five in the morning. When they go on the street to sell sex, they are exposed to various forms of violence (Chapters 3 & 4), including the risk of being killed. This material reality, which is not broadly shared by non-trans members, nor even by trans men, makes particular demands on trans women’s LGBTQI community forms. The specificity of temporal and spatial aspects of an “ordinary” trans life (i.e., an ordinariness emerging as a product of the very extraordinary circumstances) requires and generates a trans women’s political movement that functions as a survival kit. Many trans women complain that people who work regular hours cannot appreciate their everyday life routine. As I have extensively discussed in each chapter, for trans women, the definition of everyday life also takes very specific meanings significantly shaped by the state’s extralegal forms of violence and their lived bodily experience.

The accumulation of the tensions and disagreements in political demands and
imaginations resulted in one of the main schisms in the LGBTQI community, around the organization of the 18th Pride Week in Istanbul for June, 2010. Months beforehand, Istanbul LGBTT had decided to absent itself from the Pride Week organization and related events. This triggered an attempt to establish dialogue between Lambda and Istanbul LGBTT, which only ended with confirmation of Istanbul LGBTT’s position, now hardened to a refusal to join the Pride Week. There was scepticism on Istanbul LGBTT’s part around being seen as trans figures to be showcased in order to make the Pride Week more “colourful” with a token inclusion. Some trans women stressed the view that just as heterosexual liberation is strongly tied to that of homosexuals, so is homosexuals’ liberation tied to that of trans people, reasoning thus that “the last letters of LGBTT are not symbolic, but an expression of existence,” and “Trans people are not showcasing, they are for real.”

After discussing the matter among one another, gacıs decided not to back down and announced their nonappearance in the upcoming Pride Week. At the same time, however, they were quite upset at their absence, and decided to organize their own pride week, which would focus on trans people’s voices, appearances and problems. Its timing, the week prior to the Pride Week, was regarded by Lambda as a deliberate venture to harm to the LGBTQI movement by dividing it around inessential and resolvable troubles, and thus exacerbated the already existing tensions between the two groups. A few days prior to June 10, the first day of what was to be the very first Trans Pride Week, Lambda and Istanbul LGBTT managed to reach a compromise. In fact, the Trans Pride March became a test of the support and concessions made by Lambda. Lambda responded well, showing a strong presence during the march, a support that effectively started a long-term amelioration process which has lasted to this day.

I would argue that these quarrels and tensions are consistent with the logic of LGBTQI as
a large family, an argument that I make in the previous chapter in relation to the communal
dynamics among the LGBTQI people in Istanbul. As we well know, any community might, like
a family, be also a source of tension, enmity and controversy, mobilizing all these negativities in
the establishment of various forms and bonds of intimacy between its members. In the final
instance, putting an end to the quarrel period might be interpreted as a reunification and
reestablishment of familial ties among the LGBTQI people. Hence, the image of family is never
a romantic one; on the contrary, it includes continuous formation of bitter disagreements and
feuds and fights, as much as intimate bonds of care and solidarity.

Just as we need to be careful of viewing the LGBTQI community, or family, as a
homogenous group, so also should we be wary of regarding trans people as a uniform
singularity. There are constant intra-group or sub-group tensions and contestations among trans
people. Especially while discussing LGBTQI activist space in Istanbul, it is salient to address the
fissures and contests among trans people themselves related to power, organization of work time
and space, money and distinct understandings of equality and justice.

**Tensions among Trans People**

Meryem, a trans woman in her late 20s, was one of the first people who drew my attention to the
internal conflicts within the trans community. At the beginning of my fieldwork we met, at one
of those rooftop bars in Beyoglu’s side-streets on a quiet, gloomy, autumn day. I was still in the
process of making connections with people, and I thought she would introduce me to a larger
community of trans people. However, my supposition was proven false when she started to talk
about her self-imposed isolation from the trans community. Recounting a past resentment born
from doing politics with Sedef and Esra, she was approving of their decision to separate from Lambda but did not want to be part of Istanbul LGBTT. According to Meryem, attention was paid to the discrimination and violence that trans people face in their everyday lives due to Sedef and Esra, without whom it would be difficult or impossible to mobilize other trans people, specifically trans women, to protest the targeted killings. With the effort and pressure they applied, they were able to gather many trans women around a political cause that directly affected trans women’s livelihoods.

I was myself a close witness to Sedef and Esra together with Sevda’s political energy and struggle over the course of a year when they were trying to convince their friends to make trans killings a cause of public demonstrations on the streets. Some trans women would attend all the demonstrations, some would promise to participate and disappoint them by not making an appearance and some would not even promise to show up. There was a continuous endeavour to politicize and galvanize as many trans women as possible at least for the public protests of trans killings.

Gacis in Istanbul LGBTT were themselves aware of the constraints, specifically temporal and spatial, to mobilizing trans women on the street around their own actual political cause because many trans women either resided in districts far from where demonstrations took place or they might hardly be awake during daytime demonstrations after working all night. Or simply, some would see this as a waste of time and prefer soliciting to politicking. Hence, to gather enough people for a rally was always an issue for Istanbul LGBTT, especially with the lack of support from other political and LGBTT groups.

The issue of money and its benefits would come up as marking financial borders among trans women. Even though most of my trans women informants were from lower or underclass
background, there was a remarkable disparity among them in terms of financial resources. Especially when I participated in Sibel’s funeral, I was surprised by the various scales of income among trans women that marked their dress code, make-up, and skin and body care. Later on, I became quite familiar with gossipy conversations that segregate trans women basically into two camps: those who tried to survive financially (with or without sex work), and those who actually made a lot of money from sex work, indeed, who lived in luxury. The latter group was continually held responsible for demeaning the trans movement and community, while they effectively earned high rates for dangerous work.

Economic status is significantly related to the extent of violence to which trans people are exposed, at both institutional and non-institutional levels – insofar as those who had more money generally earned it in ways that brought them into daily contact with this on an everyday life basis – and, as a result is directly connected also to the degree of active involvement in the LGBTQI political scene; economic status is also causally linked to the quality of sex reassignment surgeries (see Chapter 5), one’s bodily transitional process. I have tried to touch upon these issues of economic inequality as fault lines dividing trans people; however, they require further specification and demand more comprehensive research into quite how they shape trans people’s subjectivities.

**Concluding Remarks**

Differently from many other “developing” countries, anti-sodomy law in Turkey has played no role in shaping LGBTQI politics. Mandated by moral code and imperial rules of the European Powers, anti-sodomy laws have shaped LGBTQI politics in many ex-colonial countries across
the globe; in Turkey, however, such laws have never existed, since they did not during the Ottoman period. Those mandated by the British colonial rule in Northern Iraq, for example, had not applied previously under the Ottoman rule (Myers 2013). Therefore, it is hard to talk about a queer presence in the Turkish legal domain until very recently, either in positive or negative terms.

The historical antecedents, however, become less relevant. As mentioned in the Introduction (Chapter 1), in the context of heteronormativity, the prevalence of human rights and hate crimes discourses and the circulation of sexual identities at the global level have significantly shaped and formulated the LGBTQI people’s legal claims and demands in contemporary Turkey. For today’s Turkish LGBTQI people, there has been an increasing emphasis on making their way into the domain of law and achieving legal recognition and inclusion in the nation’s body politic. Unfortunately, the LGBTQI organizations’ political campaigns to amend certain codes in the constitution so as to include sexual orientation within the scope of law have been rejected twice now by the national parliament. It is not certain whether such LGBTQI claims can be represented in the domain of law in the foreseeable future.

Of course, legal inclusion is a minimum condition, a necessity rather than sufficiency, and not something that can in any way guarantee a more secure life. As this research has shown (Chapter 5), the medico-legal regulation of transsexuality has paved the way for trans people’s inclusion within the domain of law, yet only at the cost of exposing them to strict heteronormative control and corrective practices, linking their bodies and lives to various forms of state violence. History will be the judge of whether legal recognition per se brings more security or violence, even if the LGBTQI struggle does bear fruit.
Focusing on trans lives in Turkey, one of the most important themes in my dissertation has been an examination of what we can learn from this about state power and the exercise of state violence. I argue that nonnormative sexualities in general, and trans people’s lives and bodies in particular, are shaped a great deal by the state’s legal and extralegal government of violence. Legal regulations and institutional actors’ extralegal practices regarding sex reassignment processes, issuance of new IDs and sex work administration constitute room for the exercise of state violence in intimate and sexual forms. Penetrating trans women’s post-surgical vaginas, raiding trans women’s houses and evacuating them from their neighbourhoods, organizing the rights of inheritance and reproduction according to a heteronormative logic, the Turkish state, through its medical, legal and security actors, seeks to govern not only sexuality and bodies, but also the intimate conducts and worlds of people treated as objects, of “its” subjects (sic) objectivized. As an effect of this governance, particular bodies, desires and sexualities are thus foreclosed and deemed to disappear from social and cultural life.

Undoubtedly, trans people’s lives are not the derivatives of state violence and state power. Similarly, institutional actors and practices are not the sole determinants of the everydayness of the manifold forms of violence in their lives. Other social actors, such as landlords, employers, neighbours, clients, partners, natal family members and, at times, even their LGBTQI friends, contribute significantly to the formation of everyday exclusion, discrimination and marginalization. While discussing trans people’s relations with all these social or intimate actors, I approached violence as something not externally done to lives and bodies, but rather as a social relation that is productive and constitutive of people’s subjectivities, political actions and ethical and intimate practices. My discussions of trans mobility and displacement as emplacement in the city (Chapter 3), trans people’s legal struggle and political campaigns around sexual rights and targeted trans killings, their networks of solidarity, and their
investments in forming intimate ties, bonds and care mechanisms within the LGBTQI community in the face of disowning and abandonment by their families demonstrate how violence conditions all these practices, and is constitutive in their formation and the embodied life experience of trans people in Turkey.

It has been well documented that trans people and LGBTQI people in general face varying degrees of violence, exclusion and discrimination in various locales across the world. Turkey is no exception to the dominance of heteronormative social and intimate worlds as ideal life scripts and their multidimensional restrictions on lived possibilities. The Turkish context of specific social, political and cultural dimensions does, however, provide a unique contribution to the studies of trans lives and cultures. Issues of sex, sexuality and gender have particular valences and articulations in Turkey, a country popularly known to express a duality of East and West, secular with a Muslim majority, a new republic born from an old empire, democratic and modern yet with a history of military interventions and long tradition of patriarchy. Hence, as a general inquiry I have sought to provide a comprehensive answer to the question of what it means to be an LGBTQI person, in particular a trans person, in Turkey.

Exploring this has helped me to understand how gender and sexual difference is produced at countless interfaces of diverse layers of everyday lives, in particular in institutional and non-institutional settings, the relationship between which is a porous one. Discussing the gendered and sexual organization of everyday social and familial lives in Turkey, I have based my discussion on an understanding of heteronormativity as “the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent—that is, organized as a sexuality—but also privileged”—and a privilege, moreover, that can take several forms, “unmarked, as the basic idiom of the personal and the social; or marked as a
natural state; or projected as an ideal or moral accomplishment” (Berlant and Warner 1998:548).

It is in this context that I argue that heteronormativity in Turkey, through its production and work in a variety institutional and non-institutional domains of social life (i.e. the family, law, the informal economy of sex work, medicine and the police) shapes trans lives and their intimate and political subjectivities in ways that marginalize them as sexual subjects; in thus dehumanizing them, I add, they also objectivize them.

One premise of this dissertation has been to point out some intersections between feminist and queer anthropology on the one hand, and trans studies, on the other. To be able to develop effective critiques of normative assumptions about sex, sexuality and gender, as well as to problematize universalizing comprehensions of the relationship(s) between sexuality and gender, we need more collaborative works by feminist, queer and trans theorists. This project has sought to make a contribution in that direction, by providing a sufficiently complex account of the dynamic, historically and socially specific relationships between sex, sexuality and gender by analyzing both official (the state’s medico-legal discourses and practices) and unofficial (trans women’s everyday experience) articulations of these in the specific context of Turkey today.

In addition to functioning as a theoretical project, my research, from the very beginning, has also had a political objective. The production of this dissertation has been significantly shaped by the very specific conditions of doing academia in the Global North, a position that has its advantages and disadvantages. Sometimes I have found myself in moments or even periods of serious crisis while trying to accomplish the classical anthropological task of translating a social and cultural world because the world is essentially that in which I was raised and have known as my home and the translation into the (multiple) worlds and language of the North American context. Of course, in this process, the question of incommensurability has occupied a big space,
at times in the background and at other times at the heart of this cultural and academic, as well as political translation. I have sometimes felt estranged from the academic obligation of making a social world legible for particular audience in a language that is not my own.

And yet, what has constantly motivated me also has been the very promise of this translation, a work that is full of potential to contribute to spreading the word about the conditions of LGBTQI lives beyond the Turkish or even North American national boundaries, and thereby raising a transnational awareness of LGBTQI lives and the solidarity networks available to them. If this research contributes, even slightly, to the betterment of conditions for trans people, from a simple decrease of targeted transgender killings to a raised sense of social justice, then it will realize at least one of its missions, that is, its mission as a political project.
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