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**The Fields of Trans\* Necropolitics: Trans Women's Narratives  
On the Vulnerabilities of Trans Death, Bereavement,  
Posthumous Challenges and Activism in Turkey**

Master Thesis in Gendering Practices (30 hec)

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## Abstract

This study aims to bring forward the phenomenon of trans death, underscoring the challenges that trans women in İstanbul experience, endure and confront during the posthumous scenes of autopsy, funeral and burial. Departing from and developing the concept of trans necropolitics, I examine trans death in two explanatory layers. First, I endeavor to theorize the mortuary processes of death within the context of Turkey and construe the necropolitical structures that interrupt and demarcate the trans death in the margins of sociality. Second, I examine the ways trans community and trans/feminist activism react, build remembrances and protest against the hate murders and the administrative violence in respect to the afterlife of the Hande Kader and Werde. As the last discussion, I engage in diffractive analysis of the transgender image in terms of its temporal and spatial materiality in the postmortem activisms and performance art.

Adhering to a multifaceted methodology, I share the narratives from the semi-structured in-depth interviews that I conducted with seven research participants who identify trans women. My research questions travel between two premises throughout the research: 1) What kind of challenges, conflicts and contingencies occur in the event of trans death and the afterlife? 2.) In what circumstances and solidarities can or cannot trans women in İstanbul procure recognition for their funerals and establish remembrances for their loss? The posthumous trans activism in İstanbul not only engenders the juxtapositions of different feminist agencies in the protests as a necrospace but also various segments of the society converge in an effort to construct a proper remembrance. Expounding these vulnerabilities and juxtapositions within the limits of cultural analysis, I also take notice of the entangled nature of gender, labor, and class.

**Keywords:** Necropolitics, trans/feminist activism, collective remembrance, bereavement, transgender image, Turkey.

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*...then the family came. They inscribed the assigned female name on the tombstone. We went there and broke the tombstone a week later. They renewed it. We went one week later and broke it again. They never touched it ever since. Now, Aligül is written on it and it will remain Aligül for good.<sup>1</sup>*

## **Introduction**

It sparked outrage among American queer audience when a transgender woman Jennifer Gable died of natural causes and her family misgendered her in the funeral process, from the clothing to the eulogy.<sup>2</sup> If the death of someone requires a relative morality or a desire to preserve one's identity, death and afterlife of transgender people may constitute one of the most demarcated areas of necrospace where that desire cannot be accomplished. Although the death in the margins can demand transnational analysis, it is also a phenomenon that is culturally, religiously and symbolically contingent. This study explores the event of trans death and the structures of the death phenomenon for trans people in İstanbul, Turkey, by conducting in-depth interviews with trans\* women as the participant group.

The main purpose of this research is to bring forward the phenomenon of trans death, pointing out the challenges that trans women experience, endure and confront during the posthumous processes of autopsy, funeral and burial. The main impulse for this study is rooted in incessant sequences of harassment, physically violent acts and also hate murders against LGBTI+ people in Turkey, particularly trans women. Among the plethora of hate crimes, to acknowledge the phenomenon of death as a point of entry in the gender discussions would help understand the struggle, resilience and resurgence of LGBTI+ people, trans women to narrow down the scope. Among other research endeavors, the study also problematizes the numerative approach to the concepts of murder and killing and highlights the death on the periphery so as to comprehend what kind of necropolitical governmentality is exerted on trans funerals, cemeteries and autopsy, to enumerate the ways of resilience and solidarities around the aftermath of death among trans women, to disclose the symbolic attributions of necro-related notions in activisms and their embedded configurations such as feminist solidarities, activist intersections and trans temporalities through the narratives of trans women.

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<sup>1</sup> The story will be analyzed in later chapters.

<sup>2</sup> To reach the news link, <http://www.orderofthegooddeath.com/dying-trans-preserving-identity-death>, retrieved on 30.06.2017.

Because of my tendency to focus on the situation of transgender women and the activism they are involved in, a general introduction about the LGBTI+<sup>3</sup> people and activism in Turkey would locate the topic of the research on a context. There has never been a criminalization law ever imposed against LGBTI+s in Turkey. Yet, the lack of constitutional protection on the gender identity and sexual orientation deprives LGBTI+s of building the legal basis for a possible discrimination they could face in the areas of housing, work, health and access to justice etc. Moreover, recondite and relative concepts such as “public morality” or “public order” in certain laws increase the risk of limiting or criminalizing the LGBTI+s mobility, reaching to the level of a suit to close down an LGBTI+ organization in 2006 (hopefully the association –Lambdaistanbul- won the case). However there have also been positive juridical decisions as well, in the employment discrimination cases or hate murder cases. Roşin Çiçek, who was murdered by his father and two uncles, found justice after five year and the murderers were subjected to life imprisonment. In contrast, case of Ahmet Yıldız, who was killed by his father with the same impetus have yet to find justice even after nine years because his father cannot be caught by the law-enforcement although the father even got divorced meanwhile, which means that the state would locate the father’s position if traced properly. Hence, the lack of constitutional protection, ambiguous concepts in the law and established homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in the society and in the institutions provide LGBTI+s in Turkey nothing more than a limited recognition and a secondary citizen status which put lives at stake vis-à-vis the discrimination and violence of any sort.

In the trans-specific context, the level of vulnerability to above-mentioned discrimination and violence increases. To global reports, trans women in Turkey have been subjected to various kinds of violence in recent years and gone through legal challenges to find social justice. (ILGA, 2016) According to Trans Murder Monitoring Report to highlight Trans Day of Remembrance, the reported figures show that there have been forty-four hate murders against trans and gender-diverse people in Turkey between 2008 and 2016 (Tvt Research Project, 2016). Besides the figures, the research findings of particular organizations also give a thought about the interrupted lives of trans women in İstanbul and proximity to the death, thereto. 90 percent of trans women have experienced police violence at least once in their lives (Lambdaistanbul LGBTİ, 2010). Over seventy percent of trans women face violence from the unknown individuals (ibid.). A similar survey recorded 267 right violations since the

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<sup>3</sup> As of 2013, the movement in Turkey adopted this synonym thanks to intersex activism, including “+” for queer and beyond.

last year, most of which are entailed as physical and psychological violence including threats, bodily harm, sexual assault and hate speech (Ördek, 2016, p.40). Apart from violence-based figures, trans people in general have been exposed to other sorts of discriminations in housing, employment, health, family etc. in much more frequency than other non-trans LGBs (Yılmaz & Göçmen, 2015).

Although the first legislation on the sex reassignment surgery (SRS) granted the right to order a change in the birth register (Atamer, 2005), during the legal process of pre-SRS psychotherapy, trans women are required to conform to normative modeling of female and must be 18 or above and had no family (Zengin, 2016). Forced sterilization is also another compulsory process if one wants to be legally entitled to have “pink” ID. Although a same-color card is being issued recently, the ID cards are still separated in tandem with gender binary, female-pink, male-blue, which puts trans people in dangerous situations in public and strengthen the binary. Turkey with its over twenty years of LGBTI+ activism has come to a point that there are institutional organizations that can give legal and psychological guidance for the community. Gezi Protests<sup>4</sup> were also effective for the movement to take action together against the planning policies and police brutality, make a publicity of the movement itself and also its relations outside other LGBTI+ collectives that participate in the Gezi (Ünan, 2015). After Gezi there has been an increase in support for the LGBTI+ visibility in the local (e.g. first lesbian municipality council member was elected). The two parties which have a positive stance on the issue, HDP (Peoples’ Democratic Party) and CHP (Republican Peoples’ Party-main opposition) have shown more support. As well as the relative changes in the political parties, Gezi Park Protests also reinvented a political platform where the Turkish Left and other underrepresented groups such as LGBTI+s and environmentalists originated new intractions. (Eskinat, 2013) However, recent years of organized authoritarianism has brought backlash to the movement. Nobody would expect a drawback in LGBTI+ rights in pride parades which have been organized for 15 years. İstanbul Pride Week has been celebrated for 25 years. For three years in a row, the parade has been attacked by the police with the excuse of security and the activists were taken into police custody for a while. Considering such context for LGBTI+s, the queer livability of one’s identities in freedom can be interpreted more properly for the next discussions on death.

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<sup>4</sup> Gezi Park Protests refer to the civil unrest that started against the urban plan regulation imposed by the government for İstanbul Gezi Park, one of the rare green places around Taksim and a historically important area. Starting as a sit-in, the protests attracted many supporting groups after the police’s excessive force. The protests also carried other concerns on freedom of speech, free media, increasingly authoritarian regime etc.

The postmortem reality of death as an experienced phenomenon develops the framework of the study by engaging in the narratives of trans women in İstanbul as well as doing participant observation in one funeral. I conduct in depth, semi-structured interviews with seven trans women participants, face-to-face interviews with the six and the one through email. I also recount to discourse analysis over the narratives of trans women on the issue of death and trans hate murders in general, expanding the reasoning through analyzing the cisnormative discourses in religion, bureaucracy and services. Content analysis over the narratives of the activist and artistic scenes they and the allies performed during the protests shape the ethnographic construction of the research. Various ethnographic research methods and theories are utilized during this study to generate a deeper comprehension of the phenomenon.

As death is an all-encompassing term, the death of the periphery –which I dared to say trans death in this sense- is my narrowed focus on the issue, whose space is deemed “interminably buriable and limitedly grievable” (Butler, 2004) in dominant discourses of heteronormativity. Going beyond the judicial and right-based accounts of hate murders, I dwell upon the remains of the death and the afterlife of the deceased in activism. At this point, the phenomenon of trans death is explained in a way that addresses to trans women’s narratives on their personal experience of trans deaths –specifically to hate murders. My research questions move between two dispositions -challenges and solidarities- for different parts of the discussion: *1) What kind of challenges, conflicts and contingencies occur in the event of trans death and the afterlife? 2.) In what circumstances and solidarities can or cannot trans women in İstanbul procure recognition for their funerals and establish remembrances for their loss?* Taking into account the people’s multiple positions of labor, ethnicity and mobility, a proper example of ethnographic research on trans death in Turkey may reveal cues on delineating the governmentality of death on trans women.

For the first chapter, I discuss about the different structures trans women can be subjected to in postmortem situations such as in the funeral. The personal accounts of the trans women on the experiences with death shed light on realities of institutional violence and challenges with the families. The second chapters focus on the refugeeism and human mobility and how necropolitic space would circumscribe the death of trans refugee women. I also pay special attention to labor factor considering the sex work trans refugee women can be involved. For the second part of this chapter, different confrontations with other socially marginalized societies and posthumous protests are given place. For the third part, I took a step to analyze

the activist materiality and symbolism with a different theorization of narration, dwelling upon the narratives of the material and performance art.

## **Literature Review**

As I will be engaged in trans narratives and a small-scale ethnography, I recount to various literatures that focus on trans women's studies both specific to engendered discrimination and to the event of death. There are two parts that constitute this literature research: trans ethnographies that focus on trans women's narratives and the studies that comprise trans women's experiences in Turkey and, secondly the works that centralize the event of death and trans necropolitics are discussed. The reason I include the studies on sex labor of trans women in the first part stems from the fact that some of the research participants used to and (some) still work as sex workers and that the trans women's space and the political activist demands particular to this issue in İstanbul is entangled with sex labor and workers' rights.

### **Trans Narratives**

The academic and activist scholarship on trans/gender subjectivity examines different aspects of trans women's narratives and life stories which have become important part of academic discussions on transgender studies. While particular works focus on the trans women's realities on gender correction/reassignment processes (Platero, 2011; Bremer, 2013), others include accounts of experienced or witnessed discrimination, violence, ostracization as well as their achievements and rights advocacy (Stryker, 2008; Morgan et al., 2009; Girshick, 2008). The former part of the narrative formulation contributes to trans embodiment, trans selves and their constant confrontations with medical gatekeepers and the medical system that works to the service of pathologization of trans women. The later includes life stories that touch upon various agendas in trans people's lives, historicizes, archives and highlights the individual accounts of discrimination as phenomenon.

Some studies perceive the narration from artistic and aesthetic point of view, focusing on the representation of trans imaginaries in popular or sub- culture such as in visual media (Dutta, 2015; Glevor, 2016), literature (Snorton, 2012; Halmqvist, 2017) and in contemporary art (Halberstam, 2005). Much as the topic of these sources is not specifically death, the theorizations of this part of literature helps me re-shape my considerations on the transgender image in the sense that they embed a temporality in the discourses of transgender image.



Halmqvist's work has brought forward the Swedish literature from eighteens which bears characters and stories that are transcending the normative figures of gender and sexuality, thus unearthing the early modern trans-literature. Halberstam emphasizes on the concepts of time and space upon which the transgender image in USA has been transformed and how it has been reflected on the contemporary visual productions.

As for literature in Turkish, I have not come across a research that posits trans necropolitics as its focus to study the experiences of trans women. They are mostly gay focused field research. The academic literature on trans women in Turkey comprises studies of trans narratives on the SRS procedures and trans historicity (Berghan, 2007), the studies that the LGBTI+ organizations published on the rights violations that I mentioned in the introduction and also the ones that focus on the processes of transition and trans activism. The two books to highlight here, "80'lerde Lubunya Olmak" (Gürsü & Elitemiz, 2012) (To Be a Lubunya<sup>5</sup> in 80s) and 90'larda Lubunya Olmak (2013) (To be Lubunya in 90s) published by Siyah Pembe Üçgen (Black Pink Triangle) Association in İzmir include personal accounts of trans women with an aim to create a queer oral history. In their stories, the historicity of police violence and the oppression are revealed and the audience can also read about the first attempts of resistance against the police raids into trans women's houses and queer spaces such as bars and streets.

Among those streets, Ülker Sokak, a trans resettlement around Beyoğlu, İstanbul constitutes one of the earliest examples of police brutality and gentrification that deported trans people out of their neighborhood tortured and forcefully detained them and eventually forced them to leave the street. Selek (2011) defines the displacement of Ülker Street as part of a systematic state and civil-militia exclusion and violence in the name of "beautifying" the neighborhood which still endures its structures against trans people's right to life and reside. This type of confrontations with the state forces and the transphobic mobs maintains its reality even today in Bayram Street (an earlier settlement than Ülker Street) for 35 years, in Avcılar Meis Sitesi (İstanbul), Eryaman in Ankara.

The trans literature that is engaged with the narratives of trans women contribute to my research in terms of formulization and re-narration of the participants' stories. These narratives help situate the conditions of the living trans between life and death thus adding to

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<sup>5</sup> Lubunya is an umbrella term like queer, generally referring to transgender women or trans-feminine gays in Lubunca, the queer slang which etimologically derives from Romany. Although in the past it was used by transvestites only, now it has become a general slang used among many LGBTI+s in Turkey.

the purpose of this study. My contribution to the field of the trans narratives aims to shift the focus from the life challenges to the limitations and possibilities in death and afterlife, which is also concentric with the challenges of the deceased's surrounding from the same community.

### **On Trans\* Death**

Particular resources that support comprehensive guidelines for trans people have allocated a special place for Trans death where the concept is usually associated with the aging, to a proximity to the normal course of dying (Ippolito & Witten, 2014, pp.493-95). The cited guide suggests certain procedures to cope with the death, the inheritance issues, the problems with true names on death certificates, the funeral procedures including intervention on the bodies etc. A similar guide for trans people living in the UK has categorized bureaucratic procedures to follow after a trans friend's death from funerals, will and costs and advised on how to deal with the possible challenges the deceased's loved ones may go through (Whittle, 2007). The guide also analyzes these steps peculiar to trans death under the process of bereavement. Although such guides deal with possible transphobic applications after the death of a transgender person, their focus is mainly around the natural course of death and in the limits of USA or UK citizenship and whiteness. However, the violative forms of services and applications can be observed on trans funerals outside the Anglocentric or white contexts with distinctive and maybe more vehement features since the circulation of the phenomenon of trans death is constitutively different. One of the purposes of this research is to point out this differentiation and how the legal procedures may not suffice for a proper remembrance of the loss.

At this point, the remembrance of trans people of color requires specific attention within certain geographies such as USA and Germany. The value extracted from the death of trans of color has been instrumentalized for the sake of homonationalist agenda serving to the interests and imaginaries of the racialized queer activism and media which reincorporate transgender body of color under a gay male body (Snorton & Haritaworn, 2013). Their formulation of afterlife and "value grid" (ibid., p. 68) in the event of trans death contributes to this study in elaborating on how transgender image is posited and transphobia works in the Turkish context. Following a similar path in analyzing the concept of afterlife, I revisit the governance of trans death during the protests in Istanbul against hate murders.

Transphobic and anti-immigrant structures on the transnational and institutional level have also promoted technologies of *rightful killing* against the human mobilities transcending borders. Shakhsari (2013) analyzes the death of Naz, an Iranian transgender woman peacekeeper who committed suicide from this point of view where the image of transgender death has been utilized within the limits of “gay internationalism and the national and transnational actors perpetrate the mechanisms of life-enhancing / death-enforcing structures for trans refugees. The concepts of “rightful killing” and “life-as-death” (Shakhsari, 2014, p.1008) they theorizes for their later works about the conditions of trans refugees will be useful for both the theorization part of my research and for the next chapters where I will engage with the case of a trans woman refugee.

Though not directly related to trans death and trans funerals but to the positionality of trans death, some sources make references to various areas where trans necropolitics is practically imposed. The incarceration of and the discrimination against trans people, especially the ones with HIV positive status (Gossett, 2014), the gentrification and purification projects of cities from prostitution and sex work (Edelman, 2014) and the legal frameworks that administrate the trans populations in life and death (Rukovsky, 2015) are among many discussions that comprise the peculiarities of trans necrospace are exemplified. Such works bestow different perspectives on the literature of trans death as a newly-fledgling study field and initiate probable patterns to analyze for my thesis.

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

Theoretical building in this chapter involves different perspectives on transgender issue ranging from Foucauldian to post-material discussions. If I need to assure my position under an umbrella term, one would observe the theoretical framework in this study is constituted by the prepositions of poststructuralist theory (Scott, 1988) in regard to binary deconstructions and identity definitions. This is not to assume transgender identity has to be on the side of non-binary (which may not be the case for this research) but to give possible space to dynamism where trans identities are formulated within distinctive solidarities. Foucault’s concept of power/knowledge as producers of the subjects that are both transcendental in its own boundaries and embedded in the cultural practice of power relations (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, pp.60-63) also contributes to the theoretical framework of this research in a way to understand how this cultural practice of gendering the death imposes governmentality over trans women.

## Necropolitics: The Politics of Death and Natality of Death Worlds

If there is a theory for death, one may need to construct it starting from the life and its politics beforehand. Necropolitics with its enlarged meaning that I will endeavor to explain later has its theoretical roots in the concept of *biopolitics* with regard to Foucault's theory of governmentality (Foucault, 1978). Foucault suggests that the sovereign used to exert its power over life through absolute terms before 19<sup>th</sup> century modernity; however, its power is not unconditional in deciding life and death in contemporary politics. The sovereign has "indirect" power over the subjectivities through its judiciary and executive instruments. He explains this shift: "...the ancient right to *take* life or *let* live was replaced by a power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death" (ibid., p. 138). Although he focuses on the *fostering* through the biopower instruments (birth controls, medical technologies, reproduction projects) of the sovereign administering, disciplining and regulating the people's lives, as well as dictating dominant sexuality, I would like to question how the *disallowing* appears on the points of trans death. Disallowing denotes a more constant manifestation of a process than *take* life and nullifies the finality of death on part of the subjectivity, trans women in this case.

The practice of the sovereign is instrumentalized and sustained through the techniques of both anatomo- and bio-political power which brings another dimension of segregation and social hierarchization, "guaranteeing relations of domination and effects of hegemony" (Foucault, 1978, p.141). This sort of link to the segregation becomes a dominator for me to explain the incessant violent acts trans women are exposed to in life and the regulatory mechanisms that shape their death in the line of utility and value although Foucault's point is not specific to death. At this point, not only the bios as the realm of life but also the realm of death is regulated by the sovereign whose instruments create *death worlds* and subjugate populations to a status of *living dead*, which adds up to the necropolitics of the state (Mbembe, 2003). Taking an example of Palestinian plight, the sovereign deploys its power not only with conventional weapons and war tactics but also has a capacity to relegate a certain segment of citizens to a status of continuous disposability (ibid. p.27; Joronen, 2015).

In an effort to explain the atrocities and the structures of the camp during Nazi period, the concept of thanatopolitics<sup>6</sup> was introduced. With thanatopolitics, the death of population(s) has been analyzed within the frameworks of how the sovereignty's right to kill is established and transformed through the history with the means of its biopolitical power through which

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<sup>6</sup> "Thanato" meaning death in Greek and Thanatos is the God of Death.

the governance of death is accrued and managed (Agamben, 1998; Joronen, 2015; Nasir, 2017). However, construing the link between biopolitics and thanatopolitics requires more comprehensive theorization that transcends the theory of camp as well as Nazi regime and calls for reconsideration of contemporary death worlds beyond singular forms of biopolitics as totalitarian regimes (Rukovsky, 2015, pp.19-20). This is where the notion of necropolitics can claim more place in discussions of politics of death beyond since it speaks more to the spatiality and temporality of the subjugated Other.

Where does the condition of trans life situate in this necropolitical space? Besides the livability of being trans, how is the necropolitical governmentality is wielded in the frontiers of trans death? Agamben (1998, p. 84-86) expounds how biopolitical and thanatopolitical mechanisms of power define the juridical positioning of *homo sacer* (*sacred human*), a term to define (non) juridical subject who bears the “capacity to be killed but not sacrificed” and whose life is located outside human jurisdiction, defined as ‘bare life’ referring to a life sustained in the ‘state of exception’, the zone of indistinction, and the continuous vulnerability that *homo sacer* maintains. The exceptionality and unsanctionable killing of *homo sacer* is reinforced by “the double exclusion (from human and divine space) into which he is taken and the violence to which he finds himself exposed” [emphasis added] (ibid. p. 82-83). In a similar vein, Arendt considers the death in the Nazi camps in the holes of oblivion and non-human spaces where the Jewish “death was avoided or postponed indefinitely” (1951/1961, p.454) with the destruction of human bodies.

Although Arendt’s and Agamben’s theorization highlights the construction of sovereign’s enemy taking into consideration the subject and structures of biopolitics thus relating *homo sacer*’s position to trans subjectivity, they may not suffice to explain the perpetuity of marginalized death. Not limiting the queer death in the state of exception, emergency or siege, Shaksari (2013, p. 574-575) emphasizes the perpetuity of imminent death of transgender refugees and locates the life of queer migrant population at the threshold between life and death as the *living dead* who can be killed “rightfully in the name of rights and global justice.” Considering the refugee application processes, the trans death is constrained within the chronopolitical conditionalities of rights’ regime which brings violation of the individual rights (Shakhsari, 2014, p.1011).

This paradigm of necropolitical permanence may present the complicities of trans death which manifests itself in the afterlife of trans women and in the processes of bereavement and

remembrance. Butler (2004) describes lives in the margins, as ‘in a state of suspension between life and death’ where they can’t be “mourned since they are already lost” (in non-reality) or in the process of derealization of their human subject (pp. 33-36). Although she narrates her thoughts against the post 9/11’s foreclosing of the critical dissent in USA, I would like to draw a pathway to skew these questions into the trans vulnerability. The derealization and interruption of trans death is enforced by the administrative violence by the state and its institutions in the afterlife of trans people. Thus, Butler’s and Shakhari’s conceptualization of queer death goes beyond the definition of bear life and opens up the question of ‘near life’ which signifies onto-corporeal (non) sociality where the overkill of the queer in terms of afterlives left behind is exercised by deeming their death in the spaces of non-existence and indistinction (Stanley, 2011, pp.12-14). Hence, the death in the margins relates to the epistemic and structural violence perpetuated through history of exclusion and alienation (Fanon, 1952). The event of trans crypt at this point, emblemizes the ‘untraceability of antitrans violence,’ assigning that territory of death as the province of the trans (Stanley, 2011, p.15).

I problematize the locality of queer death as analyzed here, recalling my second research question on the recognition of trans death. The position Butler (2004, p. 34) designates as “ungrievable and interminably buriable” creates a conundrum in the interpretation of the agency and concede the trans death to an everlasting necrospace. Accordingly, the spaces of the non-being as well as the spaces of trans death can reach up to making other conventions of struggles, protests and activism possible by practicing non-sovereign coping mechanisms (Aizura, 2014). In a similar vein, Irit Katz (2015) examines the space of death not only in the limits of necropolitics but also in the notion of ‘natality’ (Arendt, 1958) which proposes a politically productive area of natality against the systematic production of deaths. This is not to celebrate on any death nor glorify it, rather to acknowledge a reality of human condition in the afterlife.

In a nutshell, the theoretical circulation on trans necropolitics can be summarized into three methodological stances on the position of trans death, the last two of which include the aim of this research.

- A. Trans necropolitics may refer to theorizations on the exclusion of trans people (of color) from the gentrified and racialized queer/LGB spaces.

- B. It can be studied within the frameworks of state applications and with an effort to elaborate on the systematic discrimination and exclusion of trans people from public spaces of life and death, which I will exemplify in the analysis of the cemetery and funerals.
- C. Trans necropolitics can refer to a non-derogatory space of thanatopolitics where non-sovereign coping mechanisms collaborate, creating distinct characteristics of trans solidarities and discloses novel conceptualizations of death, dying and afterlife. I dwell upon these possible schemes of convention towards the last chapters.

### **Intersectionality As a Moment of Experience**

Intersectionality is not novel but dynamic theory in social and cultural sciences that builds its formulations from and widely applied in gender studies. Among other post-structuralist theories, this theory takes its stance from the discrimination on the grounds of multiple identities tied to one's race, gender, sexual orientation, status, age etc. The theory argues for a multiple and simultaneous functioning of segregated oppressions in the society. It also makes it inevitable to look from multidimensional and diversified perspectives. The reason I allocate a place for this type of theorization is because I would like to underline the dynamics of privileges that come with the differentiation of identities among trans women in Turkey. The stories display distinctive scenes when the participant comes from less privileged, ethnically marginalized communities such as Kurdish populations.

Theoretical background for and intersection of multiple oppressions takes the roots from 1970s with the criticism of Black Feminist Movement and the most proficient work has been created by Black feminists in the field. Black feminist movement can be regarded as a middle step for gradually adopting a Third Wave Feminist perspective. These times were when the oppression systems of racism and patriarchy are actually understood to process together and finally verbalized by activists and academics. Bell hooks was one of the major Black feminist writers that criticizes the sisterhood and universalist accounts of the feminist movement. In her book (1981), she reveals the racist perceptions on black women both by the society and within feminist organizations. The further critiques are based on the exclusion of the specificities of racialized identities and the universality claim of feminism (Collins, 1986; Crenshaw, 1989).

Recent examples of major authors like Collins are also on place. According to Crenshaw, contemporary punishment culture still continues and the various gendered dimensions of racial discrimination have continued to bear unpredictable burdens and disadvantages for Black women (Collins, 2012, pp.1420-71). This punishment culture against marginalized communities in Turkey is not a new phenomenon to discuss. In this sense the intersectional theory helps understand the privilege positions of identities holistically. In a nutshell, intersectional theory enjoys four core principles (Collins, 2012: 453-455); first, it regards the positionality of individuals in a matrix of domination and a system of oppressions. Secondly, individuals experience discrimination and oppression simultaneously. Thirdly, the intersectional thought respects rationality in a sense that class, race, gender, ethnicity systems operate in a rational process. Fourthly, for intersectionality, not only actual communities (social structures) but also worldview (knowledge) are rational and interrelated.

A new turn in interpretation of identity politics can be read through the novel writings of feminist intersections. Yuval-Davis' theorization of transversality (Yuval-Davis, 2006) proposes a turn from the identity politics articulating the distinctions between me and us. Transversal politics situates the intersectionality on borders and boundaries across membership and develops a collective belonging "us" (Yuval-Davis, 2010). She proposes a dialogical truth achieved through different encounters of solidarities without excluding the difference factor in positioning. And yet the transversality is accomplished via emphasis of commonness: "The boundaries of transversal dialogue are those of common values rather than those of common positionings or identifications" (ibid. 278).

In her work "The Dialogue That Died", based on Yuval-Davis' term "transversal politics", Cynthia Cockburn (2014) centers upon the Palestinian and Jewish women struggle in favor of Occupied Lands Israel state claim and she also focuses on challenges among women within the Bat Shalom. Her main aim is to indicate the uniqueness of Bat Shalom as a revolutionary activist movement which seems to have managed the transversal politics in considerable sense. She also aims to propose innovative perspectives to achieve transversality. I interpret this as a real *experience of the intersectional moment* reaching beyond the framework supposition by early Black feminist mentioned above. Similarly, trans women in İstanbul has had shared and conflicted encounters with feminists, Romani people and various segments of the society. These intermeshed encounters bring about new interactions and dissolutions in the trans activism in Turkey, which is diverse and engaged with general politics, as well. In the



temporalities of posthumous scenes, I follow the tracks of these intersected encounters through the trans women's narratives.

Richard Juang (2006) on intersectionality and trans politics proposes that the recognition struggles tend to exclude trans people from their frameworks of achievements and see trans existence as aberrant cases. Civil equality for trans people has been inadequate in the practices of contemporary politics. Juang (2006, pp. 709) underlines the pattern of synergism in explaining intersectionality, the synergy that connect seemingly separate acts of violence and discrimination in intertwined links between one another. This also means that each case of oppression has its own importance and urgency. How this urgency is shared and marked between cis-women activism and trans activism is also included as a separate chapter in this study. To better situate the practice of the shared values and motivations between two movements, I utilize a Foucauldian theory that stratifies the similitude between the approaching movements/things. This may also add a new dimension to the intersectional theory in a way to clarify the dynamics of two movements.

### **Transgender Theory**

The theoretical structure of trans narratives would be inadequate without referring to the transgender theory of trans experience which contributes to the composition of the analysis as well. I present some of the concepts particular to trans study circles that were manifested in the verbalizations of the research participants related to the discussions of cisgenderism, and tranifests since they may signify a transversal configuration of trans theorization and activist practices. Transgender theory builds its inter/trans-disciplinary roots from the trans autobiographies and histories –especially those of Sandy Stone and Susan Stryker-, transfeminist critiques to transphobia/transmysogyny and critiques to queer figuration of transgender.

Feminist transphobia during 1970s academic and activist circles have become both as a sourcebook and a goad for transgender theorization, although they were not true representatives of feminism (Stryker, 2008, p.106). The phobic associations of trans experience to rape, invasion in feminist solidarity or agents of patriarchal oppression, mutilation and deformation has also drawn not only criticism that shapes the theory but also the rage from trans women who have been discursively stigmatized in the feminist movement. As another way to boycott against trans-exclusive accounts, redefinition of transgender, what Sandy Stone (2006) defines as post-transsexual in her manifesto written in 1993, has been

brought into the feminist discussions where trans experience was located in regard to its own conditionality rather than disparaging connotations of radical feminists. Stone's critique to textual violence imposed upon trans being in the academic and activist texts has given reconstructive force for trans people to reformulate both the category and the theorization. Stryker's formation of trans rage in her monologue "My Words to Frankenstein" (1994) outlines the limits of signification and livability for trans subjectivity in relation to materialization of hir inside/outside dispositions in the realms of symbolic order that subjugates the transgender being.

Queer definitions of gender liminality also drew criticism from trans circles, especially Butler's (1990) formulation of gender performativity around the drag performance, which has been criticized for disregarding the actuality of transgender experience, relegating it to the practice of drag and erases trans subjectivity (Namaste, 1996). However, since the post-transsexuality emphasizes on the social embodiment and gendered sense of the self on textual and discursive levels, Butler's theorizing of gender system vis-à-vis body as a discourse that delineates the lines and perception of bodies can contribute to transgender theorization (Stryker, 2006; 2008). Performative Turn does affect the writings of transgender theory in its essence; from reclaiming monstrosity, subverting dominant discourses to the definitions of transgender as both cross-dress and to a more diverse umbrella of "identities and practices that cross over ... socially constructed sex/gender binaries" (Roen, 2006, p.658).

The theorization of gender-transgression and transifests is also concretized by the words of some participants, some of whom have the long years of activist experience. Neva defined the root of antitrans thought as societal attributions for people's genitalia and the structures we built around the binary. She also does not believe a trans person can be "fully integrated to the system as LGBs can." Again, another participant who preferred to stay anonymous mentioned a 'frequency' that keeps transgender people together and same: "a frequency of the lowest where there is the minimum of everything in life." As a theoretically improvable term connected with the marginality of death that I theorized before, this frequency refers to a monolithic layer whose space does imbeds little signification for lesbians and gays. Not to generalize, however, this sort of positionality of trans women in Turkey can reveal the class dynamics of some of the transgender people, alienated from the normative capitalist structures and displaced from the streets they used to maintain life, but today populated with many well-off lesbian and gays (Erdoğan & Köten, 2014, p.102).

Fazilet, a well-known trans activist and also one of my research participants expounds the vitality of trans identity in the efforts of gender non-confirmative transifests and through transgressing gender binaries in daily life: “I didn’t want to melt into the ‘system’ women by being biological woman. Let them understand I am trans.” One may discern from these two participants’ definitions that the queer theorization does not have to be incompatible with positionality of the trans subjectivity out of Western contexts although this may not be the case for every trans woman in the context of Turkey. Any theoretical supposition would be inadequate without the transgender conceptualizations, which I urge myself to textually practice it in the analysis.

### **Diffraction Production: Narratives of the Material?**

As the last component of theoretical discussions, I try to change the text stream from the discursive accounts of governmentality and engage in the agential realism and the new materialism, following Karen Barad’s (2007) theoretical introduction. Most of this part frames the analytical praxis of the last chapter which centers on cultural critique on transgender aesthetic in art and activist performances. Return of the matter in feminist theorization as epistemological standpoint has built from the earlier studies on transgender embodiment and the critique of feminist universality. Drawing from Hawking’s generated voice what she calls “prosthesis/extension of one’s person”, Sandy Stone elaborates on the posttranssexual embodiment and how the trans prosthesis (hormones and surgery) “extends a sense of self” and situates the episteme of the trans subject’s embodiment and identity (Stryker, 2008, pp.126-28). Here one can think of the narrative force that the corporeality of the material (the prosthesis) imbues, which refers to the force that prelusively becomes a determinant agency in the transgender realities. Similarly, the Haraway’s cyborg imaginary propounds a unique epistemology in favor of the partial/relative communication with the materiality of the knowledge, which she sees as “a way out of the maze of dualisms, in which we have explained our bodies, our tools to ourselves” (1991, pp.315-16).

Challenging the binary construction between the discursive and material, the agential materialism suggests a diffractive methodology regarding not only inter but also intra-action among human or non-human subjectivities whose materiality is produced by the ‘differential patterns of mattering’ what Barad defines as ‘phenomenon’ (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, pp.110-17). Intra-activity suggests an agential realist understanding of discourse and matter, both of which are entangled feature of the material that is shifting and transforming in the realizations of the non-human. Barad’s methodology on the episteme is significant in this

matrix. “An ontoepistemological stance asserts that practices of knowing and being .... are mutually implicated” (ibid., p. 116). How was the materiality transformed during this research in terms of the physical material that I used in the interviews (photos and videos), the content and what it embodies and the sound of my voice and gestures while asking certain ‘fragile’ questions? The multiple bodies or the embodiment of materiality have indicated mutual relationship, affecting one another thus creating a posthumanist performativity (Barad, 2007 cited in Taguchi, 2012, p.271).

My analysis on activist materiality incorporates two ‘patterns of mattering’ (phenomenon); 1) the mattering of rainbow as a transnational friction in the trans-activist space (Alm & Martinsson, 2016), 2) the mattering of performance art around the transnational theme and protests of trans hate murders. I explain what sort of diffractive intra-action is enacted in the matters of trans death.

## **Material, Methodology and Ethical Reflection**

### **Research Methods**

I adopt a qualitative approach and develop it through narrative, content and discourse analyses. I conducted seven semi-structured/in-depth interviews with research participants who identify trans women; six of them were face-to-face interviews, one of them was through emails due to the informant’s wish. The oral accounts in an ethnographic research can count a valid method to understand the phenomenon in two ways, first through reading what the participants tell us about the phenomenon and “analyzing them in terms of the perspective they imply, the discursive strategies they employ” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, pp.97-98). Furthermore, narrative analysis of the oral accounts contributes to a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the experience, raise researcher’s own awareness and recognition of temporality (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, pp.157-58; Bell, 2002, p.209).

The structure of interviews and the line of questions differ in each interview towards a more structured one with open-ended questions. The reason behind this was to incrementally ground myself in the interview processes since this way I managed to improve on the communication with the next respondent. As much as solicited accounts that were based on the specific questions, certain unsolicited accounts (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, pp.99-103) by the participant related to specific perspectives and concerns on e.g. ethnicity, activism etc. opened new frameworks of positionings during interviews. This has been a rare form of

indication of naturalness for me although I cannot call my questioning non-directive one. I follow phenomenological interviewing by focusing on the lived experience of the participants, dividing the phenomenon of death into three discussions: the concept of death, the trans death and the performance of death. Both emphasizing past and present experience of phenomena and emphasizing the textures of the experience in my own subjective knowledge (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p.153), the position of the inquiry is shifted to a more structured one.

Although only one of the participants wants to remain anonymous for the study, I hesitated to mention human names on this research. I acknowledge that the personas come with the names, especially if those names are prominent figures in the LGBTI+ activism (two of my participants were). However, I also give lots of thoughts on the rising authoritarianism that we have had experience in Turkey, that journalists kept in jail, academics dismissed, activists arrested, traditional İstanbul LGBTI+ parade intervened by the police since 2015, the organizations that are affiliated with the people I interviewed are targeted to hate speeches. In such political environment, should I be confidential of their identity although I personally know that all of them (except one) do some sort of activist work as open trans women and all consented on their names used for the research? Would this not fool their participation effort and devitalize their embedded experience peculiar to their names (O'reilly, 2012, pp.68-69)? I would rather go for my first concern; ethical and security risks. The anonymity may eviscerate the different identities and profile-specific experience where the narratives occupy; however I hesitate to face ethical risks that may occur afterwards both for this study and as the possible risks for the participants. Therefore during the analysis, I keep their names private and assign a pseudonym. I describe the profiles of the participants in relation to their activist work as a reference to the specific discussions, not going into personal details. I always wrote or spoke about the content and aim of the research and the structures of the interviews also sent it if wanted before meeting any participants. I write the names in the chronological order of the interviews. One remains anonymous, one was through email.

**Açelya:** Although I never met Açelya in person before this research, I knew her from her role in LGBTI+ activist visibility. I contacted her through Facebook after seeing a post from her about the death of a common friend from LGBTI+ circle, Boysan Yakar. She was so nice to contribute in any ways because we both thought it is important to talk about our losses. We met at a restaurant but had to switch seats a couple of times because we feel interrupted by the cis-gazes and murmurs from the customers nearby.

**Neva:** I applied for SPoD<sup>7</sup>'s academic counseling, the LGBTI+ organization I did my internship in. Neyir Zerey, the academy coordinator advised me about Neva. I knew about Neva and her input for trans oral history production from activist space but never met in person. Neva is a trans activist and also DJ at mostly queer parties. We met in a cafe.

**Duru:** I already knew Duru in person through my internship work in SPoD. Duru volunteers as a political activist and helps the organization at the trans therapy sessions. She is also involved in sociology in the university. We met at a café with Duru and she was willing to tell me many stories of hers from her childhood and did not keep questions short-answered.

**Fazilet:** Fazilet is a trans feminist activist, a writer and a theater actress. She is an iconic figure that I surely assert any LGBTI+ activist has heard about. That's why she refused to answer my question "so, who are you?" with a shrug. She is raised in a small, mostly Kurdish populated far north-east province in Turkey. She gave a lot of insights on the ethnicity discussions as a Kurdish woman. We met at an LGBTI+ café. She is also a person that experienced the most vehement forms of transphobic violence during 80s and 90s.

**Asi:** I knew Asi from a common event we attended and added on facebook but never really conversed much. As an active figure of Istanbul LGBTI, a trans self-organization based in İstanbul that helps organize and supports trans people in the Marmara region. The organization is a key solidarity figure on arranging the protests against trans hate murders and Asi herself is the one who connects with families of the deceased and organizing other trans people for a common political action. Similar to Fazilet, Asi gave significant insights on sex work and the status of trans murder cases in Turkey.

During the research I also endeavored to keep in mind the specificities of research with trans people in order to avoid discomfort and keep down microaggressions such as universalist assumptions, exoticization, limiting response options, disrespect of the emotional impact of the questions etc. (Staples et al., 2017; Nadal et al., 2012). However, there have been moments of misunderstandings about the questions revolving around mourning and activist strategies where I unfortunately found myself in discomforts of exoticization since one of the participants found the question about mourning "weird" stating the mourning is the same for anybody including trans people. Referring to the strategies of associations after hate murders

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<sup>7</sup> Social Policies, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association was founded 5 years ago and engages with mostly academic studies and projects to empower LGBTI+s. They also have general counseling line and support group for queer refugees. See. <http://www.spod.org.tr/>

one of them stated that one does not have time to talk about the strategies due to sequence of killings, “you just do what you have to do”. Other than these “awkward” confrontations, none of the participants gave negative feedback and some “liked” it (referring to topic), some asked to see it as a presentation in their organization (which I also plan), some finished the interview with wishes for the community. Moreover, as part of strengthening the value of work, I approached trans phenomenon and phenomenon of death with the aim of better understanding the trans experience (Hill, 2009).

During the field research in İstanbul lasting approximately one month from February 15 to March 15, I happened to see a remembrance announcement on a trans woman’s friend’s Facebook newsfeed about Werde, a trans migrant sex worker woman who was stabbed to death on December 17, 2016. The date I saw this Facebook post was March 9 when I was still conducting the interviews. I felt obliged to participate in the funeral both as a commitment to the community and because I once utilized the case of Werde to explain the margins of queer labor vulnerability for one of my works. I was not there for my research, neither wanted I to do unobtrusive direct observation without notice which would create ethical concerns. I did not either want to disrupt the remembrance by mentioning how relevant the research I am conducting is with the funeral of Werde.

However, I noticed that three researchers, one a master student and the other two journalists, were there to record and take photos and videos. I later decided to include the observation of my participation for the analysis of this remembrance to better problematize the issue of death and embody the narratives. I tried to connect with the people that took the photos at the funeral but I failed to get response. I decided to utilize a participant’s post on social media where she put it for general public in a way that everyone could see. I will use two of those photos as secondary research data since I did not plan to take my own photos for the research. I do not share any links to that post for the privacy of the funeral participant. The observation helped me connect various types of data, reduce the problem of participants’ reactivity and give an intuitive comprehension about cultural facts (Bernard, 2006, pp.354-56). O’reilly (2012, pp. 96) points out the discomfort of the participant observation where a researcher may feel strange as the cultural other (in my case activist Other) and urges the researcher to learn from this experience. As a cultural insider but also an outsider in the trans community and the event of trans death, I revisited my positionality that is specific to citizenship, ethnicity and gender. The funeral is explained in detail through first two chapters from different angles.

## Methodological Encounters

The methodological debates that I engage with in shaping the research projects constitute different encounters on three themes: knowledge production, ethical dilemmas and translation process. While every articulation of the last two may fall into knowledge production, I analyze the themes from the point of my writing process. This part is inevitably intermeshed with the theorization and establishes the link between methods and the theory through doing beyond rationalizing the former.

If the pre-research designates concerns for the ultimate purpose of our projects, “what is to be done?” remains as an inevitable question to be acknowledged (Bhabha, 1994, pp.33-34). Parallel to my own preoccupations as to ethnographic research, the purpose of the research is recurrently manifested in the course of knowledge production. The trouble of I in the face of the oppositional truth (the subjects to be researched) must slacken its –what Bhabha says– “epistemological distance” to the Third person, the researched (ibid. pp. 34-35). Is it possible for me to think the difference and Otherness of the Third Space out of the context of dominant epistemology? Can the Theory in practice inadvertently feed the production of cultural difference as a preemptive category? As an exit from this binary of researcher and the Third Space, Bhabha situates the “inter,” in-between space, as the indicatory space where translation and negotiation are disposed notions of departure and where political expectations are waived this way. However, Bhabha does not answer the question of what happens *in* the moment of ethnographic practice. And yet, the Third space in the text production which I interpreted as some point where the space is neither white nor post-colonial (Turkey), balances the distance of my position as a researcher.

I tried to approach two-way communicative interview technique in narrative methodology as a practical tool in constructing my methods in the research field. To bring forward the communicative stance in respect to traditional methodologies in feminist research taking the reflexivity as the basis and ushers possible ways to equalize the power relations among research agents (Mulinari & Räthzel, 2007). Not leaving out the inescapable power relations between me and research participants, I endeavor to emphasize on the knowledge production of the oral history within ethnographic research. Although I was the one who formulated the structure of the questions and felt failed to practice this methodology in most parts, I prompted to speak up my own reflections on mortality, murder and suicide, especially in the last discussion. This way of narration helped me chasten the boundary between me and the participant to whom I was the “researched” for *short* moments. To practice this, I draw semi-



formulated questions and do not hesitate to remark my proximity to the topic of this research and sometimes even dwell into my personal stories. This way of counter-hermeneutics shapes my strategies of text creation and dynamics of textuality.

At this point, the question of “What is to be done?” resonates in another tune that is “What is to be done for whom?” What and who do I obliterate or reproductively ascribe a meaning to in my research? No doubt is this an ethical question, maybe even *a priori* foundation behind all considerations of the subjectivity, so in the same way can it hardly be ruptured from the concerns of what makes an ethnography feminist. For this second encounter, Davis and Craven (2016) opens a similar way of discussion with previous work cited and further touches on transformativity in ethical embodiment of the researcher. The ethical in the research is in a dynamic process where agent and subject is equivocated, interchanged and substituted. Considering compliance with narrative shift of Mulinari and Ratzhel, my ethical considerations through the projects remains in changing, shifting and folding positions together in the context of my outsider-insider position entangled with power relations I wander into. The tactics of both the knowledge production and the ethical considerations recall a *travelling* and self-structuring agency which is bound to undo “epistemological distance” among subjectivities of his/her research mentioned in Bhabha’s discussion. But, where does the inevitable loss emerging out of this distance to negotiating and translating the difference stand in this mangle?

Recalling the transgender theory and its contribution to researcher’s positionality in the ethnographies of the transgender phenomenon, the embodied experience of the research narrators constitutes essential components of the trustworthiness of a research. However, the knowledge of transgender phenomenon can also be gained from an exterior position – someone who is not trans- to the level that the research does not foreclose the peculiarities of the speaking subject and create a false universe (Stryker, 2006). Considering the boundaries and historical tensions in the gay community that lead to exclude trans people in the struggle and expropriate their efforts, transgender people either reclaimed their positions in the organizations or self-organize (Devor & Matte, 2006). The institutional trans activism in İstanbul under İstanbul LGBTI Association was initiated by similar tensions, separating from Lambdaistanbul LGBTI Solidarity Association where I am a member of and have a history of whether to allow trans people in the association or not during 90s, which is also a case the research participants verbalized in the interviews. Therefore, being cisgender gay man and doing LGBTI+ activism in Turkey, İstanbul neither parallelize my experience to theirs nor

detaches me from apprehending the trans phenomenon. The events of honor killings, hate murders and engendered violence against gay people both differentiate and approximate our knowledge of difference where a transcending space unequivocally occurs in our solidarities, which I empirically share in the posthumous activism against hate murders.

Considering my future projects and publications during the time I study in Sweden (most of them are about Turkey), I see myself as a translator not for something different to myself but something in which the difference is preemptively embedded in a Western context. Accordingly, I am the one to negotiate in the *loss* of in-between space of signifying what is untranslatable and/or preferably translatable in the ‘vernacular’ culture (Turkey) where I found myself –ironically– in the Third Space in the country of my citizenship. This promises no good taste in endeavors of disenthraling from a dominant epistemology, if not its terminology with the same effect.

Apart from this quandary that it entails, translation can be another way of encountering a toilsome methodology, opening new ranges of negotiations between agencies regardless of the loss. Translation can be perceived in its prospective function as communication studies suggest, as a dialogue, instead of naming it as an act, process, craft etc. since “each point of view can be made explicit within a dialogue” (Fawcett & Guadarrama Garcia, 2010). This notion of dialogue requires novelty in ideas, multiplicity and neutral ground for the “stream of meaning.” Utopian as it seems, this dialogical turn designates a more negotiable space for the Other in the research than the structural, normative and descriptive accounts of translation theory. From a similar perspective, Walter Benjamin (2012) tries to break the literal/freedom or word-to-word/sense-to-sense boundary, attributing the translation as a possible utopia of linguistic harmony. Fawcett and Garcia again introduces us the translation as a methodological interaction tool between disciplines. The translation process not only in the target text creation but also in cooperating with other disciplines is in a dynamic chiasm of body and the psyche of both translation work and academia. How should I posit myself in this intersection?

Translation as a cumbersome work will appear in writing down the ethnographic raw data from participants. Keeping in mind the opinions above, I recount to translator’s notes to further explain a translated term of the culturally embedded, as well as my intentions. At this point, it is significant to take stock of the repercussions of two-way half-structured interviews I plan to conduct. This type of strategy could be useful in finding one’s direction in

his/her/their politics of translation. I can posit myself in this intersection of self-reflectivity and translational politics. However, Spivak (2012) leads us to think second on the translator's task in creating an agency who acts out of its intentions through the construction of meanings. "The task of feminist translator is to consider the language as a clue to the workings of gendered agency. The writer is written by her language, of course" (ibid., pp. 312). In this re-creating, the semantic and functional equivalence aimed by translator should not be considered as a safe space where logic becomes the only figuration achieved in expense of rhetorical interferences. Translator must engage in the triangle of "rhetoric, logic, silence" in all steps and facilitate the love between the original and the shadow (target text). It is more than obvious that Spivak implicates original agency of the gendered and its shadow in translation as "subaltern." However explanatory this separation could be, the articulation of this boundary reiterates the hierarchies between cross-culture feminist agents, which is problematic. Will I be one of the narrators or translators as the agency signifier through translation? I dare not answer that since this type of politics may circumscribe the possibility of open dialogue which the very function of itself can make the research more objective and feminist.

## **Representation of Results on the Narratives**

### **Necropolitical Governmentality Over Trans\* Death**

This part covers the analyses of trans women narratives on the phenomenon of death and the event of trans death, very specific to trans hate murders. The chapter also touches on the challenges trans women experience during postmortem situations such as funeral procedures, the bureaucratic communications and inheritance issues in İstanbul. The chapter also deals with the trans death in relation to afterlife of trans women from the remarks of informants' close friends or acquaintances from activist space. The challenges marked in the narratives are approached from a one-way hermeneutics of dominant discourse which compartmentalizes the death of trans women in a way that scrutinizes, constrains and discounts their realms of death.

### **Personal/Political Experience of Death**

Following the structure of the interview questions, the perception of death by trans women has been narrated both in relation to and separate from their identity definitions. The questions addressing to general views on the phenomenon of death and the questions regarding trans death overlapped most of the time. The associations of the dying through narratives either

show the extent of violence against trans women or render the definition's self-annihilation. Most of the answers on the occasion of death unavoidably require the closure of the word itself and centered on the definitions of violent acts such as *ferocity*, *primitiveness*, *feloniousness*, *monstrosity*, *trauma*, *murder and killing*.

These utterances matter in revealing not only the surface of violence the participants individually situate themselves in but also a system of necropolitical governance that is signified beyond the personal and is found marked in political context. The words not only reflect on the violent occasions that trans women go through in daily life but also imply the incessantness of what has been substituted in the place of death. Remembering Agamben (1998) here, the foundation of *bare life* in the roots of exclusion from the political imaginaries of life for the marginalized Other sustains its peculiarity over the death of trans women through which I can argue a phenomenon of trans\* death which is indistinctively lived in premature death. The act of dying cannot be achieved in conventional terms through the permanence of trauma and killing, unilaterally designated by the dominant sovereign and whose framework is delineated by violent acts.

Açelya implies this indistinction of trans death: “(When it is about trans death) I think about a trans woman being murdered.... I think it is not a death but ferocity, primitiveness...” Pointing her colorful scarf around her neck, “I wear this rainbow thing for example. This struggle will continue while we live.” Similarly, Lerzan, a prominent trans activist and drag performance artist, points to the ways of murder in hate crimes against trans women: “All (trans women) have different experiences.... The hardest are the ones that had been killed and whose killing was the most felonious.” Not politically active in a trans self-organization, Açelya focuses on the losses of our activist friends, Boysan, Zeliş and Mert<sup>8</sup>: “We shrink, all our voices are gone, a strong voice like Boysan’s is gone, and Mert and Zeliş are gone... Ayşe’s (referring a cis-woman here) death is not same in my mind with these deaths.” [emphasis added]

The death of an activist has more than one signifier in Açelya’s mind, bears many connotations, pervades the realms of LGBTI+ activism and attains multiple bearers of the loss. I bear the loss of Boysan both as a friend and an activist comrade, so does Açelya. The frequency of our emotions meets somewhere when we name him. Similarly, the deathly

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<sup>8</sup> The three contributed to the LGBTI+ community in Turkey in different efforts. They died in a car accident on September 2015. I knew Boysan Yakar personally as an activist friend with whom I shared different spheres of protests and organizational work.

occurrences can trigger people to activist work, make them collaborate and take action. One of the informants states that her first affiliation with activism started at a protest against the murder of a trans woman in İstanbul. These early times correspond also with her identification and coming out process: “My first encounter with an LGBT space happened like that.... I was at the very early stages of my coming out process. Once they said there was a trans killed and there is a remembrance protest for her. I participated in that.” Hence, remembrance protests can become platforms of political consciousness of trans women who are both governed by the deaths of trans friends and also become political subjects.

One of my questions on the general perception of death was about “*eceliyle ölmek*” (die in one’s bed or literally translated die of natural causes). The reason to address such a question was to highlight this phrase since it has been used in trans women’s activisms, personal posts from their social media accounts and the phrase is actually a traditional saying to describe the cause of death. As the word “*ecel*” literally means “time of death pre-determined by Allah as end of life”, I came up with another term used in the language for this: “*zamanlı/zamanında ölüm*” (timely death) or its opposite as generally used “*zamansız ölüm*” (untimely death). In trans women’s protests against trans hate murders in Turkey, I have encountered the slogan focusing on the “timeliness” of death as “*Ecelimizle Ölmek İstiyoruz*” (We want to live our timely death).

When asked about this phrase, the responses differ in almost every participant. Lerzan does not agree to the phrase used as such: “Actually, every death is untimely.” But she also adds “For trans people, to die timely is almost a luxury.” The lack of peace on the brink of death is substituted with the lack of timeliness (as embedded in the culture) with these remarks. The violent regime governs the temporality of death, eviscerates the expectancy of life within it in the same way the semantic of the phrase erases the responsibility of the sovereign in the course of violative action. “*Ecel*” (that moment from God) becomes a marked moment of the desirable, if not a point of longing in trans women’s lives, a common space for un-lived postmortem irresponsibility. This gives clues on trans necropolitics imposed by the structural violence that trans women face in their daily lives, in every segments and institutions of the society.

However, this also should remind us the impossibility of this desired irresponsibility. How measurable is the naturalness of death for trans women in Turkey? How viable is *ecel*? Likewise, some of the participants consider these remarks in personal accounts as fatalist and

futile wishes since natural death for trans women come with the package of societal causes for that end. Considering institutionalized violence, relatively underserved physical and mental health contributing to depression and minority stress (Hoy-Ellis & Fredricksen-Goldsen, 2017), residual affective impact of historical and mobilized hate (Ahmed, 2004), a condition of “near life” –similar to bare life of Agamben- has been expressed on the vulnerabilities of trans women (Stanley, 2011, p.13). This sort of exposure to overkill and premature death also corresponds to the notion of “living dead” (Mbembe, 2003) where the incarceration of selected citizens is sustained by the state outside prison through a process of depersonalization and dehumanization and dragged onto the margins of the social realm and those of social death (Gilmore, 2007 in Posocco et al., 2014).

One of the participants pointed out another concern of trans women about dying before the transition:

I used to be afraid of dying before the transition process. I didn't want to be buried, washed or seen by others at the musalla taşı (coffin rest) like before; I wouldn't want to be part of those rituals. Will I be buried like this? Will I be buried in a male body? I have always thought about this in the funerals. Even at dying, one wants to die like themselves. Nobody would want to die in another person's appearance.

*Anonymous (2017, March 3). Interview<sup>9</sup>*

The participant's remarks here define the innate trans embodiment from the very early childhood. They also emphasize the perpetuity of this desire not only in life but also in and after death. Here trans embodiment transcends the bio-perspective of trans livability but propels another trans actuality in the afterlife. Thus, a possible theorization of the right to bodily and agential integrity after death would find more meaning in the efforts of honorable and memorable funerals organized by their friends. The wish of the trans deceased is not limited to a formal piece of paper and this may create problems but that wish is resumed through the practices of trans activists and friends.

Similarly, another participant Duru's story from her childhood constitutes an important aspect of her trans imaginary and bodily consciousness, which is also closely related to death. The story heralds that “those who were born male here in this world will be born female in the other world after dying [referring to afterlife or the reincarnation in the same world.]” Duru

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<sup>9</sup> All the interview extracts and citations are translated by the author from Turkish to English.

stated that back then as a child, she would think of dying and being born again with a corrected body and more welcoming social environment. My purpose is not to hold on to the “wrong body trope” which can be a manipulative argument reiterated in the popular culture to authenticize the trans bodies that are represented as mismatched and trapped corporealities (Lovelock, 2016). However, I take note of the significance of these narratives to describe how the imagination of dying as a child could signify affective memories of early trans embodiment and consciousness.

As another part of this discussion, we conversed about the current situation in Turkey and how the occurrences related to death has been delivered to us as audience. 2016 has been a year of many deadly attacks, hate murders and endless conflicts for Turkey, resulting in dead masses. This was one of my motives for this research as well, to be able to produce a say against the death, against the mass numbers around it, to remember what is forgotten between the death news coming to us. One of the participants who wants to remain anonymous for this part expressed her anger against the normalization and numeration of the death:

One person does not matter anymore; you are nothing more than a loss statistics. .... This also applies to the hate murders of trans women. The first thing they ask me in the interviews: How many murders occurred last year, how many killed etc...? I can't know. I can't tell you this as a number. Ask me their names and I will count the names of those 17. For me, they are not made up of numbers. I can't quantify them in statistics; I have felt pain for each of them. Do I make myself clear? They have a different value for me.

*Neva (2017, March 3). Interview*

Another participant explains her desperation and how she was made to feel unable to act against it: “To live feels like a shame sometimes. I feel that kind of pressure on me psychologically.... There is no time to mourn since there are incessant sequences of death. This disrupts the character of a person.” Numerous expressions of exhaustion from most of the participants depict a portrait of despair that is affectively deplored in the narratives. This interrupted process of bereavement does not allow individual signification of the deceased's persona in afterlife.

## Exequial Scenes of Administrative Violence

Besides the general approaches on the notion and reception of death, trans women face multiple sides of discrimination of structural transphobia in funerals and bureaucratic work. Dean Spade invites activists to think on trans rights perspective in a different framework where complicated and diverse ways of transphobia is included in a way to deliberate on the distribution and operation of power beyond the perpetrator/victim model (Spade, 2015, pp.50-53). This model highlights the administrative levels of disciplinary power in Foucauldian perspective and re-explores the power structures of violence and trans vulnerability to premature death. (ibid.) In a similar vein, this part points out the legal processes after the death of a trans woman and what kind of challenges the deceased's acquaintances face afterwards. In funeral and burial procedures, the encounters between trans women and both state/bureaucracy and family create tensions in the afterlife of the deceased. Before deliberating on the experiences of the trans women activists during funerals, it would be important to take stock of the laws and regulations for burial procedures and the funeral in order to highlight what kind of a governmentality over trans death is orchestrated by the legal system.

There are two legal texts that shape the procedures of funerals and interment in Istanbul: one of them is the general regulation from the Ministry of Health "The Regulation no. 27467 On Construction of Cemeteries and Funeral Transfer and Burial Procedures" and there is also the local one implemented by İstanbul Municipality, "The Regulation on Funeral and Burial Services for Istanbul Metropolis Municipality." There are two points that I am interested to analyze here and that may have an impact on trans women's lives. First of my discussions will be about the phrase "kimsesiz," (n. and adj.) in literal translation "those who do not have anybody" or "nameless." The phrase has been given little space in both regulations (Article 25 in the general one<sup>10</sup>, Article 7/16 in the local<sup>11</sup>). In the general one, it is written together with "the procedures on the death of the poor and *kimsesiz*" thus rendering the phrase to a category of people who have lived in despair, needed help in their lifetime and died alone. The law urges the state units to cover the costs of the funeral for those people without a condition thus making it the municipality's responsibility. Moreover, in the local text, the burial place of the *kimsesiz* is allocated to only one region of Istanbul (3<sup>rd</sup> Region Cemeteries). Kilyos Cemetery encapsulates a big part of such cemeteries which are called "Kimsesizler Mezarlığı" (The Cemetery of the *Kimsesiz*) in colloquial language.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/Metin.Aspx?MevzuatKod=7.5.13730&MevzuatIliski=0&sourceXmlSearch=>

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.ibb.gov.tr/tr-TR/kurumsal/Birimler/MezarliklarMd/Documents/2013/yonetmelik\\_2013.pdf](http://www.ibb.gov.tr/tr-TR/kurumsal/Birimler/MezarliklarMd/Documents/2013/yonetmelik_2013.pdf)



The cemetery of the kimsesiz generally revives sad feelings and imaginations where some find themselves wondering about “those” destitute people that they have never known and whose stories could not have chance to be told. Although the phrase is suitable to adorn one’s emotions with agony and pity and there is little to point out in legal texts, its connotations may mean great deal for the marginalized groups in society. Besides the regulations, the colloquial usage of the cemetery reveals the necropolitical characteristic of the state and also present a historically extended carceral situation, a circumambient trans necropolitics over trans death as “uninterrupted practice of institutional violence .... regardless of the form of government” (Rukovsky, 2015, p.23). The death of trans women whose relatives or assigned kin cannot be found by the authorities is automatically put into the kimsesiz category in implementation of burial processes after a trans murder or natural death although the law itself is not necessarily to be interpreted that way. The attempts from trans women to adopt the body and funeral of their trans friends are not taken into account and the authorities claim that it is legally impossible. Both the police authorities and the municipal personnel do not pay respect to “unofficial” surroundings of whom they call as “kimsesiz.” So, the kimsesizler cemetery has different connotations on the part of trans women that may evoke a hurtful past or an uncertain future. Although most of the bodies are adopted by the families (legally at least), the organization of the funerals and remembrance are organized by the trans-self-organization İstanbul LGBTİ.

There were no discussions about the cemetery with any of the participants but I engaged in a remembrance of a trans woman, Werde while I was in the field research in İstanbul. I wasn’t there for the research or this was not an intended participant observation and I did not take any notes, photos or recordings to respect the remembrance, but this funeral revealed so many things for the understanding of the trans death, urging me to include the real situation from a close angle in this research. Werde, a trans Syrian refugee sex worker woman living in Cihangir, İstanbul was found dead at her home on 17 December 2016<sup>12</sup>. When Werde’s friends arrived at the police station to adopt the funeral, police did not allow them. Then, two organizations intervened at this point: İstanbul LGBTİ Solidarity Association, the trans self-organization in İstanbul and Women’s Solidarity Foundation (KADAV). They also made a claim to adopt the funeral; however, since Werde lost her parents in the Syrian war, the authorities did not deliver the funeral of Werde to neither organization.

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.kaosgl.org/sayfa.php?id=22666>

The discussions after this include the information about the bureaucratic conversations that I acquired through inner-talks and by specifically asking the activists from Istanbul LGBTI and KADAV that organized Werde's remembrance. The petition given to the authorities to adopt the funeral was stalled for months and the body of Werde was kept in the Institution of Forensic Medicine. Werde's friends, also refugees, could not keep the track of this incident in the fear of confronting the authorities. The petition both organizations applied was rejected and the attorney decided on her burial in the cemetery of the kimsesiz. Their members also tried to reach the metropolis municipality and the Directorate of Cemeteries to adopt the funeral as their friends but this was not permitted. The authority deems all the attempts of trans women futile, stratifying its area of exclusion, consolidating its governance vis-à-vis the trans death which has been relegated to the "namelessness" and interminable isolation. The framework of creating a belonging to the dead and the claim to a proper funeral is drawn by the heterosexist structures that enthralls the concept of kinship, restrains the actions of the beloved ones left behind and the volition of the deceased whose identity does not confirm to gender expectance of the same structure. The only space allowed takes place in the remembrance of Werde, as the inevitable resort of activism after trans death, about which I will share more of my observations in the next chapter.

The current legal system on death and cemeteries is open to insecurities and creates other types of vulnerabilities for the living ones. Not only the legal violence through law but also the lack of protection and positive advantaging on trans peculiarities in the law promote the overkill of trans women, re-incarcerate them in the cusps of death (Stanley, 2011) and depersonize them. Considering the traditional significance of rituals, practices, services and the new sociologies around institutionalization of death in Turkey (Sağır, 2012), trans women have been valued as neither servable nor mournable subjects in dominant cultural spaces of death. Besides this marginalized positionality, the right to information about the files of their murdered friends is also disrupted due to recent "state of emergency" declared after 15 July coup d'état attempt and extended three times now. For example, the friend of Hande Kader that I interviewed stated that her association cannot reach information through official channels and is denied access to the case file of Kader. The current state of emergency has created a system of "state of exception" where arbitrary, politically partial and antijudicial decisions passing over into the law (Agamben, 2005, p.29) with statutory decrees that reiterated an already authoritarian environment where the LGBTI+ movement in Turkey inevitably experienced mentioned drawbacks. This specifically affects trans women as both

individuals and collectives and create an exceptional regime for them whose applicabilities are demarked by mechanisms of state necropolitics.

Until here, administrative aspects of the legal ambiguity and violence imposed through regulations and bureaucratic hardships have been discussed. Now I want to take a more affective turn towards to a question of what happens to the body of a trans woman after death. Does it go through the conventional postmortem process? How does the mortuary examination proceed after a hate murder on the bodies of those out of cisnormative culture of death? When asked to tell about the common process the associations go through after a trans hate murder, two of the research participants, Asi and Fazilet mentioned that they witnessed per se and also heard about the somatic violence enforced on the dead bodies of trans woman. These illegal and unjust procedures may be practiced for the sake of a scientific aim or in the frames of forensics' arbitrary decisions. Asi:

This [the hardship] starts at the autopsy. When they [trans women] have blue ID<sup>13</sup>, they [medicolegal examiners] ... remove the silicones [breast prosthesis] and embed them under the ribs and cut the hair. [emphasis added]

*Asi (2017, March 13). Interview*

Similarly Fazilet expresses her past experience on the autopsy process and conversation with doctors:

I remember once, there were a lot of stitches on her [referring to a deceased friend] belly. They said they did it for the autopsy but I asked a couple of doctors and they said it was not for the autopsy. They said that they conduct experiments on her because she was *unclaimed*. They took many organs from her illegally. Although I would have filed a complaint about it, I didn't have the right to request for re-examination of the body since I don't have a line of descent.

*Fazilet (2017, March 13). Interview*

I recall my first research question here and maybe add one dimension in it: What happens in the event of not only trans death but also the dead body of a transgender? What keeps this

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<sup>13</sup> The legal gender in Turkey is determined in the identification cards as blue and pink, creating an organizing difference between male assigned and female assigned as an overt product of gender binary, which produces transphobic scenes in daily life for gender-liminal, gender transgressive and transgender people. (Zengin, 2016, p.28)

body belonged to that trans person after all? What does this say about dehumanization, about not being counted as a human being after your death) These two witnessed cases may not concretize the systemic violence but it addresses to the vulnerabilities of not only trans death but also dead body of hers. Moreover, as I problematize in the personal experiences of death as well, the desire of liveability by conserving the agential/identity integrity of trans people is one of the major desires for the afterlife of everyone, keeping the you even after yourself. Conserving the identity after yourself was uttered by the deceased in hir life and is applied by the deceased's friends in death. The bodily integrity is not any different and part of identity conservation in the afterlife; maybe it is a stronger responsibility for the living ones for the deceased's honorable remembrance since it embodies somatic and affective attributions. The historicity of emotions as 'lived experiences' is corpo-realized through the permanent past impressions on the skin thus enabling the surfacing of the bodies as a reminder of pain and pleasure (Ahmed, 2004, pp.29-30). However, the way that the affection works on the dead body differs from the living one on the point that the material agency does not bear a physical receptor but a social one, through which the overkill and vulnerability of trans death is vitalized in the face of 'scientific' sometechnical interruption of the trans dead body. Beyond the utilitarian production of the dead other (Arendt, 1951/1961, p.459), the practice of autopsy as an invasive and messy procedure is deployed through "corporeally destructive technologies" (Lotter, 2009, pp.190-91), thus rendering the dead body of trans a *somatechnological* body whose usability and disposability is administrated and perpetuated by –what I will call and think could be useful to analyze the positionality of the dead body- *somatechnics of necropolitics*. Yet, I stop my analysis here for the sake of thesis' scope.

### **Immediate Families and Inheritance Issues**

Considering the cisnormative family structures as a probable challenge in trans women's lives ranging from the coming out, relative relations to transition process, trans women may share similar experiences of exclusion by their family members, particularly parents. Trans women are made to detach themselves from their families at early ages at the risk of their own life and find new ways for living in Turkey. As a result of this, Istanbul has become one of the big cities that draw trans migration from smaller and more conservative towns. They build their own environment; some start sex labor and become closely related with other trans women in certain neighborhoods such as Tarlabası today. These relations and new ways of sociality bring out a certain sustained detachment from their parents and relatives; some disengage with them completely, some still maintain affiliation in limited levels.

This sort of disengagement from their biological/assigned families is revisited on the point of their death as both bureaucracy requirements and the hypocrisy of their parents. The friends of the deceased trans person generally become the ones who reach his/her parents and tell about the death. There are three ways that the families deal with the news. They either adopt the funeral, which is a usual occasion but only in paper, or reject the relation with the body thus rejecting the funeral or only accept engaging with the inheritance issues if that trans person has considerable capital but distancing themselves with the funeral. Some families organize the funerals in silence and do not want any of the social environments the deceased used to have to join the funeral. The positionality of funerals done by families in silence and in secret also reveals cues on the possibilities of bodily appearances for trans women in public and how the right to assembly is restricted not only in life but also in deathly scenes (Butler, 2015). Neva starts to explain this situation exposing the cisnormative structures of the parents' actions and expectations, calling them "the ones who worship holy cocks and wombs." She describes their struggles in funeral processes in vivid words:

The first thing I saw is that eighty percent of the parents reject the funerals. We deal with it. I do not say it as an onus. I am saying this to disparage them. Because how much they worship the cock! .... They *invest in* your cock so much that when this cock is gone, they have nothing left. Then maybe they should stop being the possessors of their child's cock or womb. ... It should be enough for someone to love the soul and character of one's child but it isn't. Because of the reasons originating from this cock-worship, I saw, many times, we saw families rejecting the funerals. If she is wealthy, they accept the funeral to take advantage of her possessions; we deal with the funeral again; they once even took the carpets of the house but we were the ones who buried her. I saw this a million times. [emphasis added]

*-Neva (2017, March 3). Interview*

Setting aside the hypocrisy of the families here, trans death becomes a marked event that the families have to go through, signifying their expected responsibility yet again taunting them about their avoidance from the procedures. Moreover, the assigned kinship relations in life has been restructured here after death, both reminding parents or relatives' responsibility about their last duty for the deceased (as an expected ritual) and re-acknowledging the troubled past, their "lost investment" as well. The existence of the trans woman is sustained

through the relatives' ongoing denial, yet only as a personified capital she might have saved and her parents claim right to, rather than the person or her body itself.

The inheritance claim of the family is granted by the law although it may have unjust repercussions on trans women's friends of the deceased who have always been on her side lifelong. Although the law allows individuals to leave a will for other people than their families, none of the participants in this research mentioned specifically about this option. Considering the unexpected death trans women are subjected to, this regulation may not apply to the majority or require a special legal assistance, which the few would be concerned while they live. Similar to Neva's accounts, one of the participants also draws attention to the hypocrisy of the families:

When trans people become the victim of a murder, their families –the families that have not adopted them until then- begin to develop a belonging if that trans has an estate, which also means that the same family, who weren't on her side with many problems she experienced, don't want to see trans people or her friends in the funeral. They don't want to see her lifelong comrades. Because they see her as a shame, they want to bury her secretly, telling nobody about it, keeping their environment apart.

*-Anonymous, (2017, March 3). Interview*

More important as a question for this research than what kind of religious amenability the families pursue here is the question of how trans bodies are adopted, their persons re-claimed and transposed in the frameworks of legality, sweeping away the volition of trans people and also the deceased itself, perpetuating their enfranchised situation thus capitalizing on their vulnerability at the edge of death. The trans funeral signifies a contingent exchange between two social spheres, their friends and families, propelling both to communicate and sometimes negotiate in funeral procedures although it may result in legal confiscation of the funerals by assigned families whose adoption or rejection become a significant factor for the strategies of trans women in funeral arrangements.

### **Remembrance and Trans Activism**

Much as the administrative and violative force of the law and the cisnormative structures foreclose the liveability of trans subjectivity and enhance the continuous incarceration of the bodies in afterlife, the activism that trans women develops against this type of necropolitics finds its examples in the protests and remembrances organized against trans hate murders.

These sites of trans activism, what I call posthumous activism, are not only signifiers of consciousness raising about hate murders but also embody the areas of trans/feminist solidarities (and the lack of), the intersections of intimacies among different communities and different bereavement conditions, which I explain in this chapter.

### **Trans/Feminist Possibilities and the Complicities of the Personal/Collective Bereavement**

On 7<sup>th</sup> of August, 2016 Hande Kader, a sex worker trans woman and an activist, was beaten to death, her body was burned and thrown in a desolate, woody area<sup>14</sup>. Their friends also reported in the mortuary that they saw bruises on her body and they suspect that the murderer raped her. The story of Hande was one of the chief reasons why I wanted to be involved in this type of study as well as the online campaigns, blog notes, vlogs and protests that followed her death. The protest was organized by İstanbul LGBTİ Solidarity Association on 21 August, one and half month after the 15 July coup d'état attempt after which many rights violations occurred as dismissals and suspensions from civil servant positions, post-coup prosecution of 4811 academics (Özkırımlı, 2017), shutting down near 600 associations with the decree laws. The participation and the temporality in Hande's protest has significance in this sense, however my aim is not to highlight one hate murder to another or obscure other deaths. I was specifically advised on this by the research participants reminding me to include Hande in a general framework of hate crimes and discrimination.

LGBTI+ protests in İstanbul, both reactive (force groups convened after discriminatory events) and traditional (LGBTI+ pride and IDAHOT demonstrations) ones, accrued spaces of resistances and scenes of solidarities through which everyone outside the hetero-/cisnorm have their distinctive voices regardless of the abbreviated letters/identities they embody. Hande's protest was this kind of a demonstration where dissimilar agencies share a similar sense of belonging constructed by both community affiliation and queer rage but also reminding the resemblance of imminent stories of other hate murders.

Before analyzing the intersections of the protest, I want to deliberate on the activist texture of the solidarity scenes on that specific date and construe how these different conventions emerge. Hande's protest has been one of many demonstrations where trans\* and cis- women come together to act against engendered discrimination and gender killings. LGBTI+ movement and feminist movement have experienced many cases of solidarity and

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<sup>14</sup> <https://lgbtnewsturkey.com/2016/08/12/trans-woman-burned-and-murdered/>

transformed their relations from staying by each other to being entangled (Altnay, 2009, p.148). The protests against trans hate murders have specifically been sites of intertwined platforms of solidarities reflecting different backgrounds of women, those of the transfeminist geographies where trans positivity/neutrality/inclusion of the second wave feminism in Turkey is re-calibrated and revisited. The reason behind this shifty proximity is rooted in the past experiences of trans women who lived exclusion from the 8 March protests and certain leftist circles (İstanbul LGBTT Dayanışma Derneği, 2014).

Although it is better than it was in the past and there have been evident examples of cis- and trans women solidarities during recent protests against gender killings, how can someone make sure of this proximity result in a close and permanent togetherness? To fully understand this kind of proximity, the level of social belonging and commitment needs to be construed with reference to analysis of resemblance and similitude between two social movements which has distinctive frames for a possible adjacency. A newly fledging *convenientia* (Foucault, 1989) between two movements endows this togetherness with a sui genesis communication where different ranges of possibilities occurs in-between. Distinctive edges of two feminist movements approximate in juxtaposition; “their edges touch, their fringes intermingle.... through which movement, influences, passions, and properties too, are communicated. [emphasis added]” (ibid., p. 20).

Transfeminist *convenientia* in İstanbul requires a similar eventuality for its resemblance that is to be raised by a common denominator such as a protest of gender killings. Likewise, the imminent tensions between two groups can be channeled into a coalitional feminist organizing in the realms of death through actions against gender killings that are products of heteronormativity, patriarchy and misogyny, all of whose affects reside and empierce into the women’s realms of life (whether trans or not) (Zengin, 2016). Here, the life of transfeminism rests its existence on the necropolitical spaces of the post-killing where the definition of necro-space/polis functions beyond the governance of the sovereign but signifies a platform where subjectivities reimagine their belongings.

This supposition is important as a starting point to shape novel coalitions however, it can also yield not only mortal but also finite imagination on transfeminism. If the necrospace will be the major point of action or a source for the adjacency of the movements, then the activists are supposed to contemplate the afterwards and the future of these points of protests, beyond the necrospace. Going beyond *convenientia* as a temporal and context-specific neighborhood,



transfeminism should construct a similitude around the developed frames of resemblance that can function at the distances freed from the law of space/context (*aemulatio*), has the ability to produce a polyvalent voice with its new bonds and joints which can express distinguished forms of differences (*analogy*) and finally can excite the emotions and mobilities in a free state of adjacency without any prescription (*sympathies*) (Foucault, 1989, pp.19-27).

İstanbul LGBTİ's activist strategy in Hande Kader protest and its cooperation with KADAV on the remembrance of Werde exemplify this type of transfeminist solidarity whose applicability reaches toward the gender killing protests, creating new sympathies for the public reception of trans death. Hande Kader's protest in this sense remarks a public reaction that is not unique per se but peculiar to wider segments of the society from local, national to international area whether LGBTI+ or not. In this sense, the protest heralds a possible livability in the eyes of the dominant (public reactivity). This proposition may deconstruct the hermeneutics of necropolitical writing where the trans subjectivity is deemed nothing other than an object of rightful killing and the subject of incessant biopolitical demarcations and dehumanization (Mbembe, 2003; Shaksari, 2013). Similarly, Butler (2004, pp.33-36) posits the death of the Other in the derealizations of the dominant discourse and in a state of inexhaustible deadness, in a suspension of life and death where the grievability of the deceased remains vain in the efforts of the subjectivity since the sovereign power ultimately delineates the limits of dead geographies.

Here I recall my research question: *In what circumstances and solidarities can or cannot trans women in İstanbul procure recognition for their funerals and establish remembrances for their loss?* For the case of trans death, the posthumous activisms entangled with various political forms that managed to attract the reaction of diverse group of populations enable trans subjectivity to deconstruct the mortal fate of necropolitics and found its own equilibrium in the society. Asi describes the death as “the collectivity all trans women cooperate.” This sense of collective action comes with the collective feelings of mourning, bereavement and activism all of which are experienced in the level of spontaneous *sympathies*. Remembering the concept of natality (Arendt, 1958) here, trans death re-situates and transforms the condition of trans women in the eyes of feminist solidarity and embarks new meanings and ties to it.

“The death of a human being is not exclusively a biological reality but evokes moral and social obligations expressed in culturally determined funeral practices” (Hertz, 1960 cited in

Robben, 2004). Rationalizing different connotations of death in a transgender activist culture in İstanbul, it is evident that the trans death requires moral and social obligations to be practiced not in funerals but in negotiations with the families, the communication with the officials and the protests as an obligation. This collective impulse of death is expressed by all the participants including Asi: “When a trans was massacred, all trans women get to the work. They find their number and contact the family, try to convince them to give the power of attorney signature for the funeral.” The efforts of getting the power of attorney signature from the families in order to adopt the funeral so that the body will not be buried in the cemetery of nameless becomes an obligation, a postmortem duty after a trans loss.

However, the duty does not finish there. In the next step, the organizations demand justice on the case of trans murders, request law-enforcement to find the perpetrator so that the remembrance of Hande can be realized with ease. Asi stated in a different stance with other participants that “you cannot mourn or remember someone whose murderer is still on the streets, you just can’t.” I did not think of the justice as a possible, inevitable step in front of mourning and remembrance processes however, it constitutes the an integral part for Hande’s case. Another complicity in demanding justice during current years in Turkey is that under ‘state of emergency’ [OHAL] declared by the government after the coup d’etat attempt in 2016, even the right to transparent information about the hate murder cases is not granted. So it is not really possible to ask and learn about Hande’s case in OHAL.

Hertz (2004, pp.199-200) explains death and its affective sensibility over the living in the afterlife:

Death, in fact, by striking the individual, has given *hir* a new character; *hir* body which (except in certain abnormal cases) was in the realm of the ordinary suddenly leaves it; it can no longer be touched without danger, it is an object of horror and death. [emphasis added]

Just as the intermediary and the interrupted period of mourning mentioned here, the mourning of trans death suddenly leaves the afterlife with certain obligations and prohibitions as if the living subject is in ‘the target of the spite from [a ghost-like] tormented soul’ (ibid., p. 199), all processes of which presuppose the restless but *sine qua non* activist mobility on behalf of trans/feminist movement. Maybe this is why Asi thinks of the deed to mourn impossible before finding the perpetrator.

I would like to enter an additional input to the schemes of mourning and remembrance. The mourning reserves a sign of realization, the one that humans discerned to know that they have to separate from the deceased (Robben, 2004, p.9). For the phenomenon of trans death, collective mourning as a main structure of mortuary rituals is interrupted by both exceptional situations such as OHAL (for Hande's case currently), the application of the national sovereign and also the exclusion from the religious public space. The last hindrance in front of a dignified burial and mourning has been manifested by some of the participants. Some religious personnel may not want to attend to the funerals of trans women and some can reject to come to their houses and do *mevlut*<sup>15</sup>. Additionally, the cis-gaze against trans women in the mosques (if the funeral gets there after autopsy) forecloses the liveability of trans agency in religious public space.

Not only the gazes in the mosques or the lack of imam to serve in the funerals but also the misgendering of Imams in the trans funerals could create problems, especially in recent times. After the autopsy and the deceased bathed, the body is brought by the municipality's funeral vehicle to the mosque, put in the coffin with religious cloth on it. Then in the mosque, Imam calls the deceased name and hir gender title before hir name before the praying. Sometimes he also adds some more words if that person is of an acquaintance, which may seem like a eulogy in Christian funeral. Then, the imam starts the prayer while everybody standing and praying together. In denotation of the deceased<sup>16</sup>, the imam either says "X<sup>17</sup> er kiři niyetine" (for the male deceased X) or "X hatun kiři niyetine" (for the female deceased X) on the basis of the ID card's color or written sign of gender in current IDs.

This application may create possible tensions between imams and transgender women. Most of the participants stated that this is a mis-attribution of gender they identify with. This definition is also compatible with the utterances of misgendering in the Christian funerals. However, the trans women I interviewed also stated that this may not be the case for relatively elderly trans women or the ones with religious views. Some trans women actually would want to be named as "male deceased" at their funerals and some friends of the deceased make effort to realize that wish of the deceased. This is because some believe that the assigned

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<sup>15</sup> A religious script-reading practice after special religious days and after a death. It tells a story about the birth of the Prophet Muhammed.

<sup>16</sup> The denotation of the deceased is uttered before the collective prayer so that the praying group informs Allah they pray for the specified gender.

<sup>17</sup> Refers to the name of the deceased.

name at birth was the name that was ‘whispered to their ears’<sup>18</sup>, in their birth and it will remain so when they died in order to be recognized in the afterlife. Hence, some trans women do not think the denotation of the assigned male for their death within the definitions of misgendering as the West theorizes it. As mentioned before, the conceptualization and praxis of trans death is culturally, religiously and symbolically contingent and speaks to the vernacular of that culture. To read the trans death from the partial realities enable us to generate different understandings of the phenomena.

### **Trans Migration on the Frontiers of Necropolitics**

Considering the recent humanitarian crisis escalated after Syrian crisis and Turkey being a passageway as a third “safe” country, trans peaceseekers became easy targets of marginalization and violence on different levels. This part continues to analyze the specific case of Werde, the trans refugee woman who was subjected to hate murder, and exhibits the scenes from her funeral organized by two feminist and LGBTI+ associations. Analyzing the remembrance held on behalf of her and discussing about the necropolitical scenes entail a brief clarification on the trans refugee context in Turkey.

Turkey has been an inevitable route for the forced migration not only since the recent outbreak but also for LGBTs mostly from Iran conditional refugees. Among around three million Syrian asylum-seekers in Turkey, great majority of them (%85) live outside camps and settle in major cities (Del Carpio & Wagner, 2015). Istanbul as a city of trans migration has become a final destination for some trans peaceseekers and provided new spaces of settlement, labor and solidarity. Although there is a general coordinating mechanism for refugees, Ministry of Interior Directorate General of Migration Management<sup>19</sup> (DGMM) and a strong civil society of The Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants<sup>20</sup> (ASAM), there is a lack of coordination about the resettlement and the integration process, especially when it comes to LGBTI+s. The connection with Syrian LGBTI+s becomes through ASAM, directing people to LGBTI+ Associations or through their personal relations with the LGBTI+ movement.

The legal status of asylum seekers is also one of the ambiguous areas for Syrian refugees. Although the right to individual application for refugee status is guaranteed in the

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<sup>18</sup> As a cultural-religious ritual, adults whisper the name of the new-born baby through hir right ear three times. This practice deems the name permanent and valid in the stage of Allah who will call hir with this assigned name.

<sup>19</sup> To reach the website on English: [http://www.goc.gov.tr/main/En\\_3](http://www.goc.gov.tr/main/En_3)

<sup>20</sup> To reach their website on English: <http://en.sgdd.info/>

international conventions that Turkey is part of, a separate legislation was implemented for Syrian refugees in 2014 putting them under a “temporary protection status.” The temporality framework in the legislation creates a distinction between Syrian refugees and the other ones, preventing Syrians the right to individual assessment as well. Syrian refugees are always seen as a group of people or in household figures in which the vulnerability of Syrian women is overlooked, a “legal limbo” is enforced through the law, thus a legal violence is sustained in terms of unstable legal regime and legal inaction (Kıvılcım, 2016).

In official documents, there are only family-related references for the conditions of women refugees and there have been no official records for LGBTI+ refugees. LGBTI+ activist organizations in Istanbul has recently held events for the queer refugees to socialize and conduct projects on the problems of them, providing legal guidance and psychological support until they go to the third safe countries (mainly USA, Australia and Canada). Besides the legal inaction and the lack of coordination especially against the most marginalized segments of refugees, the legal attempts such as the recent legislation regarding the work permits implemented since on early 2016 proved to be practical only for a small segment of refugees with an amount of capital and did not bring a solution to precarious working conditions in large sense, nor did it alleviate the informal labor among refugees. (Grisgraber & Hollingsworth, 2016) The new work permit legislation also led to outrage on behalf of nationalist media and there has been considerable increase in xenophobic attacks against Syrians.

I especially wanted to focus on the labor part because that is an area where trans women may confront discrimination based on gender expression and identity. Unlike the established stereotype, recent reports show that trans women engaging with labor areas other than sex working increase in İstanbul, creating new alternative spaces for them (Demirbaş & Kaçan, 2016). However, documented and undocumented sex work still remain a considerably wide area of labor where trans women maintain their lives, build characteristic solidarities and communities in spite of precarious and insecure environment. The fragility in the working conditions of Syrian trans sex workers is more prominent considering the entangled nature of violence they had to endure. The violence against Syrian sex workers are orchestrated not only by the administrative or law-enforcement’s lack of knowledge or negligence but also in the street by their customers and the surrounding they work (Ördek, 2017, pp.91-92). Additionally, Syrian sex workers who have difficulties in access to health services, protection

from the violence and justice also experience the challenges of poverty and have to live with legal ambiguity in terms of their refugee and sex worker status (ibid.).

One may say such factors could cause Werde's murder, but this sort of causality is closed to other contingencies that surround not only the murder but also the life and the death of Werde. The finitude in the utterance of the word "murder" constrains the death of Werde from existing any further thus curtailing the story of her in a way that it borders her death's liveability which is already positioned by the sovereign as 'ungrievable'. Hence, the major discussions about necropolitics should not discount the narratives of afterlife, death and funerals, which are also related to the aim of this study. Accordingly, I would like to continue with the Werde's remembrance and share some pictures taken and displayed publicly as the announcement on the social media. Since there could be neither funeral arrangements nor a registered grave for Werde because of the challenges mentioned in the first chapter, KADAV and Istanbul LGBT held a remembrance event at the Kilyos Cemetery where there is a special part for the "nameless" deaths and Werde's burial place is specified with a number. I saw the remembrance announcement through a friend's post on Facebook. The announcement written top-down follows as: "In memory of Werde / Werde, a refugee sex worker, was murdered hatefully on 17th January. Although all legal



Figure 1

applications in order to receive her funeral, she was buried in cemetery of nameless, based on decision by attorney generalship. We as friends of her, in order to tell that she was not alone, are inviting all feminist and LGBTI+ organizations to memorial ceremony. 10.03.2017 11 am: in front of AKM, place of departure 13 pm: Kilyos Cemetery of nameless, Memorial KADAV & İstanbul LGBTİ" [The English translated text conferred directly]. I decided to attend and also encouraged people to do so through similar social platforms. Around 10 people set off in the morning to the cemetery on a bus provided by the Şişli Municipality<sup>21</sup>. As we enter to the cemetery, the organizers told the name of the deceased and that we would like to visit. Then the security could not find the name and instead we learned Werde was registered with her

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<sup>21</sup> This is one of the first municipalities in İstanbul that has special services commissions for LGBTI+s and provides a safe space for their employees.

assigned name at birth. Having arrived at the nameless part of the cemetery, I noticed that the place seemed nothing of a cemetery but carelessly rowed graves, each of which was framed around low-height cement blocks framing each one and on which a green figure was written, signifying the dead person's number among many others. (Figure 1) Werde's was 276. Two hundred seventy six...

Posing the question "Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives?" Butler attempts to clarify is important here in analyzing the positionality of queer death (2004, pp. 20). I reverse



Figure 2

the question for similar cases as Werde's and ask: "What deaths count as death?" and "Who counts as the grievable human?" The necropolitics calls for a control of populations and is also part of a measurement where life proximities are calibrated within the interests of national and transnational mechanisms. Werde's story indicates a similar scene that one may read in the face of death and with that scene of 'oblivion' for marginalized death (Arendt, 1951/1961), the status of trans refugees in Turkey can be read more precisely. What things were obscured and manifested in the number of 276 unseen behind a bag in the Figure 2? The 276 seems as if it is a corporeal manifestation of the

sovereign's relegation of trans death. No one noticed it, I guess so, because we have never talked about it going back home.

Figure 2 also represents a collective creation of a dignified grave, an attempt that propels to push the limits of necropolitics and defy the disposability of trans bodies by reclaiming the necrospace. In this way, trans women construct a grievable space for their loss; revive their anger, pain and anguish. Those were the major particles of emotions that I encounter that day. Those emotions with their past impressions garner a sensation of loss with the help of the flowers scattered carefully. The collective reclaiming and honoring of trans death hereto, calls for an unreservedly inalienability of trans rights shuttling between life and death and reserves a temporal but memorable temporality for Werde.



“Home is nowhere else but right here, at the edge of this body of mine” Minh-ha (2011, p.12) defines the dual spatial belonging of the refugee. She expounds the boundary event of global regimes through production of ‘virtual fears and fences.’ The boundary event speaks to the limitations and radicalization of the refugee mobility. Stuck between the complicities of boundary event, Werde maybe could not have the time to create a belonging neither within here nor elsewhere because of those regimes creating fear and hate. The nation state constructs its textual and symbolic Productive Other over refugee through its institutional practice and administration of fear and hate (Barsky, 1994). The construction of the productivity refers to borderline creation of refugee’s positionality in the margins of both life and death. Werde’s death from this angle is expelled to the sites of oblivion, where the frontiers of necropolitics are strengthened in order to deem her death untraceable. Yet the natality and uniqueness of the human condition (Arendt, 1958) is still there, somewhere on the fringes of restless efforts of collective remembrance displayed at the edge of Werde’s grave.

### Appearances of Defiance from the Posthumous Scenes

Let me start with a quote belonged to Fazilet who organized a funeral for her deceased friend years ago. They are in front of the graveyard as a transgender group:

Once, a group of gypsy<sup>22</sup> women came up to us, they said “we don’t want transvestites here” and then tried to dig the grave. I told them “Hold on a second, that’s not I who say this, but look at the society, they would despise you more [than us]. They would at least fuck me. They wouldn’t even fuck you, that’s how filthy you all are.” I told them to stop and listen before attacking: “If you don’t want me and if I don’t want you, how is it gonna happen? They [society] would want none of us.” Then the gypsy lady started to cry and said “You are right” [with Roman accent]. She regretted what she did; you know... gypsies have this emotional side. Later we buried her [her trans friend] and they cooked *helva*<sup>23</sup>, they invited us home; they compensated for their sin in a way. That is one of my stories.” [emphasis added]

*Fazilet (2017, March 17). Interview*

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<sup>22</sup> The participant didn’t articulate Romani people but said “gypsies” instead as a common usage, so I translated directly. I apologize for any possibility of offence.

<sup>23</sup> A semolina dessert that is often served after a death at the home of the deceased or hir relatives. Helva is served to the friends and relatives to remember the life of the deceased and it is also a way of keeping the extended family and friends together who then comfort the relatives for their lost. Relatives are also expected to bring some of the dishes they cooked at home to the immediate family of the deceased because they would need some help in the process of mourning.



What sort of a dialogue has been accomplished here? Apart from the contentious component of the conversation between two marginalized groups, Romani people and trans women, a constructive dialogue has been established between two dissimilar groups. However the cultural dissimilarity and antitrans attitude of the above-mentioned Romani group has been negotiated with the transformative interference of Fazilet. She grasped their attention from the marginalized and radicalized province/spatiality of the queer 'near life' (Stanley, 2011) and actually proved how the proximities of their deaths adjoin in similarities. This signals a distinct construction of an identity -trans and Romani mutually- which is diological, reflective and constitutive through which the marginalized temporalities of identities converge in an effort to enforce coalition (Yuval-Davis, 2010).

The achievement of the *sympathies* permeates other socialities that the culture around death brings about. *Helva* as a "compensation for their sin" also saved the trans death from derealizations of queer disposability and re-humanize it with cultural and maybe religious practices. Fazilet's stance during the burial can be understood as a sign of defiance whose act of protest congregates the elements of harmony and consensus in spite of her angry responses. As a non-sovereign coping mechanism against the dehumanization of trans death (Aizura, 2014), Fazilet finds a common space in her narrative for both community members. This scheme corresponds to the third categorization I skewed in the theory part for trans necropolitics as a necrospace which does not necessarily fall into the derogatory fields of death compartmentalization but rather become natal scenes of struggles and solidarities (Arendt, 1958; Katz, 2015). This is a natural *convenientia* for most of the human conditions of vulnerability where the minorities can relate to each other from different but shared layers of frequencies and historicity.

Another protest at the posthumous scene is articulated by one of the participants but I do not want to state names here. I want to recall my forewords I have written before the introduction:

...then the family came. They inscribed the assigned female name on the tombstone. We went there and broke the tombstone a week later. They renewed it. We went one week later and broke it again. They never touched it ever since. Now, Aligül is written on it and it will remain Aligül for good.

Aligül Arıkan was a leading figure especially for the community of transgender men. He established the first initiative of trans men, Voltrans and contributed to the queer community in wide sense. Aligül had uterine cancer which was diagnosed at a late stage and he passed

away on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Two things happen in the remarks of the research participant in terms of trans death. The misgendering through inscription of the assigned name by the family on the tombstone bears the features of conflict from life and sustains them in the death of Aligül. There is a tendency to theorize misgendering under the category of ‘microaggression’ which refers to interpersonal, communicated ‘othering’, verbal or non-verbal (Nordmarken, 2014). However, we should also remember more somatic aspects of misgendering whose affect may result in a trauma and distress on the recipient as in this case. This type of misgendering is the component of a larger antitrans positioning of the family and direct violation against the integrity of trans man agency. As observed here, the affective remains from the deceased trigger populations and permeates its agency to the imaginaries of the still living, thus creating a living afterlife for himself.

The second event circulating here beyond paying respect for Aligül is related to the act of the collective remembrance. One year after Aligül passed away, LGBTI+ organizations organized remembrance days for him in four different cities where different aspects of trans activism and transfeminist thinking of Aligül would be discussed. Among these activities, the activists planned to visit his grave in İstanbul<sup>24</sup>. After he passed away, the friends of Aligül lived hard times to find a proper imam who would respect the Aligül’s self-definition in denomination of his name and some LGBTI+s still do not have enough knowledge or capacity on handling the death during these vulnerable situations.<sup>25</sup> This lack of discussion on death, therefore, is one of the aims this study claims to contribute. To sum up, the misgendering can also be an interruption in front of collective remembrance and mourning for the loss of trans death. I reclaim and assume the ‘destructive and presumably non-legal’ protest of transgender community here.

Another point mentioned in the introduction of the interview footnoted is that Aligül went to gynecologist at a late time which caused spread the cancer on his uterus. Much as he was politically conscious person, “...as thousands of trans men, lesbian and single women, he hesitated to go to gynecologist...” This hesitation reveals the vitality of gynecologist violence imposed on trans men thus rendering their lives within the frameworks of imminent death (Shaksari, 2013).

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<sup>24</sup> For the detailed program, see. (in Turkish) <http://www.kaosgl.com/sayfa.php?id=17569>, retrieved on 03.07.2017.

<sup>25</sup> An interview on Aligül’s funeral challenges with the firends of his can be read from the link (in Turkish): <http://kaosgl.org/sayfa.php?id=17507>, retrieved on 10.07.2017.

## Performances of Death and Transgender Image

The last chapter shortly engages with the concept of diffraction in the analysis of the phenomenon in order to explore the transactions of post-humanist performativity. Under the major themes of transgender image and the temporality of its representation, I deliberate on how the mattering of the image, symbols and cultural products travel through different transnational necrospace of posthumous activism. Halberstam (2005, p.96) considers the representation of transgender on cinema as the instruments of production which creates new forms of “heroism, vulnerability, visibility and embodiment.” Some viewers think of trans bodies as transgressing agents as subcultural subjects that have the conveyances of both gender binarization or fantasy of gender fluidity.

The image construction peculiar to gender-transgression in Turkey is facilitated and affected by the print and visual media’s representation of transgender as well as their representation on TV and cinema. Based on the queer performances of three TV and stage performers –Bülent Ersoy, Zeki Müren and Seyfi Dursunoğlu<sup>26</sup>- Eser Selen (2012, pp.732-34) theorizes the function of queer stage into three categories; the stage as a space of queer spatiality, the representational queerness for a Turkish audience in a secular Islamic nation state context and thirdly a space where the performers embody the representational spaces by sacrificing the queerness due to the management of heteropatriarchal state and society. It is problematic to define Bülent Ersoy in the third category of the queer definition here because of the fact that she is not. The fact that Ersoy does not want to identify trans does not necessarily mean that her stage performance is a signifier of a queer sacrifice which is to be diminished for the interests of heteropatriarchy. This can be a misreading of trans subjectivity which is interpreted as the agency of the queer, thus erasing its actuality (Namaste, 1996). The erasure of the trans subject proposes a modality transgender image only demarcated within the limits of queer and thus becoming an issue of misrepresentation. “The misrepresentation of trans on the popular culture.... creates troubled scenarios for the trans imaginary, detaching it from the reality of life” (Juang, 2006, p.714). This adds up to a false historicity of a trans image (ibid. 715).

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<sup>26</sup> Bülent Ersoy is a singer woman who led the way for the legalization of SRS and law legal gender change in 1988 and publicly known as Bülent Ersoy Legislation. She is a prominent singer of *Alaturka* and a diva figure in major singing talent shows and tv programs. She never identified as trans woman, nor did she verbally support the trans community. She generally reflects a character of muslim, nationalist and upper-class woman. (Altınay, 2008) Zeki Müren was a cross-dressing highly famous singer of Turkish classical music and was on stage with his gender-transgressing avant-garde elements of fashion. (Hawkins, 2016) Seyfi Dursunoğlu is a impersonating drag actor who used to appear frequently on TV as the presenter with his queer parodies.

Apart from transgressive spatiality and representation theorized above, the historical imaginary of trans women demands a different analysis on the transgender image. Neva separates the representation of transgender image in the media into two figurations, what I call as ‘visual quagmire of the trans image’:

There were two types of trans visibility in the media in 80s and 90s. One, Bülent Ersoy and the other is transvestite insanity, transvestite terror, a body covered with “blood” holding a knife. .... We couldn’t see what is in-between these two pictures. Because the system always told us that ‘since it is not possible for your child to be like Bülent Ersoy... then your children become like the other one. ... Thus, nobody is shocked when they see a trans lying in a pool of blood. [emphasis added]

-Neva (2017, March 3). Interview

The positionality of homo sacer as trans is endured in the fringes of life, unrecognized, diminishable and disposable imaginaries of bare life (Agamben, 1998). Apart from positionality of trans that I also theorized in the previous chapters, the materiality of the visuality in the remarks of Neva is transgressed through the prisms of trans temporality here. The figuration of blood and what it associates in the geographies of the transgender produces materialized tie between itself and trans historicity. If the phenomenon is the “differential patterns of mattering” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012), what is the differential characteristics of trans death configured into the image of ‘blood’?

Figure 3



The mattering of blood with its violent association, its color and even smell which is emblemized in trans activist materialities can help analyze the agency of necrospace more comprehensively. For this aim, the Figure three<sup>27</sup>, a moment from Hande Kader’s Protest shows a trans woman with a white angel costume whose long, top-down sleeves are attached with the photos of people who died of homo- and transphobic hate

<sup>27</sup> The figure can be reached through <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/aug/23/murder-transgender-lgbt-hande-kader-turkey>, retrieved from 19 July 2017.

murders. The white costume and the tears of the model are portrayed in the color of blood, signifying blood as well. The make-up of the activists also denotes the atrocities of trans women. Neva disagrees on this type of post-hate murder activism that prompts the vehemence of blood since it does nothing but reiterates the image of “bloody transvestite”. My aim is not to decide the best activist practice but the agency of blood clearly circulates in differential temporalities and modalities of trans death and posthumous activism. This augurs a disrupted post-humanist performativity among multiple participants of that trans image, blood, the protestors and trans historicity and eventually re-formulates the realisms of the necropolitical space. So the materialization of blood as a dynamic and shifting entanglement (Barad, 2007) does not draw a rectilinear route but diffracts in different encounters.

Different routes of diffractions are also manifested in other human-nonhuman interactions of activist milieu and in the realms of necropolitics. The rainbow flag marks one of such diffractions. Alm & Martinsson (2016) contemplates the rainbow flag as both a transnational activist materiality and a cultural product that onto-epistemologically travels the LGBTI+ political space, Pakistani context for their research. Their theorization of the rainbow flag as friction, referring to “a space in which subject

Figure 4

positions are formed in relation to one another in normative inclusions and exclusions” (ibid., p. 223) contributes to thinking beyond the Western commodification of the flag’s episteme. Hande Kader’s protest involves many rainbow flags (can be seen under the feet of the protestors in the Figure 3) similar to rainbow flags and rainbow colors people use in the demonstration of Jennifer Laude, a Filipino Trans woman who was choked to death by a U.S. Marine. The rainbow flag becomes an indispensable component of every post-murder activism. The protestor on the photo does not carry the flag but painted her cheek with the colors of it (Figure 4<sup>28</sup>).



At this point I would like to problematize an aspect of the flag analysis: the episteme of the colors. To relegate the locality of six colors into the mere spatiality of the rainbow thus to the flag itself may eviscerate any contingency of the vernacular and historical affiliations of the

<sup>28</sup> The link to the photo is here: <https://urgentactionfund.org/2015/06/raising-the-voices-of-trans-women-of-color/>, retrieved on 24 July, 2017

same colors in the ethnographic culture. For the Turkey's case the story of the rainbow (gökkuşağı, eleğimsağma, alaim-i sema, ebemkuşağı etc.) already marked a gender-transcending figure from child stories to tales<sup>29</sup>. Although the caliber of this political consciousness around the colors may be incommensurable, it can be complementary for the mattering of the rainbow. Moreover, to reclaim the ubiquitousness of not only rainbow flag but also rainbow colors, maybe even as the components of the natural event after rain can develop the conceptualization of imagined communities and their transnationality as well as the epistemology of their mattering. In terms of trans death, the rainbow flag can also be an injured and sacrificed bearer whose existence may not be approved by the family and they may not want to cover it on the coffin. This may create tensions at the funerals of LGBTI+s.

The agency of the non-human (blood and rainbow flag and colors) shapes the discursive practices of trans temporality in diffractive ways. As the last step of discussion on trans death and the materiality around it, I deliberate on the artistic articulations of trans murder and thus relating to death and capture a possible transnational aesthetics over the two art performances.

How does the art mobilize a transgender image in relation to the trans death? I involve the works of two performance artists: Leman Sevda Darıcıoğlu and Mary Coble.

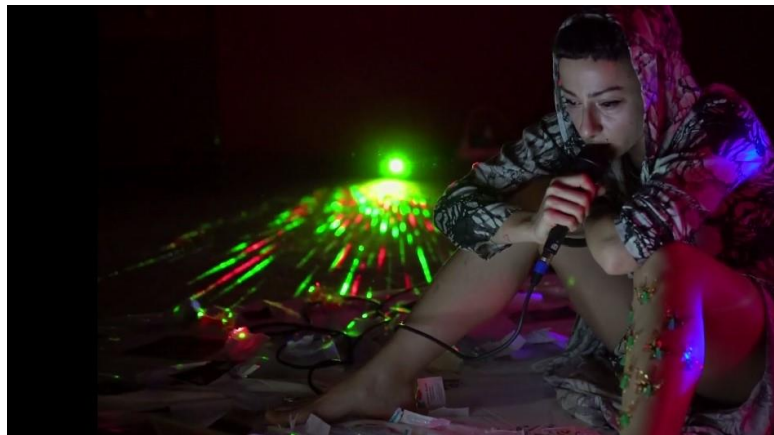


Figure 5

Darıcıoğlu is a prominent figure in terms of their queer works performed at different queer

spaces in Turkey. One of their last work aimed to build a remembrance for 99 trans girls that “lived the golden age of Ülker Sokak.<sup>30</sup>” They has recently created performances on queer death and “Kimler Geldi, Kimler Geçti<sup>31</sup>” (Who has come, Who has gone?) is one of them. I haven't witnessed this performance in person; I watched it from their video channel where

<sup>29</sup> One common story tells that if someone goes under a rainbow, one's sex is changed. Again, a child story of Ömer Seyfettin “Eleğim Sağma” handles this folk narration over a girl who embodies the privileges of being a boy after she went under the rainbow. But it turns out to be a dream. Seyfettin depicts the positionality of new founded Republic over a child girl.

<sup>30</sup> To listen to a witness of Ülker Sokak and its antitrans gentrification process in English <https://vimeo.com/139880696>. The work “Golden Butterfly” can be seen from this link: <https://vimeo.com/139648011> retrieved on 20.07.2017

<sup>31</sup> The link to the performance <https://vimeo.com/201537359> retrieved on 23.06.2017



they shares the gist of it. The performance captures “an effort towards bringing into existence the absence of those who were not allowed to live, building a temple for those who died.” In a half-dark, red lighted room full of newspaper clippings and other materials in front of which they situate themselves, an open screen behind them sitting cross-legged. They start to read the perpetrator’s remarks written on the news of trans murders and suicides with a monotonous but emphasized and half-creepy way. (Figure 5) After each news clip they read, they put a *needle* through their skin on the leg. The needle is in the shape of yellow butterfly, the same symbol that they used before in the trans remembrance. She reads with temporal stops:

-‘I said “I’d shoot you, son” ... and he heard.... “Ah, brother” he said and fell to the ground.’

-“I met her from the internet. She introduced herself as woman then I learned she was a transvestite when I went her home.”

Darıcıoğlu, investing a bodily sensation into the necropolitical space, locates the spatiality of the objects in a temple where the utterances of the perpetrators permeate somatic and affective injury for the trans death. The red element dominant in the room time to time seems to

Figure 6



circulate all the objects. The episteme of the color red/blood as a particle of collective memory and trans temporality signals a similar imaginary of the transgender as in the activist materiality of Hande Kader protest.

The second performance artist I would like to introduce is Mary Coble<sup>32</sup>. (Figure 6) Their endeavors are to approximate art and artistic activity to the queer resistance and defiance. They once lectured us on “Gestures of Defiance” and through that class I came to know about their work that I will include in the discussions of trans death. One prominent characteristic of Coble’s work is brave instrumentalization and self-utilization of their body. Among their works, Note to

<sup>32</sup> Check their website here: <http://marycoble.com/>

Self (2005) is a performance that specifically handles the issue of hate murders against LGBTI+s. Coble collects the 436 names + anonymous at the end and “these names are tattooed with no ink, onto the surface of Coble’s body.” After each name, a *Blood Painting* is made on small papers, all of which then are collected and hanged on a white wall to indicate the brutality against LGBTI+s. (Figure 6)

Both artistic performances indicate particular differences in physicality of the material but confess more similarities in manifestations of queer death. The intracibility of trans death has been emphasized in the silences of the perpetrator in Darıcioğlu’s work and in the lost position of multitude of deaths in Coble’s. Moreover, the self-technologization of their bodies equipped with the needles and other materials promise an affective turn into the emotional positioning of the queer. Emotion as a space embedded with the sociality we inhabit (Ahmed, 2004), the emotions around death is relocated to the proximity of trans necropolitics.

Compatible with the theoretical aim, the prostheses (Stryker, 2008) utilized by the artists such as needles, microphone (for Darıcioğlu’s case) and the paper (Coble) demands a separate narrative and realization. The matter of the *needle* in both performances going under the skin of the performers does not enjoy a signification of dynamism. It is a bare evidence of random, indistinct injection. It also gives hints on the ordinariness of the brutality, incessantness of queer dispensability. However, the needle also brings upon sensation of pain. Ahmed (2004) sees the affectivity of pain as a crucial element in forming of the bodies as material and lived identity. The mattering of the needle signifies both necropolitical governmentality and a tool of transgender embodiment in terms of its reclaiming with butterflies (Darıcioğlu) and with tattoo (Coble).

## **Conclusion and Further Discussion**

One of the main purposes of this study lies in the endeavor to introduce and construe the phenomena of trans death within the frameworks of cultural analysis. The theoretical structure is constituted on the four analytical perspectives: the theory of bio/necropolitics, intersectionality, transgender theory and posthumanist theory. Much as not a major theoretical framework, I also engage in the discussions on death and anthropology especially to take stock of mortuary processes of bereavement, loss and remembrance. The reason for such a theoretical juncture rests on the complex nature of gender and feminist literature as to the discussions on subjectivity, belonging and solidarity. Methodological input also pays regard to different encounters on epistemology, knowledge production, ethics and translation. The



corpus of the research material is formed through the interviews with seven participants who identify trans woman as well as the ethnographic inquiry that I conduct on a trans remembrance. The photos of trans activism and performances from secondary sources also contribute as the material of this study in the last chapter.

Although the participant's personal experiences on death are not major components of this study, I found valuable indicators from these narratives adding different insights to the conceptualization of trans death. Moreover, the distress felt through the narratives against the numeration of trans death and trans people as quantifiable Subjects not only depicts a general portrait of Turkey regarding to trans hate murders but also highlights the trans women's opposition to derealizing/dehumanizing feature of necropolitical violence, both of which answer one of the aims for the research. The second part of the first chapter places trans death on a systematic and historical continuity of administrative violence. The administrative violence is enforced by the mechanisms of legal texts and the reality of the cemetery of the nameless. The legal texts on the funerals of the "nameless" people include implementations that are both textually and practically ambiguous and reinstate the vulnerability of trans death. The political situation of Turkey, which slips into more authoritarian and oppressive landscapes, thwarts the rights of the trans advocate organizations to acquire information on the cases of trans hate murders, thus foreclosing the liveability of trans subjectivity in terms of activist efforts, which is obvious for the case of Hande Kader. The legal regulations and bureaucratic structures do not allow trans friends of the deceased to adopt the body which is automatically relegated into the vulnerable forms of exequial scenes.

Besides the fact that the reality of the cemetery for trans people stands as a necro-geographical platform where trans death is conceded to an untraceable, unclaimed and interminably carceral demarcations of *bare life*, I also deliberate on the postmortem processes of the dead body as an extra dimension of my first research question on necropolitical contingencies and dwell upon the narratives of trans women that experienced the event of autopsy. Autopsy as an invasive and somatechnical procedure instrumentalizes, technologizes and utilizes dead body of trans deceased for the sake of science and within the modifications of cissexist applications exercised by medicolegal examiners. The somatechnics of necropolitics over the trans corpus as gender-nonconforming body manifests the violent and destructive nature of autopsy in the face of trans death, thus adding the *overkillability* of trans subjectivity in the posthumous scenes. Compatible with the aim of the study, the narratives

from the interviews elucidate the postmortem reality of and necropolitical governmentality over trans death via the analyses of funerals, cemeteries and autopsy.

The funerals have been sites of derogative necropolitics in terms of bureaucratic obstacles, families and inheritance issues. The disengagement of trans women from their families in life is revisited afterlife mostly because of legal responsibility or within the interests of the deceased's inheritance. The family intervention in the organization of the funerals and the cemetery occurs in different ways: they may try to detach the deceased's friends and the activists from the funeral and handle the funeral as a silent and secret event. They can also intervene in the forms and shapes of the cemetery and even the tombstone or the cloth of the coffin (as in the rainbow flag rejection) in a way that trans deceased and the friends of them would not accept. Moreover, when the letter of attorney signature lacks, the trans organizations have no right to claim the body and organize funerals.

Recalling the first research question here, all of these necropolitical apparatus contribute to the systemic enfranchisement of trans populations, incarcerating them into the necrogeographies of *imminent* death in the margins. Hence, the trans people's challenges around death are encumbered with the conflictual afterlife encounters with the state and its institutions, the religion as in the examples of imams' denotations and the family. Here, I consider the intricacy of distinct experiences as well and do not skew the same reality for all trans people in Turkey. Being sex worker, of different ethnicity and enjoying other marginalized positions approximate one's death more at the fringes of the death normativity. Likewise, after the research I have become aware of the connotations of trans death is culturally embedded as in the reactions of the misgendered denotations of the imams in the funerals, which may provide an epistemology of misgendering different from the Western nomenclature.

Thinking beyond the positionality of a marginalized death calls for a wider perspective on the concepts of afterlife and remembrance. Parallel to the second research question, I revisited the sites of trans activism both as the street protests and as the forms of remembrance organized in the cemetery. The trans activism and its *convenientia* with the feminist movement in İstanbul is formulated into a coalition in the events of gender killings. However, this mortal conditionality of trans/feminism also beckons a necessity in the feminist movement to become more trans-inclusionary. After a hate murder, the collective remembrance and protest becomes a collective postmortem responsibility among trans women and their feminist allies.

Procuring recognition for their loss and the demand for justice in capturing the murderers are intercepted with the challenges that are solidified by state actors and the current state of emergency in Turkey. These have become common factors that circumvent the processes of mourning and remembrance for a collective loss. This collectivity is significant to notice in terms of enumerating the ways of resilience and solidarities among trans women, which is alongside another aim of the study.

Both the insistence on public grieving and the position of marginalized Other within the presumptions of invariable and fatal criminality –this also corresponds to the bare life of *homo sacer* – can become propellant layers in transforming a possible kinship between different movements, which signifies an intimate alliance both enduring and breakable (Butler, 2000). This sort of a radical kinship manifests itself during the remembrance of Werde between a trans self-organization and a feminist one. The participants in the event collectively adorned the grave of Werde and consummated their postmortem duty. The solidarity at the remembrance draws the lines of grievability of trans refugee's death and becomes an indicative of a resistance against the obliteration of trans death.

The posthumous activism not only engenders the juxtapositions of different feminist agencies in the protests but also assembles various segments of the society in the cemetery. The stories conferred in the last part of the second chapter exemplify similar types of protests conducted spontaneously and with an effort to honor the deceased friend. These appearances of defiance transcends the conventional ways of protest and attend in the practices of reclaiming the authority over trans afterlife circumscribed by the cisnormative commodification of the trans grave as seen in the case of tombstone. As a possible answer to the second research questions, the anti-trans intervention by families and state actors in the funerals and graves of trans people reinstate the challenges in the afterlife of the deceased but actuates novel forms of solidarities among different subjects. This may open up a complementary discussion on the 'natality' of human condition in the necropolitical space that I theorized in regard to Arendt's concept.

The last chapter deliberately sets off its own path in theorizing trans death, which coincides with the last purpose to disclose the symbolic attributions of necro-related notions. Moreover, the posthumanist analysis enabled me to imagine the necropolitics on a different topography, the one that matters the materiality on a diffractive methodology. Accordingly, the mattering of the trans embodiment and its tokens reflected in the queer performances and opens a

discussion on the temporality the trans image embodies, e.g. the representation of blood. The visual quagmire of transgender image travelling between two extreme indicators of class is sustained by the visual culture and these attributions of trans image can be observed from the activist practices to the performance art. The travelling of trans image around death also reveals its permanence at the transnational figurations such as in the case of rainbow flags and its colors. The diffractive analysis of the material and what it brings to the trans temporality and spatiality remold the course of discussions about the trans necropolitics and its employment on the artful and performative scenes.

The theorization of trans necropolitics presents a wide range of discussions on the vulnerabilities of trans death and the afterlife for the academic literature. This study has also provided me not only knowledge but a different perspective and proximity to trans activism although I still problematize my own position in a trans self-organization as someone who does not identify trans, which I deliberated on the methodology part. During one month visit in Turkey for this research, I had the chance to organize a workshop with my previous university's LGBTI+ student group with the title "Queer Death" and shared particular frameworks on trans necropolitics with them. Maybe it would be utopic to imagine this text as a catalyst for gendering practices on trans death and the postmortem violence; however as a further discussion, I acknowledge that the defiance of trans people at the posthumous scenes already gendered the realm of death in an effort to stand against the violent and obliterating regimes of necropolitics against the bodily and agential integrity of the trans deceased. Since the afterlife of the trans transnationally conveys a phenomena with the interruptions in their mortuary processes of death from Turkey to USA, Philippines and many other geographies, I hope the thesis would contribute to trans necropolitics literature from the angles of cultural analysis and anthropology of death and move to a mainstreaming platform and trigger other works that will aim to create a guide for trans people and their loved ones on the processes of legal procedures and bereavement.

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