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“THOSE WOMEN”: VIOLENCE STORIES FROM SEX WORKER TRANS WOMEN

INTERVIEW / COMPILATION: KEMAL ÖRDEK





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March 2015

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This book is dedicated to Dođa Asi evik and Ayda Esra Yıldırım who have passed away in the recent months.

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This is the product of intense work. Collecting the interviews conducted under “Mapping Violence Against Sex worker trans women in Turkey and Legal Support Project” carried out by Red umbrella with the financial supports from Açık Toplum Foundation, The Netherlands Embassy, and Swedish Consulate General in Istanbul within a book is the end result of an intense energy and resolution.

In scope of the project, a survey on experiences of violence was conducted with 233 sex worker trans women from 10 provinces in Turkey, in addition to interviews with a total of 18 sex worker trans women from various provinces. Interviews were completed either in one time or by meeting up with sex worker trans women for multiple times. The greatest effort in the successful realization of these interviews belongs to sex worker trans women who accepted to speak with me. I bid my deepest thanks to 18 sex worker trans women who opened their homes to me, fed me with their nice conversation, allocated their time to me generously and shared their life stories with me.

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KEMAL ÖRDEK

2 March 2015, ANKARA

INTRODUCTION

The stories of trans women are always remembered with tragic scenes in arabesque-genre movies. These stories are about being exposed to violence and outing from the society, and they always end with death. Each and every one of these women, who strive to stand tall among the anger and hatred incited by the society, are the symbol for the struggle of living as natural born warriors. These heroines, who enjoy a laugh-ter from time to time and make fun of life despite everything, are sometimes imprisoned with despair within the feeling of helplessness and isolation. No matter what, “those women” always exist as valuable subjects in the middle of invisibility.

This book consists of the true stories of sex worker trans women who struggle to exist within violence. Hope and excitement are always there within the dark atmosphere that dominate these stories. The adventures, which were untold to us, rise in the very center of the story of wedding and funeral at the same time. These adventures tell us of “the other”; the stories of “other women”, “those women”. Those who are not seen or heard, those who have been embedded in the middle of silence and continue their struggle of life.

Some of them work in brothels while some work on the

streets or night clubs. There are those with disabilities or living with HIV among them. Some of them struggle with the swirl of violence they have fallen into at a young age while others reminiscence back from the age of 60-something to recall exciting days. Some of them are overwhelmed, and resort to drugs while some of them recall their days in prison and remind us the burden of those days. Some of them are currently sex workers while some of them are happy to have left the life of a sex worker behind. Some of them revolt with a feeling of desperation against behind compelled to sex work while others demand the government to improve the conditions of sex workers. With a mutual language, all of them are shouting out with the hope for an equal and fair world, and a longing for a free world in peace.

Each story in this book involves a feeling of longing. Each trans woman searched, hoped and waited for something during their life. A feature domineered the life of each one of them. While one of them resorted to revolting, the other one wailed One hopes for heaven while another one searches for the rainbow. Some of them run after love while some of them ask for equality and justice. In addition to those who put an effort to achieve a life full of serenity, compassion and hope, there are also whose who have woke up to an innocent dream with the longing for peace.

You won't be able to find the names of these people in the interviews. Instead of those names, you will see the themes that refer to what is yearned for in each story. Each of these themes are the names of each interviewee trans woman. These names are the answers to all of the negative aspects of the life cycles of sex worker trans women. Each trans woman sex worker identifies with their answer. These answers are the name of the resistance sex worker trans women have developed against violence.

As they tell their stories, "Those Women" get out from the violence they have been embedded into; and share their yearning for justice, equality and peace with all of the public opinion. Let's hear these stories. Let's see sex worker trans women. Let's touch these stories and make life more beautiful for not only sex worker trans women, but also for everyone.

[PEACE]

“I need a friend who can share my sorrows and offer me a shoulder when I cry. Someone with whom I can communicate and lay on their lap when I am sad. I need a friend who will hug me when I go to bed at nights.”

ISTANBUL

Can you talk about yourself briefly?

My birth certificate is registered in Konya, 1968. I came to Istanbul when I was 17 years old. I did not communicate with my family for 17 years. I started seeing them after 17 years.

What are you doing now in Istanbul?

I have been in Istanbul for 28 years. I used to have very good circles. As you know, our environment is wavy. Only the god has no ups or downs. I spent everything, I changed my life. Then I started to use drugs with my co-workers. I used drugs for 17 years. Someone who works for this association was a very dear friend to me and she knew of my environment. She knew how it is here. I knew that there is a guesthouse. She used to come around and visit my home in Tarlabası. I was helping for the association. Eventually she offered me to manage the guesthouse so that I could help the girls there and carry out its administration. So I came. You see, I cook for them. I manage these. As for the drugs, - I have been here since the 20th April - I have used for maybe 4 times at most within the last 4 months. May Allah appreciate the efforts of anyone who helped me. I get out, sometimes for the weekend, and don't return for one or two days. I also don't want to live any troubles with here. I enjoy myself to my heart's desire, get out and come back right before my friends.

Do you do koli nowadays?

For sure. I get out and buy my bread and cigarettes. We don't pay for meals, rent or utility bills here. But I don't like to squander away just because we don't pay for things. No matter what, you should manage your money even if the association covers the bills. I observe everything here. I turn a blind eye on some of things. I don't know what to say. But when I have special needs, I go out and meet my needs by myself, and return here thereafter.

Which conditions made you stay here?

There is obviously a deprivation and poverty, I got into a scrape for so many times. In a sense, I came here by myself so that I could stay away from drugs. My friends supported here as well; for instance, I used to try to get outside at weekends but my friends would not let me out. They would not let me as they knew that I was going to use drugs if I went out. In some instances I did not leave here for three weeks. I forced myself but sometimes I escaped after those three weeks. I used to flee at 1 o'clock in the morning. I was saying that I should go. I could not resist the urge. Quitting with your own free will is different from receiving rehabilitation.

But you did not receive rehabilitation, did you?

Never.

Reducing it by yourself is a great success as well, congratulations.

I can bring you to the place where they use 24-7. I can show you the place I used to stay and sleep. For example I can take you with me and get you in if I tell that you use drugs as well... Only Allah other than me knows where I stayed and in which conditions I lived. Nobody other than who has lived this in person can know this. But if you want me to show you, I can bring you there and show you around. A friend of mine took photos of it, and I know that she will publish the photos and everything... I am not ashamed, I don't have any hesitations. All of my friends know me, my personality and conditions very well. I never competed with any of my friends, my only competition has been with myself. I never had any secrets anywhere. I always knew to be content with less. I always supported all of my friends. I never set an obstacle before anyone, I always supported everyone. My only weak point is my child¹ inside. Its comfort comes before mine. Let me be clear, the only reason why I came here is so that this little one doesn't suffer outside. I have no other reasons. I can survive and stay anywhere, but I dote on it. If I went to my friends to stay, they

1 She is referring to her dog.

would accept me as I am a human but they wouldn't accept an animal. It comes before all for me.

How is the environment you mentioned of?

There are three buildings in different locations. You go there... Oh my Allah, I am very thankful to have arrived here. It is very good that I am here now. I am not just saying it, I am very serious. I wish I could take you with me and bring you in there so that you can appreciate me, and say to me, "How could you leave there and come here, how could you resist the urge to escape from here while you were on drugs 24-7 there, well done." I have been using for 17 years. All of my friends know this. But I never did anything bad to anyone, I never offered or proposed to use it to anyone. I always said to my friends, "You should see and know what this is, so that if you find yourself in the environment when something bad happens to you or feel yourself down you know it. You should stop talking to anyone that offers or proposes it to you, you should even change the way you walk on to stay away from them." It is very good that I am here now.

How did you start to use it?

It coincided with a vulnerable moment. My friend used to reside here, in Pangalti. She is of Roman origin. She used to

sell it here. She told me that she bought the house, it turns out that she only rented it. It was a building with three - four floors. I bought a painting and visited her. I will never forget that day, it was three days before the feast of sacrifice. She slaughtered a sheep as an offering and brought it to her family in Yalova. She told me to wait at that house. She said, "come on, let's use ex," and stuff like that. She said I will put it into your soup or anything you have without your knowledge. I said, I will use it. I will use it with my own will, and nothing else. I was curious about what I would feel. In my behaviors, attitudes... I said myself, I will do it. This is how I started and continued it.

Then you couldn't quit...

I used for 17 years.

Did you ever want to quit in during the 17 years?

No, it never came to my mind. When I came here and started to go out only at weekends as a 24-7 user, it occurred to me that I could quit if I achieved to stay clean during the weekdays while waiting for the weekend. So I decided to go outside biweekly just to see if I could refrain myself. I can hold it for two weeks as well, but anyway...

You want it, don't you?

I do. Let me express bluntly, I want to use it but I stay here and I cannot use it when I am with the people here. I cannot do it right before the people staying here... We all are victims here. I am able-bodied, I am 41 years old but I can earn my bread as a person who works for days. There are people who aren't able to do it here. This is where I sleep and stay. I get up and do the cleaning. It is as you see and you saw how it is when you first came as well. But I don't develop any attitude against anyone.

Did you start working as a sex worker starting from the first moment when you arrived in Istanbul? Was that the time when you started?

May Allah rest him in peace. There was someone called gay Mustafa from Adapazarı. I was masculine in appearance back then. I started hanging out with him during my skinny times. I had no idea of cross-dressing then. I never forget, it was in Unkapanı. There was something like Cibali Tobacco Factory; Pinar Office Block was located behind it. It still exists today. I used to sleep there. I started coming to Taksim thanks to him, as I used to hang out with him. I went to his family. My first friend in Istanbul was; I have a friend called Öykü. Her friend is Tuğba. Do you know of her?

I don't.

She is my first masculine-looking queer friend. I owe her a lot, I even took her to my family. She knows of my masculine appearance well. As I made trips to Taksim thanks to her, I started to see transvestites there. When I went to bed, I started to think on how I could become one and how they became so. Thereafter, I met someone called Zeki in Tarlabaşı. I cross-dressed as a woman in Tarlabaşı for the first time in my life. I cross-dressed as a woman when I was 17 years old; it was 3 months before my 18th birthday. I have been cross-dressing as a woman for 28 years in Istanbul. I opt for a masculine appearance during daytime as I can walk around more comfortably; and I cross-dress at nights.

How would you define the time that has passed since you first began as a sex-worker? What was your life like?

I experienced very nice things as well. If I compare myself to my friends in much worse condition, I didn't experience such bad events. Because I have a high level of awareness, and I am also very sharp. I know what to expect from each environment. I never go to someone's home just to earn money, earn more. I always opt for less, it is sufficient for me on the condition that it is trouble-free. I have always used my own mind for this. I never went to places or homes I was invited

by others. This is why I did not suffer too much damage. I never turned a trick with someone else. I was always alone so that only I would suffer in the event of an accident or bad event. Therefore, I did not suffer much. People are somehow capable of this. When criticizing, we should criticize ourselves as well. When you go out, you should pull yourself together at first. You should have self-esteem first, and you should respect others. You take what you give to others. Obviously there is no other way but if you get outside with such an obscene clothing, if you present yourself bare naked before everyone everywhere, I will surely react to it as a transvestite or homosexual, whatever it is called, however it is seen. This is why. I get outside with a normal appearance. Maybe 10 people out of every 30 people understand that I am a homosexual. If I go outside as a transvestite during daytime, maybe 100 people will see me as a transvestite. I prefer being unobtrusive than drawing attention. For example, I can walk around more comfortably like that. I go out like that at nights as my job requires to do so, I am not very beautiful but I am very difficult. I don't easily let myself to be exploited. There are very beautiful queers, they may outdo me with their beauty but I outdo them with just one word I can say. Beauty is subjective. I am 47 years old, but I feel that I am the most beautiful when I dress up. I can compete with the best. Competing does not matter. Spiting or flaunting is not important. What you keep is what matters. Keeping is important. Friend-

ship does not mean doing something bad behind someone's back. Friendship is helping. I have always behaved so. Ask me around, I helped most of them with earning their bread. Nobody can say that I am bad. Nobody in my environment can claim that I seduce others' lovers or steal. Maybe I did wrong outside, but I never did anything wrong to my friends. Do you know anyone from Bursa?

Yes.

My friend used to come from Bursa and stay at my place for weeks. They used to visit me at my home. I never let them spend their own money when they were at my place. I used to let them work at my home as well. Both visit and trade at the same time. Of course they were going to work. My home was available as well. If you stay at my place, your money should remain in your pocket. You can work, eat and drink at my home. I had so many girls work. The profit would be 50/50, I never exploited anyone. They always took more but never less. All of my friends witnessed this.

Considering your first period, would you like to have any other job for work?

Wouldn't I? My profession is bakery. If you find me work at a bakeshop now, I can prepare all kinds of bakery goods. I

don't know kneading, but I can bake batons. I would prepare any variety to the best. If I earned 2000 TL a month, I would work. See, I am saying again. I am not permanent here. I will eventually leave here one day. Even if I left here someday, I know how people here work and what they do down to the last detail. I swear to you, they cannot accomplish anything. I cannot come in the mornings, but I come at noon. I cook their meals and I don't leave here after I feed them either. Because, thanks to this place - swearing an oath does not change anything, but I could not deceive you even if I lied - I reduced drug use. As a 24-7 user, I get out to use once in 15 days. I would not leave for 2 months if I could resist the urge. Let me tell you something; if you said to me "I will come to you 10, 20 days later; stay clean for 20 days for me", I would stay clean for 1 month for you. You would come and take me to rehabilitation, and appreciate me during that 1 month. This is how strong-willed I am, but sometimes you feel down. When something occurs in my environment, I cannot leave it behind, and start regretting what I have done... I go outside those times, and don't come home for two days. What I do during those two days is just occupying myself. If you ask me where I stay for two days when I don't come home, I stay right there. I use drugs at that construction site and stay there. Just because I don't want these people to see me like that.

Who are there? Do people come around that place?

All kinds of people. There are travesties, working women, thieves, family people. There are such people that... Dear poor thing comes and does not leave until spending up a month's salary. Let me bring you and show you around one day. I can show you those places one by one. I took someone interested in this issue there. Just because I told them he was my friend, he was able to take the photos of sofas and everything else inside the house. I warned them about that he is a new user. This is how I got him inside. He got his camera out and took many flash photos. I said these are the places I talked about. He just looked around and said "I appreciate you better now". Ask all of my friends like this. I gained weight when I came here. I know what I will eat and wear. May Allah appreciate all of them, everyone recognizes me when I say my name. If you go to gay clubs, you'll see that all of the club managers are my friends. All of them offer me drinks when I go to their places, but I neither lower nor disgrace myself there. I go and pay my money, have my table prepared and have fun.

Are you pleased with your life now?

Actually, I don't have any needs. Because I inherited a little bit of something from my family. I have a home as well. I rent-

ed it out to someone. I would feel very comfortable if I lived there, but what would I do there? I mean, except for my close family, even my relatives don't know of my environment. They presume that I am a singer in the night clubs. There is nothing that I could do if I went there, so I would get bored. Which is why I say to myself that I should stay here a while longer until I am no longer able-bodied, and only after that I will go and make myself comfortable there. There is nothing else to do. This is the reason why I don't want to go to Konya. In fact, I am in two minds. Should I go or should I stay, should I go or should I stay? Sometimes I say enough is enough. I say to myself, just leave. I want it very much. If I went there now, I don't have parents - only siblings. I assigned my sister as a proxy for my paper work. Sometimes I get in distress, and ask for money. I mean I don't want her money, I only ask for my own money. She sends me 100-150 TL. What good is 100-150 TL for me? I buy peanuts with that money. But I am a drug user, why would I give that halal money for drugs? I have two nephews that go to school. It will be sufficient for me if they are grateful, that's all.

You had told that your parents passed away. How many siblings do you have?

I have 6 siblings. I am the youngest of all. We are 4 boys and 1 girl. 2 of them are in Antalya, we lost contact with one of

them.

Why did you lose contact?

He is somewhat conservative. I mean, we don't visit each other. I only visit him in holidays as he is older than me. When I go to my hometown, I kiss his hand and show him my respect. They cannot do anything to me now; they cannot afford to it. I went there for the first time in 17 years. I was very scared of being murdered, but my late mother, may Allah rest her in peace, embraced me. She warned the others: "You won't touch my child." My brother said, "I haven't seen him in 17 years. I want to take him to a tour." It turns out that he was taking me to my father's tomb. We went to my father's tomb together. They built a mass graveyard for those who passed away in Izmir '99 earthquake. We went to that graveyard. I said to myself; "He will kill me and bury me here." The graveyard was close to the village. I said "The village is close." He didn't do anything to me. There are vineyards 3 km away from there. We bought beers and went there. He said, "Listen to me. We are siblings. Blood is thicker than water. As your older brother, I have a request." He lit a cigarette for me, I refused, saying I don't use. He opened a bottle of beer, I refused, saying I don't use. He said, "You are using all of them, I know. Drink while you are with me. Don't drink beside me when we are with other people, and show me respect. I will

request something from you as a brother. Your private life is your own. It does not interest me. If you somehow appreciate me as a brother, make your trips to our hometown properly, don't let anyone say bad things to me. I won't let anyone who says bad things behind you to live comfortably either." I said to myself, "OK, he knows everything." If I go there and behave indecently even though he is aware of everything and has told me this, yet did not approach to me in any other manner, I will be the one who misbehaves. So I make my trips back and forth there properly. I go there and go to the cinema with my friends; I come back and go to the brothel. Well, do they know? Maybe they do, but they cannot say it to me. But I cannot say it to them either. I cannot say because I don't want to make them ashamed. Never. Because I can hang around freely with my friends. Would they mistreat me if they knew now? No, but then again, why should they know anyway? It is better for me that they don't know.

How was your childhood? Your relationship with your siblings, your parents...

So lively... I am from Konya, Tuzlukçu. If you go there now, they will tell you that my nickname is "topalak" (en. bulbous). Do you know the round meatballs in gravy, they make them with dough and bulghur, it is poor man's meatball. I was somehow overweight back then, they said I am like those meatballs and

gave me this nickname. If you go there now... I wish I stroll around those places like this and introduce you to my family. We used to work as farmers, we were not in need but my father was a little tightfisted. He would not give any money to us as a pocket money for school; so my late mother used to sell barley and save the money for herself so that she could give it to me before I left home for school. When I was in the secondary school -I started to waver at the 7th grade anyway- I had a girlfriend as well. There was a boy, I used to go after him whenever I saqw him. He was from the upper quarter and I was from the lower quarter. Not something other, but I felt a platonic love for him. He used to live in the upper quarter and was a friend of my older brother. So, I was wavering in general. Eventually I realized that it was impossible; I was going to either stay there and bring shame on my family, or abandon that place. It happened out of the blue. My mom and I were in Çapa to receive our payment upon work completion. That is when I told my mom I wanted new clothes. I bought a pair of new stretch jeans. I combined them with a new tunic-like sweater, I always remember that. Then I got on the bus and escaped to Istanbul. I had arrived in Topkapı, and I was going to Taksim. People were calling me names like boy, fag and stuff. I couldn't understand those names at all. This was how I had arrived in Istanbul, I will never forget that.

Did they never hear from you again? Did it take 17 years for you to return?

It was the time of my military service. But I told them that I was working and going to visit them. Then I returned to my family, because a part of me didn't want them to be broken and sad as I was the youngest child and my mother was very fond of me. Thereafter I went to Çanakkale. I came Istanbul with my family and introduced a gay I used to hang out with to them as if he was my boss. We went to Çanakkale all together, and they brought me to my assigned military base. They bid me farewell and returned to our hometown. I received a medical report 8-9 days after that upon staying at the military hospital in Gelibolu for 7 days. As soon as I received my report, I returned to Istanbul as if I had completed the boot camp. I took Tuğba along with me. She had a male appearance back then, yet she was still girlish and very beautiful. I mean, she was even more beautiful than she is now. I introduced her as the brother of my friend from the army when she came to Konya with me. Oh sister, my sister, if we talked on the phone, she would testify to these stories; all of these actually happened. I had the report with me but there were about 20 days to my medical examinations. I told my family that the reason why I was allowed to depart early was my work at the night club. I was showing Tuğba around in my hometown when a few soldiers asked me if I was a soldier, too. I approved. They asked

for my report. I told them that I had forgotten it at home. The report was actually in my pocket, but I was unable to show it to them since we were on a bus at that moment. I said “OK, I will show the report.” We went to a backyard and I showed my incapacity report. I warned them not to call me names or talk behind my back, or else I would file a complaint to the police station. I explained that my family was not aware of it. I guess I stayed at my hometown for three days or something like that. I told my mother that I was there to distribute letters. I introduced Tuğba as the brother of my friend from the army. They assumed that I had eloped from the army with a girl. All of the women in my family thought so until they realized that Tuğba was a man, not a woman. My older sister said that Tuğba was from Istanbul and a hairdresser (which justified her appearance). My relatives calmed down thereafter. Then, I was so close to getting busted if it weren't for Tuğba. My jacket had a girlish style, that's why my older sister asked for it. She had already worn it. Tuğba immediately said, “Can you give me the jacket to me for a moment, I will buy a jacket like this to my sister and I want to have a look at it.” Right at that moment, Tuğba took my incapacity report from the pocket of that jacket. I told my mother, “I am assigned to east for my military service. I will call you from wherever I am, don't bother to call me.” That is how I left there as if I was going to army. We never contacted each other for the following 17 years.

What does losing contact for 17 years feel like?

So difficult, as they say...

Were there times that you wanted to call them?

So many. I even tried to commit suicide, but I failed. Do you know why I couldn't do it? Sometimes you want to do it, but... When you are alone with yourself, your conscience... I judge myself most of the times... I mean, where did I go wrong? Allah gives your life and Allah takes it back, you cannot do it. You aren't entitled to such a luxury, but I wanted it so much. I wanted it very much. They say that you can make any self-sacrifice for your child. Similarly, I said to myself, "If I chose this road and this is my destiny, I will bear anything that comes to me for this." Sometimes we receive blows from other people, yet those blows were nothing for me. Those blows were nothing as compared to those coming from my family, my sibling. Those were the times I was already disconnected from my family. I was only in contact with my oldest sister, but not anymore. It has been 6 years; I wouldn't even go to her funeral or want her to come mine.

What happened?

That event is the reason I am disconnected from my family

now. It is the fire that burns within me. Inside me, how could I express myself?

Why, what happened, what did she do to you?

She was the only one I kept in touch during 17 years. She knew everything about me. I missed my family. She said, "Don't come here, they will kill you. I will reunite you in time and smooth things over..." In actuality, it was just a lie. It was just a trick she made so that I would disconnect from them completely. But I told her only one thing. I couldn't make it to the funeral of my late mother either. Thanks Allah, I was with her 20 days prior. I mean, the events that occurred after we started seeing each other again. I had started to go back and forth to my hometown again by then. My brother said, "If I asked you something, would you honestly answer me?" I said, "Sure." He asked if his suspicions were true. I refused. He asked if I was serious, I said "Yes." He asked, "Can you call your older sister and repeat this before her?" I said "OK". I immediately called my older sister. While we were having this conversation, we had just buried my mother in our garden. He told me to call my sister and repeat these while I was with him. I phoned my sister and called her over. She asked what it was about, and I asked if she could come over to our home for a few minutes. I said that I was going to request something from her. She said "OK, I am coming." My brother asked

her, "Didn't you tell me that it was like that when we were on the phone?" She said, "Why are you talking about these all of a sudden?" He insisted, "Just answer me, did you or did you not tell me that it was like that?" She said, "Yes, I said so." My brother then said, "OK, I got my answer. I have no more to say." "But," he said to me, "I will tell you only one thing, my brother. I am your brother, so I will take care of you for 3-5 days if you need me. But I will kick your ass on the 6th day." "Mind yourself, be smart and don't let anyone exploit your money. Even siblings are useless for each other. Now I see who disconnected you from us," he told me. Then my brother arranged a wedding for his child, and I sold my car. They arranged a full-banquet wedding for 300 million TL according to the currency back then. She disconnected me from them, yet she didn't refrain from continuing to take money from them even in that situation. I said her only one thing. "Sister," I said, "you are my sister. Blood is thicker than water, but no more... Not after today." It has been 6-7 years, I never heard from her. I said, "Whatever I have done for you, whatever I have given to you so far is yours, I don't regret any of my good deeds to you. But in the afterlife, I will seek justice from you. I will revenge you for those 17 years." I haven't seen her ever since.

What is your circle of friends like? How are your relationships?

My relationships with my friends are quite good.

All they all queers?

No, I also have a family circle.

Do you mean the relationships from the past?

No. For example, my neighbors from the quarter where I reside. My relationships with my neighbors are very good. For instance, when I enter here, I don't talk to the people that are here. You should draw a line when you see the intentions of others towards you. If you act flirtatiously, the other person will inevitably do something to you. But if you act properly, they will act properly too... If someone has feelings for me, I say, "How are you, brother?" Someone you call your brother cannot do anything to you. You get out of life what you put into it. I mean, regardless of the mistakes of other people to you, you are capable of managing certain things. What you do is what you will see from others. My family relationships, my relationships in my neighborhood are all good. I get on really well with people. I know how to approach and speak to them. As an example from my own life, I have a niece and

a cousin; I have to behave in the same manner that I behave towards them in my own neighborhood as well. I mean, they are all the same for me. But, value judgments are different in my heart. You cannot consider everyone equal in respect to feelings. Speaking from the perspective of balance, they all are the same for me. However, value judgments in my heart differ from each other. Therefore, I know very well how to engage in dialogues with people in my neighborhood. I know what to wear and how to act in each situation. In fact, there would be no problem at all if we all were able to do it.

Did you take too many blows from your friends? From those that you see as close friends?

So many.

What happened, can you tell?

Let me tell you something; I distributed all of my assets, I spent everything I had. Most of my friends told me that I am always welcome, but I never went to anyone's home asking for help anyway.

Didn't they call you?

I slept in parks of Taksim for 4 days with this child. I had a

memory loss. I don't know what I lived throughout those 4 days. Do you know the iron bars in Tarlabaşı? I hope Allah never lets anyone else experience these. I wouldn't wish it for my enemy. Queers from Bursa sent me some money. I don't know what I lived. Do you know Didem? Begüm? My mom, my daughter, come my love. Come my dear, come. Give me a kiss, come here.²

At least you have your dog with you.

This is my everything, my life. You can't even guess. I pray to either die together with her or to see her dying before I do. She is my everything. Oh my Allah... I had several dogs in the past, but this one is so different for me.

What comes to your mind when someone says “violence”?

So painful, huh. We don't deserve it, we just don't deserve it. Violence doesn't mean merely beating. How should I express myself? Even those looks, the looks as if they are humiliating you... Even those are violence for me. I mean, looking on down people and stuff like that... Even that is violence for me. I witness so many like this. Even most of my friends from my own circle look down on people in a similar manner. Whom

2 She is calling her dog.

are you looking at? Indeed, you are the same, so am I. Well, you have used your wits but... The world is a lie. The prosperity you have earned in this world remain here, you cannot take anything with you to the afterlife. If you ask what is the one thing that never will never go out of fashion, coffin is the answer. Coffin will never go out of fashion. Ultimately, we all get our ass fucked. You have changed, but I am not changing my friend, I preferred to remain this way. But that one is queer or this one is gay or has a mustache, bla bla... If anyone is happy in that way, you should accept them as they are. There is no need for these. We all are actually the same, why are we struggling anyway? We are struggling for a morsel of bread. What else are we struggling for anyway? There are people who knock on your door as well as there are people who knock on my door. I mean, everyone is struggling to make a living. What happens if they get two extra works while you get one less work? Tomorrow you will get two extras while they get one less, so what?

Is there violence among queers?

Obviously. They all reserved a corner. As a result, they don't let each other to work in their corners... What are you struggling for anyway? I dare them to not let me to work in their spot. A bunch of girls from Şehremini... 15-20 of them came to beat me up with baseball bats, so that I would not wait for

clients in their reserved spot. They are the old-timers of that location. I am the one who introduced them to that spot. I cannot tolerate injustice. Nobody can wait for clients in front of my house. That is where I wait for clients, it is right before my door. Would you let anyone in such a situation? If this was your place, would you let anyone to wait for clients right here? I am already working in that spot. You should go to wherever you want, but what are you doing right before my door? 20 people came to me with baseball bats. They all witnessed it there. Only Zuhal didn't come. Do you know Zuhal from Samsun? She said, I would never go to attack Avşar. "I earned a lot thanks to her, she gave me so many suggestions," she said. So, they stopped talking to Zuhal, because she didn't go with them. All of them cannot be a patch to Zuhal. In terms of personality, and humanity. Does she have any interest, any profit from me? Or do I have any expectations from her? Never. I never received anyone's money here. If we offered each other in a friendly environment, that is something else. I don't frequent in their homes anyway, I don't go to anyone's home. I greet my friends outside. At home, may Allah give everyone their own prosperity. Even while hitchhiking, I don't stand with them and I work aside by myself. Everyone spends whatever they earned. A queer called Zeki in Tarlabası closed all of those demolished buildings completely with bricks so that nobody can go and work in construction sites. I said, "Look at me my friend, I am a working person. I can work anywhere,

I go to hitchhiking. But, there are people here who cannot do it. I broke all of the briquettes one by one. I sent the guys over there. What is the worst thing you can do to me, will you kill me for a wall? I am better than most because I can work anywhere. There are also people with limited opportunities. Those places are government property... How can you build a wall there? If they cannot go to work in those places, they can come to my home to earn money. Isn't it a shame? Sometimes a client pays them 20 TL, and the beds cost 10 TL. What will they do with the remaining 10 TL? I would rather go there for 20 TL. At the very least, I can keep the money to myself. I demolished all of those walls. I broke the cement. I said, "You all stay out of this. Let anyone who has a problem come to me." They couldn't do anything at all. Girls are just struggling to work. But that man, he built a wall so that they have to rent his home and he can get his cut from the money. Just for exploiting those girls. That's why I demolished those walls.

Have your clients ever resorted to violence against you?

Well... Not as much as my friends experienced from theirs. I mean, I didn't receive any great blows. There are some minor incidents, yes. I have seen some things, how can you not when it has been 28 years in this environment? I will tell you something which is very memorable for me. I will never forget this, I had a friend called Seda from Black Sea; we used

to call her Lülü. I hope her hears are burning, she lives in Şile. We used to go to Harbiye for work with her. We bought two bracelets for each one of us. A couple of them cost 600 TL. We wanted to walk around and show off our new bracelets. Two men got us onto a taxi. We thought that we were having a tour, but they kidnapped us to Belgrad forest from Çağlayan route. It was midnight, but it was like daytime thanks to the moonlight. Taxi driver was a stupid man. Those men drew chopping knives on us. They stopped the taxi first. We had assumed that the taxi driver was together with them until then. It turned out that the taxi driver was on the rack as well. I will never forget that day, we held hand in hand with her. Those two men attacked to the taxi driver from behind at first, that's how we found the opportunity to flee. We were escaping, I and my friend, hand in hand, with wigs on our heads. Wigs would fall down, and we would stop to grab them back from the ground. How on earth were able to get out of Belgrad Forest with pantyhose? We didn't get any blows, but we escaped all the way... We had very little money in our pockets, and our bracelets other than that. Anyway, a man had mercy and took us to his truck. We stayed in his truck until the morning. He closed the truck and went to his home. In the morning, he gave us two bus tickets. When we got on the bus, everyone was staring at us. My queer friend looked at me and laughed. It turns out that our wigs slipped off. We looked at each other and fixed our wigs. Eventually

we arrived in our destination and got off the bus in Maslak. We were going to get on the municipality bus. We were indecent for a crowded bus. If that man has passed away, may Allah rest him in peace. If he is alive, may he be destined for all my future good deeds. We coincided with a man who was familiar with queers. He asked, "Girls, what are you doing here in the morning? Look at you, what happened?" There were runs in our pantyhose. We told that we were kidnapped. We couldn't tell all the details. Then he took us and brought to Tarlabası, to our home. His car was Şahin model. I had such an incident years ago. Yet, these are obviously minor things. I have encountered such incidents.

Where have you gone so far to work?

Anywhere in Istanbul, çark yapıyorum. Back then, Fındıkzade was not a spot. We used to go so far till Haramizade. Beylikdüzü and its surroundings were merely fields then. There was not even one slum in Beylikdüzü. When I first arrived in Istanbul, all the places ahead starting from Yenibosna were just lands. There was Yenibosna gas station back then, and there were only fields after it. There were slums, it was about 28 years ago. Now there are skyscrapers all around there.

Is there anything that makes you sorry, that you regret? Anything that you had better not have done?

Let me say first that I worked, but I didn't spend all my earnings to drugs. I have been in this environment for 28 years. With how many people have I fallen in love in the real life? Within 28 years?

In the actual sense?

With how many people have I fallen in love in the actual sense? I mean, it might be somehow obvious to you while talking to me now, if you have analyzed my personality to some extent.

Well, I guess zero or one. Maybe two, or maximum three..

Maximum, right? Well done, you have analyzed me well. Nicely done. You were able to analyze me to this extent.

Even in this environment...

Our queers are, you know, hopscotch fuckers.

Hopscotch fucker?

This is how I call them. They hopscotch to other dicks. As they

say... I have fallen in love with 4 people. I saw the families of all 4 of them. I lived love to the full. I don't regret any of my relationships. I live these even if I know what the consequences will be. It is only myself who will enjoy its happiness or endure its suffering. The happiness I live at that moment; it's what matters. I am not a very beautiful queer, but I am a very difficult queer. I mean, if I like someone I don't just go and sleep with them. Excuse my language, I neither eat that dick to enjoy this pleasure nor have myself fucked and let him enjoy that pleasure. I don't need a dick; I need a friend, brother, parent. I need a friend who can share my sorrows and offer me a shoulder when I cry. Someone with whom I can communicate and lay on their lap when I am sad. I need a friend who will hug me rather than fucking me when I go to bed at nights. I am already in this business. If I would like that so much, I would sleep with someone for one hour and satisfy my pleasure. The best ones are in this market. But it isn't what matters. Someone with whom I can chat and share my sorrows... Yes, there are people around me. But I have never shared my private life with a friend of mine from the same sex, and never will. This is the first time I am talking about these here. I can talk to outsiders, so when we are cross I can say that they are just defaming me. I can tell you as well, because you know everything about me so far, I can't possibly escape anyway. When two queers have a quarrel with each other, they always reveal the private life of each other.

This is my private life. If I am sharing this with you, I should know that you would never let me down even if we become bitter enemies. Such a friendship is not possible in this environment. I mean, there are several friends but, I don't have any bosom friends. They hug me warmly when they see me, but they swear behind my back the moment I turn my back to them. I know them very well. Do you know why? Because I tell their faults to their face, I never tell lies behind anyone's back. I never gossip about other people either, no matter what. I don't let anyone talk about a queer who isn't there at that moment. You were talking to that person face to face just yesterday. So why are you now talking behind their back when they aren't here? When I warn people not to talk behind someone, they resent me. They shouldn't. You were very close to that person when you were together, so why are you talking from their back when only two days have passed?

Have your lovers ever resorted to violence against you?

Never. May God take (all my good destiny) from me, and give it to them. I wish all their hearts desire. None of my lovers bled me dry. They cannot do anyway, because I give my money to my family, not to them. Why should I suffer from all those things anyway? Too risky... Now, I have a very nice environment. It wasn't like this in the past. We used to get out from the hairdresser only to find the police taking us to

the police station. But, it was a nice environment. The police used to take us, but we were better in financial terms and demand back then. Now when I ask someone their permission to sit somewhere near them, even younger ones ignore me. I used to sit respectfully when I was with people with whom I was staying in the past. I used to kneel beside them and listen to their conversation. Because, I learned respect from my parents as well as the people with whom I stayed. My current home environment and works passed to me from the person with whom I was staying. My home is so clean that you could eat off the floor. You touched on a matter that it important to me, did you know that? I tidy up everything here by myself. I am telling you, ask them all if you'd like to... They never help with me. All around, by myself.

How would the police treat in the past, how are they now?

Let me talk about 20-25 years ago. There was no beating at all. They used to take us and bring us to the police station. We used to wait there a night so that we could be taken to the police department the following day. The department, if they would like to, would bring us to venereal diseases hospital. The environment was strict for sure. For instance, you would have to wait until Monday if you were detained on Thursday. I mean, they would keep us under custody on Thursday, and send us to Gayrettepe on Friday morning. If our procedures

in Gayrettepe weren't completed before noon - because hospital discharge is available until noon on Fridays -, we were taken to Cancan (venereal diseases hospital in Cankurtaran) in the afternoon. Then we had to stay there until Monday. If we could find the opportunity, we would flee. Otherwise, we had to stay there until Monday. We were able to flee for most of the times. I would escape. I knew the places to hide there, for example there were good hideouts within the station behind the hospital. Whenever we found the opportunity, we used to climb on trees. But they would run after us, it depended on the situation whether we could achieve to flee or not. Homosexuals weren't as common as they are today, but the environment was strict as well. They would take us under custody whenever they saw us. Now, they are everywhere. Too much comfort is no comfort for us. If you act decently and pull yourself together, these incidents of battery as well as such bad events would decrease. Nobody would make a pass at you ether. I live in the very center of Yenisehir with people from all walk of life, yet nothing happens. Nothing happens if everyone acts in a contained manner. Look, children are standing over the place from which you bought the boreks (dough pie) a while ago. Do you see them? They are dealers. You should expect any malignancy from them. They don't do anything to you as long as you don't see, hear or know. If something happens to you here, they would be the first ones to help. You should never put a distance to illegiti-

mate people.

In your opinion, what is the government attempting to do in respect to prostitution?

I believe that it thinks it can put an end to it, but it can't. I guess it can't. Look, they closed that place (state-run brothel) only to see that prostitution has returned to the construction sites. Is it better now? Instead of working indoors there, now they are working right in front of the eyes of families now. Is it better now? Tell me, is it better in this way? Now, infamy reigns everywhere. Yet how good it was... They used to say, "Work in indoor places, we won't intervene." Now, they closed those places. They forced people to continue prostitution on the streets. I went to the brothel in Karaköy and worked there for one day. I had a friend called Gillette Deniz, she said "Let's go to ask for a leave". There is a road that goes downhill behind Galata tower. You enter into the caravanse-rai area in Karaköy and walk through the back alleys. I worked there one day, and the following day a client shouted "There is a man here," tugging at me. He saw my (male) member, he held it, pulling. I had such an incident. Queers used to work in 6 -7 houses back then. Homes of Late Matild³ were full of boys, all of whom are special friends of mine.

3 She is referring to then-tax champion Malitd Manukyan, widely known for being "brothel madam".

What would you request from the politicians?

I would request nothing but a comfortable environment. A comfortably viable environment. I mean, a trouble-free environment where nobody would suffer or be looked down upon... I mean, we are struggling for a morsel of bread; we don't have any expectations from people. We don't expect anything from anyone. We only expect people to see us as humans as well and refrain from looking down, and nothing else. A comfortable environment and order.

[REBELLION]

“The government openly wants me to die. $2 + 2 = 4$. They are just saying, ‘Die already, so that we can get rid of a scum like you.’ We are actually diseased according to their perspective.”

BURSA

Can you talk about yourself?

I was born in February 1986, Diyarbakir. I am a trans woman who has been within the trans community since the age of 16; and I have been struggling to find my own identity so far. Now I am a woman with a pink ID card. I have completed my entire gender reassignment process. But I have to be as a sex worker even though I don't actually want to do this. If there was another job opportunity right now, I would go and work there. I couldn't attend to neither high school nor university due to my status. I was successful at the university admission exams but I had to withdraw myself on the first term of Bursa Uludag University so that progress and look ahead so that I could complete my transition, because I was attacked by Hizbullah. I mean, these circumstances didn't let me to even continue to my education.

Were you in Bursa back then?

As my older sister was in Bursa then, I had opted for Bursa Uludag University as well. Thereafter, an incident occurred in Bursa Uludag University. I was the victim of an attempted lynching by 40 - 50 people. After experiencing such an incident, I obviously started to become afraid. One day, I was on my way to home from the school when I came upon a transvestite. Running into that transvestite was what made me transition to trans life.

You encountered pressures regarding your sexual identity. So, did you experience any other things?

My family, my friends, almost all of my circle exerted pressure on me. Being exposed to such pressure particularly from my family caused an undefinable agony. It was, so to speak, the last straw. Because the last thing you could lose is your family. Once you have lost them, you evolve into another phase.

When was the first time you began as a sex worker? And, can you tell how you started as well?

I didn't have much of any acquaintances and I had arrived in Bursa for school. Furthermore, my family was somehow conservative religious, so they placed me in the student houses of Fethullah Gulen. But, how did I stay there? For instance, I continuously had to tidy myself up whenever I was headed for home. I switched into something more explicit as soon as I got out from home; for example I put on a light make-up and used eyeliner. There were trans women who waited on the street in Çarşamba, Bursa. They were on my way from the school to home, yet I didn't know how to approach to them as my family was doing really well in financial terms. One day, I went to a trans woman and asked, "Can you help me?" I remember her name very well; it was Dilan. We became very good friends later on. However, Dilan took my request in a very wrong sense and said, "For sure, come and let's talk up-

stairs." She took me upstairs and took me into the room she met her clients. When she asked, "How much do you have?", I said "Money is not a problem for me." She asked, "Do you have 10 TL?". I said, "Here, 20 TL." So I have her 20 TL. But I said, "Help me." She said, "Of course I will help you. What is it about?" I told her my situation. She turned me over and over in the best manner and put me in front of the door as soon as she was done. There I was, without achieving my request. My purpose there wasn't having sex or being screwed there. My actual purpose was finding an answer to the question of what kind of a way I could take and how I could be more woman-like. I got out. I thought that there was nothing left to do. I was another transvestite and went by her. I told her of my situation. I saw her friend making hand gestures to the one I was speaking with. I told her, "I will give you 20 TL but only if you can help me with the thing I told you." She told me, "Come, I'll introduce you to my friends upstairs." She took me a home. There were 16 transvestites there. That is how I started as a sex worker. That is how I met with Öykü Evren, and went out to y first wheeling with her wig. I was wearing a chintz skirt, plastic bathroom slippers, a men's t-shirt and a blond wig.

How would you define your life that has passed since you first have begun as a sex worker?

Sometimes I rebel against it. Sometimes, I perceive it as the

reality of life. I don't actually aim for earning money as a sex worker. I am a trans woman with a pink ID card. However, nothing changes. As I feel as a woman inside, I want to live like this but I cannot find a job; so I go hungry and stay on the streets. I don't want to live in these conditions, so I am doing this since I can earn money as a sex worker. You have to stand on your feet so that you can make a living; that's why I am working in this job. I cannot have sex with my lover to my heart's desire as I cannot feel pleasure. Because, my everyday life always involves sex. One of the ways to please a man is sex, yet I cannot express myself when he wants to do it... So I start to be unable to please him, and then I become lonely. This is a very bad situation, your life always has to advance by your own. I have friends, but all of them are sex workers as well. Always the same topics: How much money did you get, how many koli did you make, how many cm was it, was the koli, handsome, etc. These are talked all the time. Therefore, I am actually bored with this life. There are very young and even child trans women who come to seek my consultation. As long as they stay with me, I don't permit them to work as a sex worker. I help them financially to the extent of my possibilities. If they want to become a woman, they can do it. But I don't want them to work when they are with me. Because, I know the difficulty of being a sex worker as a profession.

So, are you now happy with your life?

Outsiders see us as people who easily make money and become rich. Therefore everyone is trying to exploit you. There are lots of troublemakers in the environment and you have to deal with them.

Are you happy in general terms?

I don't focus on my profession very much in general. Because, I don't like it. As I don't like it, I work for a maximum of 20 days a month. I do things to make myself happy for a month with the money I earned during those 20 days. How do I do it? I take a break from the job and take a vacation, visit my friends. I am trying to live a happier life in my own terms. But, how much happy? We cannot settle down to start a family.

Are there any moments that make you very sad when you put your head on the pillow?

So many. Why do I become sad? For instance, when I drew apart from my family, I had already took the risk of encountering several difficulties. I drew apart so that I could write my own life story. But I feel sad for having to live this life just for wanting to write my own life story. This shouldn't be my life story.

What is the life you would like to live like, can you give some details?

A standard life; something like happily married with children... But, as a child is not possible for us, I would at least like to live a happy life with my family. I would like my family to accept me as I am. I can still live as they want when I am with them. On the condition that they simply accept my physical transformation, I can accept their every demand. But even if they accepted my physical transformation, what would we say to others? They live in Diyarbakır province, which might pose an issue for them. But what will we do? For sure, we upset them. But while they are upset for breaking up with us and for our situation, we are struggling to survive and stand on our two feet in our own lives. We have to do things that we don't want at all. Let alone sex, we sometimes have to use drugs. Yes, we have to. Sometimes, touching someone you don't want at all isn't something that you can do with a sober mind. You just say, "Let me get high so that I don't mind who it will be." But when family comes into the picture, everything is different. If you really want children, you can play with your siblings, nephews or nieces. But being alone isn't something that you can tell a lot about! Nowadays, I am really bored with loneliness. I am looking for a housemate. I am not looking for a partner. Because, all partners in our environment are kind of gigolos... There is a park where I take strolls at night. I was sit-

ting there the other day. A child passed by me, asking “What are you doing?” I said, “What do you mean? I am sitting on a bench and smoking.” He replied, “Don’t be afraid, I am a man of queers.”

So it has become a profession, then?

They have adopted it as a profession, you see? So if you see this as a profession...

Do you think they exploit girls?

They most certainly do. People have to hire someone to overcome their loneliness.

So they work as gigolos?

Kind of, as anyone who sells their flesh to make money is eventually a gigolo. So, how can you let gigolos spend the money that you have already earned by being a gigolo yourself? I am so against this reasoning. And it has come to a point that being gigolo now means sleeping with someone, having someone to own you and protect you in return for payment... Therefore, sometimes our new friends - let’s say unaware instead of new - our unaware friends are taken by organizations and gangs that are known in this environment for being scums and mafia. They are used there by them in terms of satisfaction with sex under the assumption of be-

ing lovers, and exploited with their own hard-earned money. Such an easy life! In fact, I would be a man of queers as well if I knew then what I know now. They earn the best money without doing anything. They both take pleasure and have anything they want done!

How is your current relationship with your family?

I still don't dare to object to them. I scarcely contact with my sister, older sister and mother, yet we completely lost contact with my brother, father and other older sister. It has been 7 - 8 years since I met my family. But I have been in this environment for 10 - 12 years. I once returned back to my family for a while. How did that happen? They used to resort to violence so many times. They imprisoned me at home. They chained me to a chair and all that stuff... I fainted and I was in a coma with blood all over me, but they wouldn't even let me to go to a hospital. My first times were really bad. I left that environment in order to return to my family. I abided by each one of their demands; I put on a suit and started medical marketing with a suitcase in my hand. I was working in the workplace in which my father had placed me, and all of my life was as they wanted... I used to commute between home and work on the hours they specified. In response to their demands that went like "You will do this on this hour, and do that on that hour," I tried to accommodate myself to them in a robot-like manner. I don't know how it happened either, but I went out to the

balcony to smoke late at one night and I was so full that I burst into tears. But I wasn't crying for a particular incident at all. I don't know how but... I just got emotional while smoking. I was sobbing so deeply that my father came running from the other room, and asked what had happened. I was both crying and saying to my father, "Nothing happened, I don't know why I am crying either." But I really didn't cry for any particular reason. My father just left me there without saying anything. After a while I pulled myself together, went to bed and slept. I woke up in the morning. I had 3-4 bracelets and about 380 TL under my pillow. I got up and I was wondering whether Santa Claus paid me a visit when my mother came. It turns out that due to the incident at night, my father said, "Yes, we are forcing him to live the life as we want. But this cannot go like this. Let him take this money and leave to live the life as he pleases." But he didn't offer me to live in their home either. Because there was a pressure from the outside. "What would we say to people here if he lived like that?" Because of that perception, he said "Let him take this money and leave to live the life as he pleases." I left home after that day and I even worked in Diyarbakir for a brief period. My family stopped interfering after that, but that time my uncle intervened when he learned. I filed a lawsuit for gender reassignment operation in Diyarbakir Dicle University Faculty of Medicine and they sent me to a medical board at the hospital. Back then Belgin Mother was also a guest, staying over at

my home. Therefore she knows that time very well. One day before my visit to the hospital, I got bored with my bright red long hair extensions and removed them just out of the blue. I dyed my hair as well. So I had very short and black hair. I slept over on my assigned day to the hospital, and went there in the afternoon. The medical board was gone anyway, but it I had gone there in the morning, maybe I wasn't alive now. As soon as I got off the car in front of the university, I was surrounded by the security guards who made a blockade. They instructed me to keep my head down. The moment I asked what was happening, the answer was: "Don't ask anything. We'll explain when we arrive inside," and they took me to the room of the manager. They showed the surveillance records in the manager's room. There were small children with guns handed over to them. As my name and surname was known and they knew of my family, they recognized me from the medical board report and hospital procedures and my relatives learned of me, so they came to bust me. About 30 people with guns in their hands, from small children to my oldest uncle, all of them... I always say, if I decided to commit suicide, I would kill my uncle first. Because I don't see my family because of him. I mean, if it weren't for him, it would be easy for me to keep in contact with my family. Those in the hospital explained the incident to me. They told me that those people were waiting for me outside since the morning. But since the information was leaked from the hospital,

the hospital staff was afraid and feeling responsible as well. This shouldn't have happened at all. They specifically gathered another medical board for me. But that medical board didn't change anything at all. Because, I became frightened due to my family, my uncle and others, and had to depart from Diyarbakir immediately. They called a taxi for me at the backyard of the hospital. Over 30 security guards had surrounded me, trying to get me on the taxi. I had such a bad incident. After that, I left there and arrived here. I never went to Diyarbakir again.

How is your relationship with your friends in general?

In general, I get along with my friends but when you are beautiful, you have the worst condition among your friends. You are beautiful, you make good money and live a nice life, so everything is perfect... This is the general assumption but it is not right. But they always assume like this since you are beautiful: "She is beautiful, so she must be making good money and her business is booming, she has fun with men, she enjoys herself, goes to anywhere she likes and having a nice life." This is why they are unable to stand with you. Is that so, or are they simply jealous? I don't know their motives, but also professional competition is involved here. I mean, you are beautiful, so they will be short of clients. As they are always ill-hearted, I naturally try to refrain from such a circle of friends. I cannot dare to meet with my very good friends

either. Because, when you meet them one day, it is inevitable that you have a problem with them on the second day. Something occurs for sure, regardless of whether you want it or not. Therefore I am trying to keep my distance with my friends and have weak relationships with my friends.

So, would you define this as a psychological pressure? Your relationships with certain friends or some gossips lead to psychological issues, don't they?

For sure. I went to Medikalpark Hospital the other day, I am starting to receive psychological support. Because, there are incidents of envy involved in my professional relationships. But when the same problem reoccurs with another friend, this time I begin to question myself. I am asking whether something is wrong with me since they all have the same attitude towards me. Well, I see that I don't do anything when I question myself. Sometimes, we don't realize our psychological disorders even if we say, "Huh, am I crazy? Do I have psychological disorders?" Even yawning continuously is a psychological disturbance. But when we yawn on a continuous basis, we say superstitious things like "I guess I took the negative energy of someone," or "I guess I am sleepy." In fact, the situation is not like that. As we think too much, even yawning is the symptom of a psychological disorder. When I had a penis, I mean in my pre-op period, it was very different. I transitioned into a very different dimension after the operation.

They say that trans women allegedly won't like women. The reality is, they are jealous of them. They don't like women as women are in the physical perfection they want, and they are jealous of that. This is a fact. For instance, I encountered a different perspective from my friends with penis after I had a vagina. "You are not one of us anymore, you did that and make better money. You'll detach from us soon." But this is how you think before I detach from you or something. You should speak so only after I do such a thing. Therefore, I have put my distance from each and every one of them. This causes a very distinct pressure. As if I don't accept myself and defend myself as a complete woman... But this is not true. Yes, I am a woman. But I am a trans woman, a trans person. For instance, if you accept yourself as a trans woman without having breasts, I respect you as well. But if you criticize me for having different physical features while you feel as a trans as well, this inevitably drags me down in psychological terms.

Do you define this essentially as envy?

In the deepest sense, yes I strictly define it as envy. Because when people see others in the place that they desire for themselves, a feeling disturbance and a sigh are unavoidably involved. This leads to envy, which is the worst thing ever. It even causes murders.

How are your working conditions?

Uh. So grouse! Just this one word defines it. I obviously don't want to work. But we have to work in order to maintain a living. I previously filed an application to Public Employment Agency. They always called me for male-specific jobs. I mentioned my status when I went there. They told that there was no job available for me, and sent me back. Even if I have to work in a profession that I don't want, the difficulties I face in this job are really different. 1- As I am a sex worker and live by myself, people may come in a crowded group to make pressure and use violence on you. They just create a blockade so that you will work for them as your pimp or boss. You cannot reside somewhere and put up your fight. For instance, I moved from Ankara, Antep and Diyarbakır because of such incidents, and relocated myself to Bursa. 2- Police, who bans you from working in crowded groups, doesn't let you to work by yourself either. They tell me "Work from your home, and work alone." OK then, let me work alone. You aren't safe at all when you work by yourself anyway. All safety is merely yourself alone in between four walls. Even if someone murders you and leaves, maybe someone realizes it a few days later. Or else, nobody even realizes that either. You work alone because when police come to you and does whatever they want to you, they don't want any eye-witnesses around. You work alone. Because, even if they don't give you money, police

even look inside your vagina when they come. They shut your house down. When they feel like it, they have sex with you. But as you are a sex worker, again, they have a head start. You are in an even worse condition as you are “the other”. I mean, we all encounter such incidents but I wasn’t exposed to police violence to this extent beforehand, I mean when I was working with a blue ID card. But while I was assuming that things would get better and police wouldn’t intervene this much after I received my pink ID card, I realized to the contrary, working with a pink ID is much more harder. If you have a pink ID card, you should go to a brothel to work and you should register as a prostitute. Or else, you cannot work around by your own. That turns into an employer-employee relationship, so they are telling you to work like that so that you have a boss managing you. But I don’t want to work with a pimp. I don’t want to condemn myself to someone. I have to maintain my life and live the life I want while I am working by my own. Because, I am 26 years old and so far I haven’t been able to actually live my childhood or my life. But I want to. Well, should I live my life by taking permits if I have a boss? It is something like, “Let me take a leave today so that I can go and live my life.” Moreover, our living area, working area, social area, all of them make psychological pressure on us, and sometimes this leads to a collapse. After the operation and full reassignment is over, most people commit suicide. What else can they do? At some point, you are out of hope to live

anymore. Why do you have it removed? Well, I had an operation and yet I am still a sex worker. I had the operation hoping that maybe I wouldn't be a sex worker anymore, I would get married and settle down with my home, I would get a decent job. But I am still a sex worker and I suffer even more for being a sex worker. Nobody is offering any help upon seeing my suffering. When you ask for help from the police, they make fun of you. They do this and that. "Open and let me see it girl, how did you have your operation? Show me your operation." They say things like that. I rented a new house once in every 15 days. They shut one down. I rented another one, they shut that down, too. I rented a new one before they shut the other one. Biweekly, out of boredom, yes it is strictly out of boredom... Whenever they feel bored on their table, they just select the lucky one from the internet and phone the winner. As I use the phone for work, how could I know who will be coming? I can't. When the police call me and say they are coming for business, I accept them too. When they arrive in my home, they strip me down bare naked as the first thing. When I tell them to take their own clothes off, they don't. They wait with their underwear on. When I am completely naked, I go near them. They open and look at my body.

They are trying to catch you in the act.

For sure, they are trying to catch me in the act but... You can't check inside my vagina.

Are they harassing?

It is harassment, directly.

So they are using their privilege to resort to sexual violence.

It is strictly sexual violence. I mean, they resort to physical violence in the police station anyway. For instance, they brought me to the police station after doing this. Well, the smallest example is that he checked my vagina. My first visitor as a client to my home turned out to be a policeman. I rented my house and before I could have only one client, a policeman disguised as a client arrived in the first place. He fully stripped me off. "Oo it is just like a woman's vagina, it is really very beautiful." I asked, "What do you mean?" He asked, "Aren't you trans?" I said, "No, I am not." He replied, "I wish you told that you are a trans, then I wouldn't have to shut down your home." So how is that relevant anyway? You come and check inside my vagina yet don't tell me you are the police. You say, "I wish you told that you are a trans." So I said, "I am a trans, then." "OK, well we will shut down your house anyway." Well, you will shut it down either way. What are you struggling for? Secondly, they take you to the police station where they swear at and humiliate you. I even called you one time, didn't I? They said I was a whore and all those bad things. But I was afraid, so I couldn't respond to them. What could I say? Once I attempted to record their voice on

my phone. While I was recording their voice, the background light of the phone was turned on. When they notices it, one of them kicked my phone. I mean, it is the last point of being inhumane. The unfairness to sex workers is really extreme. I don't know, I am just speaking Bursa-wise. I saw and experienced such things in Bursa. But I didn't have problems with the police to this extent other than Bursa. Because, you certainly face the police once in every 10 days in Bursa. I mean, you inevitably encounter them.

Do you hear these incidents from the others as well? Home raid, shut-down, etc...

We all live the same problems, it is all the same with everyone. Vice squad patrols the street on daytime as well. For instance, they are around Arap Park on the daytime. They check on the trans people over there to see which of them are there. Or when they see people that they are familiar with for being sex workers, they immediately go to the police station to find their phone numbers. They see them outside and say, "Uh, so this one is in Bursa." "Let's go to her house." They immediately arrive in your home. They shut down your home and say, "Go and leave Bursa." Where should I go?

So, do they really say "Go"?

They said to me. During my residence here, they told me "You will accept and live these." So what could I do? Should

I go? “Go to another province.” Why should I go? I already arrived here from another province so I could be comfortable. Should I continuously move from one city to another? Therefore, I am saying that I would work in a normal job if they gave me one.

What comes to your mind when someone says “violence”?

Othering. As you are the “other”, you are exposed to violence by everyone. Even if it is the police to whom we should trust the most, they are the first ones to resort to violence as you are the other. And also since this is the western region of Turkey while I am from Diyarbakir; my ethnic background as a Kurd in addition to my homosexuality gives them this inevitable privilege. Hence I become a complete target for violence.

So, by whom have you been exposed to violence so far? Consider it in the widest sense including psychological, sexual, physical...

Almost everyone who is alive and has two feet... Police, family, friend, boss, pimp... In my work environment and even in the restaurant I was eating at.

Whom are you referring to when you say boss and pimp?

As I didn't know the environment in the past, I had to work with certain people here...

Queers?

Yes, queers. The person we call Öykü Evren, she was unfair to many. My god knows all, therefore I don't have to say anything. She was the only person to act as a boss to me. And she was also the only person who I could call my boss. She was both my boss and pimp. As I wasn't familiar with the environment and was ignorant in this respect, I started this life by directly working for her. Because, there was nobody else that could inform me. I mean, there was nobody else that could say "I will inform you on this subject, I will tell you what you will do and what you will experience". She used to take 50 TL from me. If you paid that amount to a hotel back then, you would have the opportunity to stay in a very luxurious way. However, 13 of us slept on the same bed even though each of us paid 50 TL. If we had gone to a hotel, they wouldn't have accepted us anyway. Other than your ID card that indicates your gender, sometimes you have beard on your face. These are all in phases during the transition. You wear a mini-skirt, your beard goes away and have your silicones made. Then, you get a nose-job and have your face made. You get yourself a vagina and complete your gender reassignment process. However, it is very difficult for you until you complete all of these. You cannot simply go out for shopping, and women who sell clothing come to your home as you can't go shopping freely. You have to pay 50 TL again for a clothing item

worth 5 TL. For instance, you do the cleaning of the house. However, you are a man in biological terms and don't know how to clean. While cleaners take 60-70 TL for an ordinary house, they charge you 150 TL. Why? Because you are a sex worker. You make money easily. In fact, we earn money in the really hard way. But everyone else assumes that it's easy money. All of these experiences stem from the boss in the first place. The boss makes that impression to other people. What is the first thing you do for the boss? The boss facilitates everything for you, but she takes your money from you, too. 5 TL for meal, 10 TL for accommodation, 50 TL for bed... These all make you get used to an easy life, and once you are used to it you assume that it will always continue like that. But I can cook my meals for one or maybe two days with the 10 TL meal fee that you would pay to her. As for the bed fee, why would I even pay for a bed if I was in my own house? I am in my own house now. I manage myself at my own house anyway. Well, I can do my own cleaning work, too. But we got used to this because of our boss too; everyone would pay 10 TL for the cleaner. This turns comfort into a habit as well. But you are not aware of the fact that your boss puts up a fight to take the money you had earned at night from you in the daytime. If we were informed about these and could act in a conscious way... Yes, now as Red umbrella, you are carrying out really good works. You are struggling to raise awareness. I wish there had been such an association back then to raise

our consciousness, so that we could have progressed. I am 26 years old now. But I am aware of so many things because of my experiences. Today's youth is very lucky. We weren't this lucky back in our time. We were used to running out of luck.

What is your opinion on the attitude of the police?

I went to work on the street just 2-3 days ago, just because they shut down my home. It has been years since I last went to the street for wheeling. As soon as I got off the taxi, a police car came and took me to the police station. But I was going in a cheerful mood. Because, I had already known that they would take me to the police station. Yet I had a different intention rather than wheeling and earning money. I went on the street just to show that I was obliged to go on the street if they shut my home down. I was aware that the police would have taken me. They took me to the police station, and asked "Don't you know that you are too good for the streets?" I am too good for the streets but I can't work at my home as a woman, so where shall I work? So, show me a spot to work or give us an opportunity to work in a normal job; help us with these matters... Yet they don't help us with anything and shut down our houses, so we can't work at home. We cannot work outside as I will be charged 80 TL fine each time I am caught. To crown it all, a policeman told me, "I have several trans and CD friends, we love you very much." I don't like you any at all. My older brother is a policeman as well. I haven't seen his

face ever since he has become a policeman, and I don't want to. Because all of the police are the same. You suppose one of them is good and turn your back to them. Yet the following day, they strike you from a different aspect. The police from Vice Department here -no need to give any names - made a raid to my home at first, and then behaved nice to me. In response to this nice behavior, I started to think good about them. Yet the second day, they used my home for very different purposes and I audio-recorded them. They tricked a little girl and brought her here by introducing themselves as clients. They used my place as if it was their home. I was in the next room and saw that room from the window. They stripped down the girl, a little child... You can do your work without stripping her until she is completely naked. They gave the money to her after stripping her down. They made her wear her clothes back, re-checked her vagina; touched her from all places. Maybe when they touch, they come; I mean, they satisfy their ego. Then they made her wear her clothes, took her to the living room and beat her with kicks and slaps. I heard them all. After beating her up, they interrogated her: "Who are you working for, you will help us with this matter, you will bring your boss to us..." How is that little girl doing? We don't know. Interrogating her and her boss is not reasonable in my opinion. They should question how a girl at the age of 16-17 ended up with this situation. Therefore, as I say, all of them are the same. There is a policewoman in the Vice

Department. I had a bone fracture in my arm after a recent traffic accident. My here was all wrapped up. I was discharged from the hospital; I came home and sat down. My friend was accompanying me as I couldn't do my own work. My arm was fully encased in plaster. I couldn't even get up from my seat with the help of IV drip. At 1 a.m., two police knocked on my door. "You are engaging in prostitution here, get up." How can we make prostitution? I have recently been discharged from the hospital. If you see our living area as prostitution place, what will we do and where will we sit now? You shouldn't be familiar with our private houses. Then, we are fined with the reason that we made a false declaration of our residence address. You have to give your true address for registration of residence. Yet when you register your address, the police automatically know where you reside. They took me while I was in that situation and took me to the police station by taking my arms for support. As if I was making prostitution in such condition. There is no reasoning here anyway. I went to the police station and said to the policewoman there: "How on earth could I prostitute myself in this condition? If a man came to have intercourse with me, he would pity me and give the money, and he would leave without doing anything. Such a thing is not possible anyway. How can you bring me here at this late night?" I showed my stitches in my abdomen. "How can you show me your boobs?" I am opening you my abdomen, yet my breasts are up there. My stitches are around my

belly button and my breasts are above. How could I show you my breasts? You are a whore, a fag and stuff... You are like that! You are like this! I heard too many words that I have never heard outside before. As the police are the ones that actually resort to violence, you cannot find anyone to seek help from when you become of any other people.

Have your lovers ever resorted to violence against you?

Never, just never. I have had 3 lovers so far. I mean, within the period during when I have lived alone outside my home. Not even one of them slapped me.

Have your clients ever resorted to violence against you?

Yes, my clients did it. And there is even a funny story. I was even fined due to that incident. The client attacked me and I was fined with the justification that I defended myself. In fact, the situation was very different. I was residing in Bursa again. It was 2005. We talked and agreed outside and we were on our way to my home. We went home and I received the agreed sum of money. After we were done, he said, "You will give my money back to me." He tried to take his money back. I believed that I had worked enough for the worth of that money. So I deserved it. I said, "I won't give it back to you." The man beat me up there. But he was a hunky, big man. I was just a child at the age of 20. How could I cope with a big man? The man gave me a good trashing. While I couldn't

stand up back from the ground he got outside and kicked all of the doors of the building. All of the doors, he kicked all of them one by one. While I couldn't get up from my place, fearing that the residents of the building would kick me out of the building, I took a knife. If it weren't for the knife, I would be able to do nothing as I wasn't strong enough. The man kicked me again. He knocked me down again. While he was coming towards me, I stabbed him with the knife. I made a cut into his arm. He escaped outside. It had been only 10 minutes when all of the Bursa police were before my door. I had several proofs of scars and bruises all over me and I told the incident. "You are prostituting, so you are wrong. You stabbed the man!" It was in my own home anyway. I only sufficed with defending myself. But no, I shouldn't have stabbed the man. Ok then, I should have let them murder me instead. The government openly wants me to die. $2 + 2 = 4$. They are just saying, 'Die already, so that we can get rid of a scum like you.' We are actually diseased according to their perspective. It is as though they are always at war with us. They have several other people to deal with like us. But as it seems that they are only at war with you, you just stay silent and hope that they won't bother you no matter what they say. Hence you withdraw yourself.

What was the punishment for stabbing incident?

I was detained at first and went to the prosecution. They let

me go then, and imposed me with a fine equaling to 100 TL. I was fined with 100 TL because of stabbing the man. Let me explain why the fine was 100 TL. The government claimed my 100 TL client fee. "What was the agreed price?" I said, "I received 100 TL." "OK then, the verdict shall be 100 TL fine." I mean, they claim your packet delivery fee. For instance, when you go outside for wheeling, they allow you to take only one client. You go with the client and the police take you as soon as you come back. "How much did you charge?" 80 TL for them. They see you, because they are on the patrol on all the time. They don't interrupt you so that you can take a client and go. When you come back, they take you again. They are bossing you at some point. Nothing else. They take half of your earning. Maybe it would be much healthier if they registered it for taxes. So that I would pay my taxes on a regular basis. But no, they just wait for you there. They are really familiar with everyone. They know everything about you from top to toe, including your name and your address. What can I do?

Have you been exposed to serious violence by the police?

In Bursa and in Malatya, yes. I had started to work in the night club when I was exposed to violence. It was due to my trans identity again. Just because I was trans, one of the artists in the night club filed a complaint against me claiming that I was going to murder her. Just because she was afraid of

trans persons. The media perception plays a role here. They always make news about trans persons resorting to extreme violence. As a result, trans people are potentially horrible in the eyes of public opinion. So she complained to the police against me, claiming that I would murder her. I was an oriental dancer. I went on the stage when the instructions to stop the music were given. They stopped the music. The woman immediately pointed at me. I didn't think that I had done anything anyway. If I had hit the woman, that would be something. Maybe if she had known me better, we would have been so close friends. I was deeply hurt that she did such a thing even before she got to know me. The police came to the stage and asked, "How can you work here?" I was appalled, why? I have received my employment permit from the police station, that is why I was working. They showed their baton, "I will carve you out!" I have been carved out enough, I have been carved out ever since I have chosen this life. But, if you try to carve me out as a police, I can give you my reply. So I said, "I have been carved out to a sufficient degree. Yet you don't seem like you have ever been carved out; I will carve you out, too!" He said, "How can you say this to me?" He raised his baton. He was about to hit me. Inevitably, I hit him before he hit me. I kicked him to the other edge of the stage. When he landed on his ass, other policemen came and took me by hitting me with their batons. They threw me into the car and brought me to the police station. They took me to

the surveillance-free zone in the police station. They took me there so that they could hit me. If there was no surveillance there, and they were going to hit me anyway, I thought "I should hit them back." I mean, I will beat them up as much as they will beat me. The morning came. They were going to take me to the prosecutor. Six policemen and the claimant girl. OK, I understand that the girl feared from me but why are those six policemen charging against me? They all took medical reports to prove their bruises. They all had dressings on their eyes and other places. They all tried to be claimant against me. What did I do to you? I encounter such situations. Thankfully, the judge was a woman. She was me with all of my bruises... The police had taken a "healthy" medical report for me, by saying that they had just caressed me a little. But they took their medical reports by having dressing over little scratches just to make them seem like severe injuries. Six policemen had severe injury reports. I had no report of my injuries at all. I told the judge, "You see my condition, judge. They are all big men. I mean, we are talking about six policemen; not ordinary civilians either. These people have been trained on self-defense and have very good knowledge on how to behave to civilians. Do you think that I could afford inflicting injuries on these six policemen? I mean, with this condition of mine. I am covered in bruises. While I was exposed to violence, they could take medical report for injury and assert that I am in full health. How could I encounter such a thing, I

am still very appalled.” She acquitted me.

In your opinion, is there justice in this country?

No. There is justice, but it works differently for everyone. Therefore, there is no justice according to me. Because there is no justice for me. Even if there is justice for each and every person, still there is no justice for me.

Can you find justice when something happens to you?

I find justice dear, they behave fair to me in any matter that I make payment for. They didn't behave fair whenever I didn't pay for it. Or else, they are fair when you keep on their good side and give your statement in the way they want. Just because that is in their favor. For instance, a man almost beats me to death. I go to the police station in order to file a complaint. Yet the man somehow makes an agreement with the police. They just cancel the file by saying that they will save me in some other way, you see? I shouldn't be a claimant and I should let the file to be closed. If this is justice, yes dear, there is justice. For sure. We are living in a fair country, this is Turkey.

So, what comes to your mind when I say prosecutor or judge?

Well, it actually depends. Just like good cop and bad cop,

there are good prosecutors as well as there are bad judges. I was severely attacked in Ankara recently. I and my friend were on Hoşdere Street, Ankara. A man headed us off and threatened us. So I got off the car. Before I could even ask why he was behaving like that, he drove the car onto me. He uttered threats. He would have run over me if I hadn't escaped to the sidewalk on the right time. He intended to run over me, that is how fast he was. When I saved myself, my friend got off the car. This time he left me and run over her with his car. And he threw her off from being his car. In the morning we went to the prosecutor. The prosecution referred us to the court. My friend had a blue ID card back then, but she had changed her name as a woman's name. My name was a man's name as I hadn't changes my ID name. They read my name in the blue ID card out in the courthouse, and the judge asked who it was. I said, it is me. "I will sentence you in this lawsuit if you are using a man's name with this condition," he said. Can you see any reason here? I mean, I was the victim there. The man ran over me with the intention of killing me, and I complained there. And yet I am the one to be sentenced just because I have a man's name. We are in a very fair world. They say that judges and prosecutors act subjectively depending on people, that is true. If they like your appearance and if you smile at them they might be good to you. Otherwise, you don't have any chance.

What do you think of the government's policies on prostitution?

You can work very comfortably if you work affiliated to the government. You would be utterly comfortable.

Like a brothel?

Yes, like a brothel or what do they call them? Are they called informants? Is that so? For instance, I am a prostitute yet I become friends with each prostitutes and give information about them to the police. If you work in this way...

Like undercover police...

If I bring them information and do something for them, they allow me to work. Or like in Istanbul Bayram Street... They don't intervene as they take a weekly fee of 600 - 700 TL from each house. The government actually allows everything in return for bribe. You just can't work on your own. It turns into a boss relationship where the boss is the police. The police is the biggest pimp. They keep silent as long as they take the money; otherwise, they make more pressure. They tell me here in the police station that I could make a living here as long as I abide by their instructions. Other than that, I can't make a living. I objected to that in my first times. But I was renting a new house just to find them shutting down on the very first day. I would have to find another home. I would

have to find 3 houses within the same month; which would cost about 3000 TL, and if you include expenses for moving, it is about 4000 TL. I had an expenditure about 15000 TL. What good is working like that for me? I don't earn 15000 TL per month. Even if I had earned it, am I working just only to continuously change my home? It is certainly encouraged by the government. If they let me to earn to my target, I would quit this job that I don't want in the first place, anyway. I will quit this job and live a normal life. They certainly prevent it on a continuous basis.

Do you believe that being a sex worker should be defined as a profession and the working conditions should be regulated accordingly? Would you like that?

Yes, I would definitely like it. I am currently considering to work in a brothel. Because my condition does not allow me to work in a normal job. Even if I attempted to work in a normal job, I am sure that I would encounter many more difficulties. Therefore, all requirements including enactment of laws or granting of rights for regulating sex work as a profession to be fulfilled. There will be restrictions inevitably, you are a sex worker. There are diseases and other risks involved, so I am willing to see the restrictions. Something should be done. But a fight should be put up so that we could work comfortably. Maybe they can build a red district to allow sex workers under the supervision of police. It is obvious that sex work

is already being carried out and you are aware of this. But still, you say "You cannot do it, it is a crime." OK, we know that it is forbidden. So build a red district and receive taxes from there. Instead of taking half of the money from each work on the street, take your cut there with taxes included so that I can engage in my profession comfortably. Let me do it with a peaceful state of mind without being subjected to violence. The police and government claim half of my money anyway, so why wouldn't they ensure my safety additionally? Because, those who work like that aren't subjected to violence at all. I mean, there is an employee-employer relationship there, so the police is offering a protection and we don't see the violence there as we are subjected to outside. It would be more peaceful just to stay away from the violence, yes. Maybe we will have to have intercourse with people that we don't want at all. But it isn't too different from what we are already doing here. We might be paid slightly higher here but our lives are at stake, there is no safety at all. If someone murders us at home nobody knows about it, but it is impossible for someone to do such a thing there. You just content yourself with less. The reason why I want to work in a brothel is that I want to live a proper life. You may ask how I want to live properly if I am to work in a brothel. I prefer brothels because I don't want to work after 2-3 years of regular work in a brothel. I want to open a shop and dress myself as an ordinary shopkeeper. But I have to save money as a capital

before I can achieve that. Just when I think that I am about to have sufficient capital, the government is taking half of it so I am running out of money again. But when I work there, I will be able to save money well even if the government takes the half of it, because I will be directly working for the government. Because I will be working comfortably.

What would you ask for if you had one wish from the politicians?

Equality, I definitely want equality. Kurds are being othered, too. My only wish from a politician would be the enactment of a law that would grant everyone equality so that I wouldn't see that the police, nurses, shopkeepers or garbage collectors were behaved differently. Because this is how we live in Turkey. I would ask for something in order to ensure that this inequality is corrected.

What would you ask them to do? I am asking specifically for sex workers.

What would I ask them to do? As I previously mentioned, they can define sex workmanship as a profession so that they can be given better work opportunities. As for trans people; marriage. I believe that once trans marriage is accepted, the rest will follow. If trans people get marries, certain and even most things will be seen as normal. Therefore, it is always my first wish. Certainly trans marriage, because it would cancel

the distinction from normal people and put an end to discrimination.

Is there violence among trans people, in your opinion?

The greatest violence is among trans people. We are subjected to everything outside. Even while we are walking on the street, we are harassed by the gazes of people, and subjected to violence. That is another matter. We say that we have been together as trans people and we have grown up together. However, the government didn't inflict such a severe damage to us to the extent that trans people have inflicted to themselves. Sometimes we ask who had complained when our houses are raided. Who would complain? Your friends who are jealous of your good work. Or even if I have done the smallest thing - I mean, we trans women make gossip as any other woman - or I have made a gossip, it is exaggerated and told to someone else. How can you say something like that to me? They act in a cunning way and do something else for revenge. What do they do? In the simplest way, they invite a drug user man. They offer him drugs and sex, whatever he needs to satisfy his ego. Then, they make him attack at their other friends with a knife. This is what we do to each other. For instance, I have friends who live in İzmit. I went on a vacation with my friend in İzmit quite recently. When we came back, everyone made great pressure on my friend. "You can go on a vacation with your friend, but you cannot bring

her here.” But I wasn’t in İzmit to stay anyway. “How can you place her here?” The public excludes us anyway and the police set an obstacle against my work. While we have to support each other, what is your difference from the public if you say such a thing to me? What is your difference from transphobic people? We have many transphobic people among us too. Therefore, we should first solve our own transphobia issue before blaming others.

Can you briefly tell the incident you had with Öykü Evren?

You can write it down, I can tell you to the smallest detail. When I was living in Bursa, my first boss Öykü Evren and her husband had established a serious organization, a gang. Her male friends had really evil friends. They used to revel with pills and drugs. When they got high, they would make raids to everyone’s houses. This is how they started to intimidate people. After intimidating them, they ensured that everyone worked for them in their houses. It gradually became serious and they made a name for themselves. Whoever came to Bursa was obliged to directly go to them and ask for their permission in order to work in Bursa. She would immediately say, “Sure, you can work.” She would give a wig to their head and say, go out and work now. But you couldn’t stay anywhere else; you had to work and stay at their home. This was mandatory for them to take your daily earning. You even had to eat your meals with them, and I accepted these at first. But I was

just a child at the age of 16-17; so thereafter I asked myself what I was doing when I got older. What was I doing? I mean, I wanted certain things, so I wanted to struggle and take steps towards achieving them. But this wasn't the fight I wanted to put. Because I was earning at night but I couldn't even buy make-up supplies as I didn't have any money left in the day-time. Thereafter, I worked by myself. I separated my house assuming that I had found a companion. I left their house. I rented my own house. The pressure started after working comfortably for 1-2 months. They came and told me "You will either come and work for us like you used to do, or you will leave Bursa." It was pretty much the same with the incident in İzmit. You are queer as well. Look at what you are doing instead of supporting me! You don't act any different than the government, maybe you are even more cruel! I didn't accept it after having worked comfortably for 2-3 months. Because I could save my earnings. I started to look out for my own benefits at one point. At the very least, I could buy my own make-up supplies. I was eating even my own food. And not by being indebted to anyone else. I didn't send my money to anyone. I was paying my own rent and doing my own cleaning. It felt better when I started to do everything by my own. Because, the life I want to live is my own life. Not being a slave for others. After living like this for 2-3 months, I eventually challenged them. They came one day and broke down all of my glasses. One day they came with machetes. They tried

to break my door, shouting me to open it. I couldn't go out to streets to work either. They stabbed my friend who was staying with me just because she wasn't working for them. When you see these... You should inevitably go out to streets in order to make a living, but you are frightened from being stabbed. You may die. The fear of dying starts at some point. I was just a child yet. I mean, there was nobody to lend a helping hand and raise my awareness. Maybe there were some people like that but we failed to notice them as we were captured by that person in Bursa. Then I said, "This is not how I want to live. I had better take my bags..." I gathered my men's clothes and wore them under my dress, and directly went to Diyarbakır. I returned to my family's home. Because, the live I encountered was far different from what I had aimed for. But you face a different reality. You see these from your own trans friends while running away from the government and stuff. I mean, you say "So it means that you are imprisoned to live in different life conditions." I didn't accept that life and returned to my family. After returning to them, my housemate had to work with them as the house contract belonged to us both yet she didn't have anywhere else to go. She surrendered to their threats. Now she is someone who has been sentenced to 8 years in total, including 6 years for this file and 2 years from that home. How can you be sentenced to 8 years without committing any crime?

What is the exact justification for the prison sentence?

The exact reason is providing a place for prostitution. Nothing else. If it is your first sentence for prostitution, 2 years is not normal anyway and I had already come here. The judge told me "OK, you can go." I brought my father as a witness. I provided documents to prove that I was living in Diyarbakır. I wrote a petition to explain that it had been a long time since I had left Bursa and I wasn't related to the house. I went to Diyarbakır. I suffered the hospital incident in Diyarbakır. Then I left there and arrived in Ankara. I settled in Ankara and had a traffic accident. It was a near-death accident. I had a really bad accident. Those who crashed into me ran away. They just thought that I was dead. I don't know what happened in the car, but they escaped. I passed out. The car was like an accordion. I was able to survive in it. The police came and took me out of the car. I regained consciousness. Thanks god, I was fine. I said I was going to file a complaint since they escaped. I should file a complaint anyway when I am in such a condition. I went there and they took my ID card. They asked if I was being searched by the police. As I am an inoffensive person, I said "No". I don't like violence or fight anyway. I am trying to continue my way as a normal person who lives her status and her life. They said ok and detained me. I said "I am the claimant, why are you detaining me?" They said the police was already looking for me. They said that I had to give a statement

and they would keep me there until the morning. But they didn't tell me anything about the prison yet. If they had told me, maybe I would have immediately called a lawyer. I would do something. I could have the opportunity to have a lawyer. I went to the courthouse to give my statement, it turned out that I was sentenced to 2 years, 3600 TL. I was detained in the police station before that. But this is prison, and 2 years! What kind of a sentence is 2 years? I had done nothing; 2 years for nothing. They converted 6 months - it was normally 2.5 years - to a fine equaling to 3600 TL. I wanted to call a lawyer. A lawyer from Ankara came. It turned out that I couldn't have a lawyer. The only justification was my sentence. I had to assign a proxy as the sentence was 2 years. I had to file a lawsuit for that. I wanted to assign someone from my family as my proxy. But my family has already ignored me due to my status, so I wanted to assign a friend as a proxy. Let me give a small example: I had my best friend then. When I was in prison, money was gathered from several places in Turkey and sent to her for lawyer and my other needs. As I didn't harm anyone, I am appreciated by others or this is what I believe. Also they organized parties to my name, just to gather a lawyer fee, maybe you know about them? About 7000 TL was gathered. I only needed 3600 TL for the fine and maybe 1000-1500 TL for the lawyer's fee in addition to petition expenses. She spent all the money which was close to 7500 TL for crack and drugs within one night. My best friend did this to me.

How could I assign a friend as my proxy? How could I see a friend as someone who will have my every right? No. Do you know what I did? There was a friend I didn't - I am serious - know any at all, I had just met him during the sex work. As friend, I mean someone who came to me, made his payment, did his job and left. I somehow reached him and asked to be my proxy. He accepted to be my proxy, and the result of the proxy was concluded when there was 5-6 months before I was released from the prison. He was assigned as my proxy and I always say this, I wish I had done something to be sentenced to prison. I was deeply hurt for being imprisoned even though I did nothing. It has been 2 years since I was released from the prison, but so far I have lived with the fear of being imprisoned again. If they could just take me and imprison me for 2 years without a reason, they can repeat it as well. When I think about these... Where are those human rights?

[HOPE]

“And I have understood that there is no salvation for a trans individual, no matter what you do...”

ANKARA

Can you talk about yourself?

I live in Ankara. I am a sex worker. I am a trans woman. I was born in Urfa. My family was strictly conservative and I experienced so many difficulties starting from my childhood. I have been within the life itself since very early ages. I encountered many more hardships as I am from the old queers. I escaped several times and worked as a sex worker on roads and highways. I escaped from home once, then my father found me and brought me back to home.

Where did you go?

I went to Adana - Ceyhan from Urfa. He found me and brought me from there. I had escaped during the semester break, but the period I was away was 45 days. They didn't give any medical reports for 40 days back then, the maximum was one month. My father bought a ping pong table so as to convince the school. He had paid 40 TL with the currency of that time. He bought a ping pong table for the school. We weren't doing very well financially back then. OK, we were standard but not very well. I mean, just to make me continue my education... I couldn't achieve my remaining lessons and my relationships changed further. My sexual side started to be more predominant. I had already seen the world outside. I was older, too. I was familiar with outside. I understood that

I could do something and I saw that I couldn't force myself to fit in that strict identity within a small environment. I realized that I was above what I should have been, so I gained consciousness. I was becoming aware that my past and future acts would harm me and my family at that point. I left the home again and came to Mersin. I was more conscious when I came to Mersin.

Did you go there because of having acquaintances there?

No. Not because of that. I hitchhiked to TIR drivers along the road when I escaped from Adana. I mean, I continued this for a very long time... I used to get on from Antep or Adana, and would go until Habur border gate with TIRs. I would get off at Habur border gate. I had the looks of a male back then; I didn't know any trans persons. I didn't know the language spoken by the trans people either. I knew what homo (homosexual) was. I knew that the medication used by mother to delay her period was a hormone and it also affected breasts. She used to make me buy them. I was conscious about that. I was making round trips. I used to get off on the cities and towns, and meet my needs there. I was giving my clothes to dry cleaning and resting. Then I lost my ID card. I couldn't go to a hotel as I didn't have an ID card. If I was staying in the city while I didn't hitchhike or sleep in TIRs, I used to find myself somewhere to sleep. I slept on the streets for several

times. I even slept in graves that have been recently dug and waiting for a burial in the morning, did you know that? In the summer, I would wash myself in the graveyard on the way in Antep, as I was continuously hitchhiking with TIRs. There were faucets, and lighting at nights. I had a phobia for graves and dead, so I don't know how I wasn't afraid. I used to get prepared in the graveyard. I would go and wait on the street in the evenings. I would get on a TIR and leave for wherever I was headed for. Maybe Adana or Habur. The summer was really good, I was doing fine. One day the autumn came. It was about to turn to winter. The weather was cold. I came to the graveyard and I was feeling cold. I couldn't stand it. I had a sleeping bag with me. Then, I got in between two marble graves, so that I could have a shelter from the wind. It didn't suffice either. I found a grave that was recently dug. They were going to bury the body in the morning. I got inside that grave and slept there. Believe this. I slept in a grave. I started taking hormones during that period. I used to have a break in cities, usually in Antep. I would go to a pharmacy and have hormone shots. I used to have a men's barber blow dry my hair. I learned to use oxygen to bleach my hair instead of hair dye during my time in the graveyard. I couldn't go to a women's hairdresser. Barbers wouldn't let a 16 year old youngster to bleach his hair either. There wasn't such a thing 25 years ago anyway.

And in those regions...

The eastern region. They wouldn't let a 17 year old youngster to bleach his hair.

Even if someone did it now there, it would still be a problem.

The technical opportunities weren't the same. Maybe now barbers are equipped with dyes and materials to bleach men's hair. But there wasn't such a thing back then. What could you find in a men's barber? You could barely find a blow dryer. How many people would blow dry their hair? I went to Diyarbakır for a while during that period. I met a trans in Diyarbakır, she was living with her family.

How old were you?

I was 18 years old. She was called Memo. They used to call her Girl Memo. She was reputed, Zeki Müren-like. She had thin eyebrows and long fingernails. She would never go out during daytime and bring her earnings to her family. She used to live with two sisters, one brother and her mother. I stayed at their place for one month. Whatever we earned would be given to the home. Well, we were buying ourselves clothes and stuff. I was satisfying my soul. She went to Mersin, An-

kara and İstanbul and stayed for a while before. So she knew the language spoken by the trans people. She knew a few Lubunca words... She taught them to me. I was a tad more conscious. Then we got busted by vice squad with Memo. They cut my hair. They sent her home as she was from Diyarbakır. They made me get on a bus, and exiled me. With a soldier's haircut. The destination of my ticket was Gaziantep.

What year was it then?

These happened in... 88. Just imagine... I had a red, flamboyant shirt with a broad women's belt and a pair of black cotton trousers with several pockets which were fashionable back then. I was wearing espadrilles and had nail polish while I had a soldier's haircut. I was in a bus with no money at all, being exiled to Gaziantep from Diyarbakır. OK, let alone anything else but how could I remove the polish from my fingernails? I gnawed my nails from Diyarbakır until Gaziantep, that is how I removed them. No hair, no decent clothing or money... I got off there. I found a man there, he was the night watchman for the garages. I received clothes from him and pulled myself together. I was going to continue with TIRs but this time the TIR drivers didn't take me along the way. They mistook me for a soldier or something like that. I couldn't afford a wig or anything... I went and bought a lipstick. I wanted to make myself obvious in some way so that they would take me. Be-

cause there was nothing else to do. There was no way I could work within Antep, in the city center. While I was working on the road, once the vice squad took me somewhere near Antep. I had a run of bad luck. They beat me up and shaved my hair in the ugliest way... I mean, it is a very complicated life. So I was frightened to enter into Antep anymore. I would hide myself when I entered. Gendarmerie caught me in the meantime. I was on the road. Nizip Gendarmerie took me from somewhere near Antep. They beat me up and humiliated me. They beat me up with a chain. I lived all kinds of bad things. Then I came to Mersin. My hair was slightly longer in Mersin and my appearance had gotten somehow better. I was more conscious as compared to my peers, the new trans people and sex workers there. I knew the trans language. My hair was bleached with oxygen and longer than theirs. I was familiar with hormone and my boobs had started to grow. I lived in Mersin for a while. I lived better there. I met trans people with higher awareness in the meantime. There was Onur from Adana, she had longer hair and was more conscious than me. They have seen the big city. There was Akif, she went by the name Olcay. I met them and I became more conscious. I met Armağan. She was from my hometown. She liked me, so I could visit her home. She used to give me clothes and raise my awareness. She used to tell me of the trans lives and incidents from metropolitan cities... She was in contact with them. I met a man who ran a coffee

shop. He rented a room for me. I wasn't an active sex worker in that period when I was seeing Armağan. The man used to take care of me and I would see Armağan during daytime. I didn't get outside at night and the man didn't let me to see other trans sex workers. All of them were trans sex workers in the appearance of men. Then Armağan introduced me to late Sofia. She was a post-op transsexual, she even had a car. She invited me so I went to her. She referred me to her clients. We shared our earnings. I stayed with her for about one week. She gave me high heels, washed my clothes. May she rest in peace. She told me, "Go to Ankara, you won't find the life that you want here. We are from here, so we have power and capacity to some extent. Armağan has her family here. I am from here anyway, I have my own home and life here. We didn't earn this life while we were here. We earned it when we were outside. We made ourselves a name and people accepted us." She was 45 years old back then. She said, "I had people accept me I am 45 years old now. This is not a good place for beginning. Go to the big city." One day I came to Ankara. While I was walking around in Ulus, -my name was Caner back then- I heard someone calling me. I turned and looked to see a sex worker friend of mine called Olcay. We had met before in Mersin. She had a male appearance as well. She taught me the area around Gençlik Park. We stayed together for a few days. We were working in the park. My boobs had grown slightly larger. My hair was longer, so I got

my hair highlighted. I continued my hormone treatment. So I didn't have difficulty in transitioning to a full trans woman appearance. Because I already had the foundation. So it was very easy for me. I only had to do epilation. I wasn't too masculine anyway as I had started the hormones at a very early age. Both my structure and by early hormone treatment made it possible. I didn't have so much of a problem except for epilation. I rented myself a home as soon as I started epilation. I rented a slum with only one room. And starting from that moment, I have worked as I am now, with my current appearance as a trans woman and exclusively as a sex worker.

You found the clients from the outside, didn't you? Where?

There was a cafe-bar called Santral there. There were pubs in 100. Yıl and within Gençlik Park. It wasn't very easy, actually. Well, my transition process was easy but... I was sleeping with men for free around Dışkapı and İsmetpaşa, further away from Ulus district so that they would provide us with some place. Because it was winter now and I couldn't stay outside. I could sleep under two trees in the summer, but not in winter. I would feel cold. Finding clients was getting hard. I had sex with so many people for free, just to sleep somewhere warm. We used to find them from the area around the post office and sculpture.

So you met a lot of men and queers in the meantime...

Yes. Almost all of their families were here as well. In fact, they didn't have any problems with them. They only had financial problems. Actually, they all had to be sex workers just because their families weren't doing fine financially. I was a foreigner in a foreign city. I was a victim in the real sense. At least they had their families and home. But I had nowhere to return.

You were compelled.

Yes, I was compelled. I had to look ahead. And I guess I was more advantageous than them since I had a background in my past. I was more willing to achieve something. Therefore, it was easy for me to transition into a trans woman. I started contacting with my friends who had completed their transition process before I made a full transition. I mean, I didn't have a life as a man in the daytime and as a woman at nights in Ankara. I lived that while I was staying at the hotels for a brief period. Then I met other trans women. I slowly made friends, and started epilation in the meantime. I rented a home with only one room. I had a full trans woman appearance, and continued my life in that way.

When did you identify certain streets for wheeling?

I was in Ankara right before 90s. It was 6 months before 1990. Kurtuluş Park, Abdi İpekçi Parki Güvenpark and Gençlik Park were well-known back then. The sculpture and the post office were well-known in Ulus. If you were searching for a gay, you used to find him here. If you were searching for a trans woman, you used to find her on the boulevard, in front of Ankara Hotel.

Where was Ankara Hotel then?

Atatürk Boullivard. There is Büyük Ankara Hotel there, right there with the consulates. I guess it wasn't so long ago. Because there wasn't any trans individual who had been there for 20 years when I arrived. They had a history of 4-5 years at most there. For instance, my friends, my circle was consisted of trans women with a history of 6 months to 1 year. If you were looking for a trans person, Ankara boulevard was the place to go. Maltepe wasn't known yet.

So Cinnah Street wasn't popular yet either, was it?

Cinnah was kind of known but the front of Ankara Hotel was busy. I had even learned that trans women were working around Ankara Hotel while other gays were in the parks just

when I was back in Mersin. Someone told me there. Those who had seen a big city and came to Ankara, they had told me. I was actually familiar with these locations. I came here with a high level of consciousness.

You were prepared when you arrived.

I was conscious in many aspects, yes. I wasn't all blind.

So, you haven't seen your family ever since, have you?

I saw my family thereafter. I had pretty long hair with high-lights when I was in Mersin but the man I was with had me cut my hair with the fear of being exposed. I pulled myself together. I went to my family as I missed them very much. My family accepted me again even though they were aware of this. They accepted everything.

Have you been subjected to violence?

No. Such a strict, oppressive father, such a family. But I wasn't beaten up during that period. Yes, I was beaten for several times when I was a child. That one time, it was really severe with a belt since I had escaped from home. We weren't able to speak before our father anyway. We had to stand on our feet whenever he came in. We couldn't relax before him. Let

alone relaxing, we couldn't even speak anything. We used to tell our needs to our mother. We couldn't tell them to our father. But I wasn't subjected to violence, they accepted me. They wanted to bring order to my life. They told me, "You cannot do any heavy work, yet you don't have any profession, or an experience of apprenticeship from your childhood. We will arrange a comfortable job for you." But I couldn't handle it anyway. I stayed there for one month. I was accepted; however, each behavior and gaze disturbed me. I couldn't take it. I guess I stayed there for 23 days. Then I left again and went to Mersin. I was already familiar with Ankara this time, as I had made a couple of round trips to Ankara. I hanged around in Mersin for a couple of days and saw the man I used to be together. Then I came to Ankara.

So you continuously stayed in Ankara thereafter?

I stayed in Ankara. I met my older sisters when I was in Ankara. My parents were making a pilgrimage then. I went to the house of my married older sister, and my other sister came as well. I saw them there. I saw my nephews. I was a trans but I changed into a man's appearance before going there. Then, we met once again. This time, my father was about to die. He was cancer, so it was obvious that he was dying. At first, they called me. I packed my bags, bought them gifts and went to Urfa. I phoned them from the bus terminal, so that they

could come and take me. They said, “My father is in a bad condition and there are too many visitors. We cannot accept you.” I returned in disappointment. I had a very good relationship with my younger sister. She got married with a very understanding man. She didn’t hide me from her husband. I went to Urfa as I am, with a woman’s appearance. I told my sister this was how I am. Their children were too young to understand anything. Her husband knew, too. He was a religious yet civilized, well-educated person.

A conscientious man.

A conscientious man. “Let her come, so that you can meet up. You are siblings. There won’t be any problem if you stay at home.” I was already there to see my sister, why would I go outside? I wasn’t going to announce to Urfa that I had become a woman. I was going there to see my sister already. I stayed there for a couple of days, and returned back. Then I went to my sister as a woman again. I went there twice. I went to Urfa as a woman. I went to my hometown as a woman. This is the extent to which I have met my family so far. Ever since, I haven’t seen visited my sister or family. It is out of question now. My father has passed away and my mother is already an old woman. My mother isn’t dominant anymore. After the father dies, the mother becomes the toy of her children. A woman reigns as long as she has a husband. But after her husband is

gone, everything ends and she is decrowned.

Do you still keep contact with them via phone, etc.?

I don't talk to my family. Our conversations with my mother are always sad. "You wasted yourself as well as me. You humiliated me in the eyes of others. You wasted your life, you have spent it away. My life, too. I cannot find the courage to say anything to anyone," she says... I don't see my mother as our conversations are usually like that. I talk to my sister. We call each other on a weekly basis. Our dialogue continues. As for my other sister, her children are all grown-up now. They are all girls. They all attended to school. Now they are calling me to talk. All of them have become well-educated and cultured professionals. Even though they wear hijab and are religious, they are also modern people. They accept me as I am. We didn't meet face to face, but they phone me and call me uncle. One of them even said to me during our last phone call, "I can call you with your name or something else if you are disturbed by me calling you uncle." I refused her, I said that was our nature. I am your uncle. I would be unfair to you if you called me aunt. If I was given the option to call my uncle either uncle or aunt, I would opt for uncle as well. I am not entitled to ask you to call me your aunt, yet you are entitled to call me uncle. So there is no problem for me. Besides, what is the difference between calling either of these? What

would it change? What would one word change in my life?
How could it make me happy, what would it give me?

Are you pleased with your life now?

In fact, I have been in a dilemma between my life style and my religious beliefs all along my life. I have never been satisfied with my life. Because, deep inside I am a very conservative and religious person. I have beliefs and taboos. And I am deeply interested in religion. Furthermore, I graduated from Imam Hatip Middle School. I know Arabic and Holy Quran. I have always wavered between my belief and private life. I have never been actually satisfied with my life. I experienced temporary fake happiness. From time to time, I became happier with my financial status, whenever I owned something. Or when I had a boyfriend... But even these didn't make me happy. In fact, I have never been happy. The difficulties I have faced in life are not the troubles of being a sex worker, the pressure from the police, beating or the social pressure. If I weren't a trans individual, there wouldn't have been a social pressure either. Becoming a trans person was not optional for me. I had to be, because I had no other alternative. I had to be. Today, someone who feels like this has no other alternative to live in Turkey. I mean, I had to be.

What would make you happy in life? Which possession would make you happy?

In fact, I wish I weren't a trans person.

Because of facing this much bad experiences?

Yes. I am 45 years old, a little shy of 50. When I look back and reminisce, I see only three cats that I will leave behind. Nothing else. Those cats will have difficulty on the street for only a few days, and then they will continue their lives. What did I leave behind? Nothing. I neither have a family nor anyone to come to my funeral, to bury me. My financial status is not so good but I am grateful for having a standard level, a nice life in this aspect. Even if I was a billionaire now, that money will be no good for me when I am dead. My tomb will be purchased with the money earned by a few sex workers by means of prostitution, and that is how I will be buried. Even a funeral dinner or a praying session after me will be organized with the money gathered by a few trans people. How can you be satisfied with any aspect of this life? With what could I be happy? Even if I had made a fortune by now, what would make me happy? What could it be?

Except for money, what would you wish to have now?

I would like to be very well-educated. I wish I had graduated from 3-4 universities. I wouldn't mind not having a marriage life or being either a woman or a man... I wish I had a good career. I would like to be a high level authority. For instance, a hard-to-get position.

What about private life?

I would like to live together with my parents. Maybe I wouldn't have a gender, but I would be able to adopt a child. I would live together with my parents. I would like to be at their service without needing anyone else until the end of their lives. I would like to be together with my parents.

The profiles of trans women - and mostly sex worker trans women - and of the men that surround them are stereotypical.

Yes, these are standard profiles.

Do you complain about these? Have you ever had any relationships that made you complain? Have you ever wished another type of a relationship?

We let those relationships into our lives knowingly. I cannot be a hypocrite now. Everyone is well aware of the standards, rules, methods and user's manual for a relationship with a trans sex worker. This is based on such an economy. We give money to the man we are together with. Then, when we visit our friends, we show off to them by claiming "My husband bought me a present." This is how hypocrite we are in this respect. In fact, the person to whom we tell all these knows that we are lying as well. As soon as we leave their house, they phone someone else and say, "She came to me again, showing off by saying my husband bought me all these gifts. As if I didn't know that she is the one who gives the money." They immediately call someone to make a joke about it from their perspective. I mean, everyone knows how these relationships are. While the danger is blatantly obvious, we take a man and let him into our private life.

Why?

Nobody else loves us. Nobody loves us. I was actually loved. I had a real relationship which wasn't based on money. I also experienced bad things during the relationship but it lasted

for 4 years. I really had a relationship independently from my money. Indeed, that relationship was really protecting my values. I don't know whether it was out of luck or the impression I made. I was a woman to the extent that he was a man. I was respectful to the extent that he was domineering. I was loved and I lived it, but I sacrificed many things. I couldn't smoke a cigarette next to him. I smoke a pack in one night. Yet when I was with him, I couldn't smoke even three sticks. I had to brush my teeth late at night after smoking. I used to smoke in the bathroom and brush my teeth. Imagine that. I sacrificed many things. He would visit me at weekends. If the car was dirty, my first priority would be going to a car wash. I am a sex worker and I use that car. Naturally, it gets dirty. It gets muddy and stuff. Cigarette butts, etc. I used to go to a car wash place. Yes, I was loved. But there was a price for it. And I paid that price. As for the relationships which were for money... The man said his mother was sick, and asked for money. I was assuming that he was going to take his mother to a doctor. Instead, he went to his girlfriend and spent the money with her. They went to Istanbul with that money. They were there when they had spent it all. They ran out of money, so they sold the radio of the car. Yet that wasn't enough either. So he called me to ask for money, he said that they didn't allow him to go until he paid his debt. But I had already heard the news from someone else. I told him, "The whore you went there with, let her make the payment." I lived these

relationships. Other than that one special relationship I had, all of our relationships are the same. Because nobody else loves us. We endeavor to keep the fire within alive by means of money, but that is not enough after one point either. Then we see an attempt to domineer all of our life. That doesn't suit us, too. Some of us act smart and withdraw themselves. Some of just let go till the end, and continue blindly. I mean, there are only a few of us who say, "I had better withdraw myself now, I cannot cope with this relationship anymore."

**What was the greatest act of violence you have ever seen?
What is the greatest violence in life, in your opinion?**

The greatest violence was verbal insult. Verbal insult. I was subjected to physical violence many times, but verbal insult... I also lived that, and it was in a very bad environment. I had a male appearance. The police took me when I was on the road of industrial zone in Antep. They told that I was a working homosexual and I hitchhiked, so they brought me to the police station. They threw me among 10 thieves, all of whom were my peers. And they shouted out loudly that I was homosexual. They beat me up, shaved my head in an ugly way and told me that I was homosexual. They intentionally humiliated me among those children. I told those children, "I am a thief like you but I lied to them that I was a homosexual so that they wouldn't make pressure to me or bring me to the

court.” Children replied, “We should keep in contact when we get outside, so that you can teach us something.” I had to tell them I was a thief. The humiliation and insults I faced there... I will never forget that. Then, it was the same in other places too. If the insults were about myself and my gender, I could take it to some extent. But not being appreciated as a human being and being insulted in respect to my family, my religion, my belief and my holy book... Those were the heaviest ones for me; not the physical violence. Physical things heal anyway. What scarred me for life and made me say that I am not actually happy is the verbal violence. This is why I don't like my life at all today.

**Would you like to have an insurance for being a sex worker?
Would you like such a law to be enacted?**

For sure, wouldn't I? When I work on the streets, they come and impose a daily fine of 80-84 TL. There is no social security involved. Sometimes they fine me everyday for one month. Even if I am lucky enough that month, another trans still gets those fines. Furthermore, they sometimes impose three fines within the same day. I wasn't imposed two or three fines within the same day but my friend had three - all in one day. Why shouldn't that money go to my government? This is my government. If I was given the opportunity to be covered by the insurance as a sex worker, I would be happy to allocate

10 days' earning to the government on a monthly basis instead of paying a daily fine of 80 TL. Because those orphans, soldiers and that flag... They are all mine. My homosexuality doesn't necessarily mean that I have ignored all value judgments. The hungry animals on the streets are my animals, too. A mine worker under a collapsed mine is my worker, too. He is my citizen. I may be a trans person. That is my gender; not my personality or essence. This is my government. My prime minister and my president. My future, my development and the health of my country. This is my country, my homeland. While I am of this opinion, being excluded and being deprived of a social security just because I am a sex worker doesn't align with my considerations for my government. So, it is what it should be. There should be social security.

What is the reason that makes sex worker trans women to fall out with each other this much?

Economy, envy...

Is it a money quarrel or jealousy?

Money quarrel, jealousy... These are the reasons. When you project on it, you also see a horrible ignorance. Because these all stem from ignorance. Poor level of awareness. Poor level of culture. For instance, would a well-mannered trans who

isn't ignorant struggle for earning 20 TL in the industrial zone despite having three houses at the age of 55? Would a sane person do that? If she was well-cultured with a good background... I mean, the tomb you will be buried into is made of stone, not gold. Because nobody has a golden tomb. What is your problem? Late Bahar had kilograms of gold. She had the latest model car and three houses. She had two very nice adopted children. Why would you risk your life in the industrial zone for 20 TL? You are still young. Why are you risking yourself? Were you intending to buy a yacht or something?

So why do these people want to show off and earn more money?

This stems from pure ignorance. Showing off is an ignorant attempt to make yourself prominent. I am a trans person and I mandatorily work as a sex worker, but what I do isn't a skill. It makes no sense to make an impression as if it is a skill. In my building, I wouldn't like to be seen as if I am better just because I am a sex worker. I would like to be one of them. Not many trans people behave in this manner. While I pass by my neighbors, they don't greet me on the first day. Not on the second or third day either... But they are ashamed on the fourth day, and I make them say hello. I say "Hello, how are you?" on the fourth day. On the fifth they say, "Hi, what's up?" I don't withdraw into my shell. I primarily make

my quality as a human prominent. I am a human first. I can see and talk to my neighbors. Awareness is a distinct feature. This is something else. I am not trying to make an impression as if I am an extreme, extraordinary person. Because I am not an extraordinary thing; I am a human yet I am a trans individual and a sex worker. I am aware of this. What I do isn't something to show off. I am doing this because I have to. The creator gave my gender to me, this is how I was created. My country and conditions compelled me to become a sex worker without any other alternatives. There is no any other work to do. There is no alternative. I withdrew myself. I withdrew myself from this life.. I went to a wild and remote place just tp withdraw myself. It was an abandoned factory on Istanbul road. I cut my own hair with scissors. I said, "I will quit this life. I will find a job, and work." I had some food supplies. I went to that remote place with three cats. I went to the sand quarries and repented. I went a mosque. While I was praying at the mosque, gendarmerie came and took me. This happened in 2007.

Why did they take you? You were praying at the mosque.

The place I lived was 1.5 km away from the village. One day I went there and sold my electronic devices, and bought my needs. My destination was unknown. I had only arranged a transportation company to place my furniture and food. I

somehow entrusted myself to god. I wasn't well prepared or had a good amount of money. There was one thing I believed in: I am quitting this life. I was thinking, "I will quit smoking, too. I will somehow manage myself if I work for peanuts."

Why did you want to walk off? Were you fed up?

Being within this life... I mean, my beliefs and my life style were always in conflict. I couldn't stand it. Other than my belief, all that pressure and troubles... At some point, you say "If the price for all these troubles is wearing a blouse instead of a men's shirt, damn that blouse." If the price is the long hair, I'll just cut it. Is this what I am paying for? At some point, you just become fed up with it. You question all your struggles for only this. I walked off and went there. I didn't go out for a couple of days. Then I placed my furniture into a hut. I was gathering wood and setting fire. It was an abandoned lumber mill. No water or electricity, nothing. With three cats... I had a small amount of bulghur, lentil, flour and sugar. I had nothing. And nobody knew that I was gone. I was following my beliefs, I was really leaving it all behind. They spread rumors that I was in love with a glue-sniffer... If I had been to have a relationship with a glue-sniffer and I had had no money, I would have gone to Ismetpasa to live with my lover. Why would I move to Istanbul road to live together with a glue-sniffer? Nobody saw me leaving, my friend. I didn't have my ID card with me. On

the third day, I intended to go to the village. I wanted to buy water and repent at the mosque. I completed my ablution, I wanted to repent and start my praying. I was praying at 2 a.m. at the mosque when I heard someone “Shall I get him on his feet, my commander?” The other one said, “Let him give his salute.” I have my salute and finished my pray. The village people complained about me, assuming that I was a thief intending to steal from the mosque. They told me to give my ID card. I said that I didn’t have it. I explained myself to the commander; told him that I was here to quit a bad life. I told him where I was staying. I offered him to show my belongings in my hut. He said, “What will we do now, you don’t have an ID card.” But he directly believed in me. Yes, he really believed in me. “Then,” he said, “give me a reference.” I had the phone number of Okşan. “If you would like, you can call this number to confirm my identity.” They called Okşan. This is how they learned that I went there. Later on, they showed my life story on TV. Okşan came there with trans people for several times, bringing me financial help. But then, they made rumors that I was in love with a glue-sniffer there and I was using drugs with the money they had brought to help me. This is how they prevented those from helping me. If they hadn’t prevented me in this manner, if I could have continued my life for a while longer, maybe I wouldn’t have returned. I searched the workplaces around, yet the village people didn’t give me any job. I was willing to work on the field. There were large

melon fields. I was willing to pick melons, too. There were stone quarries and a plastic factory nearby. I was willing to work for a peanut, for 200 - 300 TL. I was willing to manage my life in that manner. Trans people stopped visiting me. My mood became really down. I couldn't find a job. They told that I was using drugs there. The chairman of a NGO asked me on live broadcast on TV, "Why are you acting with the thoughts of a mentally unstable drug addict who has imprisoned himself to the garden of a mosque?" These were the words he used for me. If it weren't for my beliefs, why did I leave in the first place without letting anyone know? The reason why everyone knew about it was that I showed Okşan as a reference when the gendarmerie took me from the mosque that day. They said I was fake, that I pretended to pray when the queers were about to come. How could I act hypocritically like this to Allah? I believe in god. I will die, and I will give account for my deeds to Allah. I wasn't that much in need anyway... But how could I fake it just to make a few trans people bring me some money and a few morsels of food? I already had my bulghur, rice and flour; I hadn't run out of them yet. I wasn't completely done. The reason why Okşan brought those trans people wasn't for making a favor, actually. Okşan made me a TV material, so that she could be seen on live TV for two minutes. She used me for making a show of herself. She gave me false promises. I was going to be brought to the employment agency. I was to set an ex-

ample as a working trans person, as a person who changed her life. I was to be a beginning. They made these promises. These were going to happen. So, Okşan didn't come to make me a favor. And eventually, in the news they told that I was struggling in a snare of prostitution. But they mentioned my male name on the ID card. Oh my God! I was appalled... They recorded me with my consent but... My name was written on the screen while they were telling of the life story of a homosexual who was deep inside a snare of prostitution... Oh my god, what was happening? I was locked on the screen. My phone was ringing, my siblings were calling me. I had a horrible nightmare. I had a horrible depression. I lived terrible things. And it wasn't possible for me to continue my life there. They only visited me for 1-2 months anyway. After two months, someone spread a rumor that I was living with a glue-sniffer. I had a bed base. I previously dragged it from one hut to another. They claimed that it wasn't possible for one person to carry it. So, there must have been a glue-sniffer. I was allegedly sniffing glue there. They gave me 300-400 TL when they came. They even gave it in installments. They exaggerated it and said on TV that it was 900 - 1000 TL. They rumored that I bought pills from the city, from the acquaintance of the husband of a trans with that money. They recorded those videos, Okşan took what she wanted - a material for her show. Then, they left me there. My life was ruined. Trans people entering into my life again ruined my life. Also,

being unable to find a job. I was expecting a little bit more compassion from the society. I mean, I would expect them to say, "If this person has come here, we should lend a helping hand so that she doesn't have to return to that life again." That was a rich village, too. They were capable of helping me. I wasn't asking for alms. They could have offered me a job. For instance, they could propose to pay me 50 TL in return for picking the produce in a field. I could manage myself for days with that money. I was out there in the wilderness, living in a hut. I didn't have electricity or water, and I didn't pay for rent either. The lumber mill was already demolished. The remaining wood would suffice 10 families for 25 years. You could set fire all the time, and you wouldn't still run out of wood. I could have survived by some means. I wasn't going to starve. I could have quit smoking, too. Those villagers didn't help me. I became mentally depressed and I had to return. This time, I had a major depression. I had broken my repent, so I couldn't forgive myself. I experienced so many conflicts. Just for returning back to life... What happened? This time, my friends exploited me and my status of being homeless and unable to work... What happened? My friend made me rent her car. She rent her car out to me in return for staying with her for one year. She had made a down-payment equaling to 1000 TL. I covered remaining 13000 TL in return for staying with her for one year. I paid the rent and she became the owner of that car. Just under the name of being a friend... Therefore,

I became even moodier. Then, I saw that it couldn't go like that, so I pulled myself together. And I have understood that there is no salvation for a trans individual, no matter what you do...

[HAPPINESS]

“There was a well-known restaurant in Van. Its owner had previously run a pavyon business in Istanbul; as you see, he was a pimp. I was working in that place. If you entered the backstage by yourself, the doors were locked. I will fuck you, even if I have to use force. By force... It was a place made of tin, a jer-ry-built place by the Lake Van. We even escaped from there late at night, with nothing but only our dancer clothes in the cold winter. I mean, we eluded so many troubles. From time to time, we couldn’t receive our money after they made us work.”

IZMIR

Can you introduce yourself?

I am 28 years old. I was born in Bahçe district, Osmaniye. I completed all of my educational process from primary school to university in Adana. I came to Istanbul after graduating from the university. I had a career. For a while, I worked at a company. In fact, I had a nice job and salary before becoming a sex worker. A nice salary, insurance, food allowance, transportation card; I had everything. But there were minor psychological pressures, verbal harassments and comments... The company I was working for wasn't just another law firm. We were the lawyers of almost all celebrities. We were responsible for all rent contracts of ... in Etiler. When the pressure began, I submit my resignation. Yet I stayed away from prostitution for a while. I made job applications. I had really influential references. I had friends who were doctors and lawyers in my previous city.

I guess you had a male appearance back then?

Of course, I had a male appearance. MY lecturers from the university were professors and doctors. Even they gave me a reference, but again no company accepted me since I was queer.

Which university was it?

Adana Cukurova University Department of Computerized

Accounting. Regardless of the influential names backing me, nobody accepted me. I didn't have such an extreme appearance, yet I was slightly effeminate as compared to a man. I mean, you would have noticed my behaviors and looks. Then, I started small. My first koli was for a koli from the village. When I was staying with my family, I never acted flirtatiously or became pretty. I would commute between home and school. I had a very disciplined life, my focus was on my school schedule. Obviously, the professional life of my parents required such a discipline in my life as well. When I was disconnected from my family, that disciplined life was also over. I tried to stay out of attention due to the professional life of my parents. So, my relationships weren't very sincere.

How long has it been since you have started as a sex worker?

I started when I was 21 years old. I will never forget the date: I came to Istanbul on 7th February 2007. I worked for 7 to 8 months. Then, I searched for job for about 3 - 4 months. I came to realize that I couldn't find a job while I was running out of my money. So I was compelled to somehow start koli with the help of a friend. It has been about 6 years. But, I wasn't strictly busy with prostitution within 6 years. I spent a while in the pavyons. But I never went on the streets. I have only recently started prostitution on the streets. It has been 3-4 months. I have always worked in indoor clubs in a proper

way. They were elite and nice places.

Within these 6 years, how long did you stay in Istanbul? Did Istanbul consist of the longer period?

I have spent about 5 years in Istanbul.

Then you came here?

I came to Izmir. I was working in a pavyon here. For a long time, I worked with the best women of all pavyons in Izmir. My business was really good. I received more attention and work as compared to women. I used to make 40 - 50 jobs a day. Then, even normal women in the night-club started to feel distressed. They started to rise against me. I had to quit my job when they said, "It's either her or us." When I left the night club, clients inevitably preferred them. Otherwise, my business is better in indoors as compared to outdoors.

As you have mentioned, certain queers that we know work as hostesses in indoor areas. However, most of them work at home by means of their friends, or they go wheeling. Why indoors? How did you start?

At first, I started prostitution in indoor clubs in Istanbul. I mean, the client comes and orders you a drink. You tell him your price, go home together and properly go home for intercourse. The regulars of those night-clubs weren't scums

either. They were decent, elite people. They approached to me really nicely. They used to pay attention to you... It all was very nice. I mean, I was really satisfied. But that place was shut down. Working areas in Istanbul are becoming continuously scarce. I didn't want to go to streets for prostitution. I came to Istanbul and started to work in a pavyon. I went to the eastern region.

Where did you go?

Bayburt, Bitlis/Tatvan, Van. There was a local song bar called İğdirli in Van. But I was working as an oriental dancer there. I didn't go there by myself. There were dancer and singer girls that I had met in the pavyon in Istanbul. They convinced me and let me in the new group. We toured quite a many places with the managers. But we also eluded really serious troubles. The work wasn't all moonlight and roses. It was quite adventurous. I was introducing myself as a woman wherever we went. When they asked for an ID card, I was stalling them off. I endeavored to dodge them for quite a while. But I went through all of the works. There was one time when we were in Van only one week before the earthquake. The earthquake occurred only one week after we went there. Everyone in Van used to wear conservative clothing. I, on the other hand, used to walk around with mini-shorts. I was wearing strap shirts with shorts, my hair was long down to my waist and my white legs were naked. I was dressed to kill. Even tourists

couldn't dress in the way that we did there, but we had at least 3-4 waiters and bodyguards while walking around.

When you work in such places, you both have bodyguards, and also bosses and pimps... How was your relationship with them?

Those bosses inevitably want to fuck you. And, to crown it all, if you are queer... It is out of question. He will fuck you.

What if you don't allow them?

If you don't allow them, you get kicked in the ass. That's all. You are dismissed.

There must have been acts of violence as well?

For sure. There was a well-known restaurant in Van. Its owner had previously run a pavyon business in Istanbul; as you see, he was a pimp. I was working in that place. If you entered the backstage by yourself, the doors were locked. I will fuck you, even if I have to use force. By force... At the backstage. If I were a sex worker, I would have sex for once and get rid of him. But I wasn't there for prostitution. What was my purpose? Oriental dancing. My job consisted of getting on the stage, dancing and getting off from the stage. That was it. The place wasn't safe, too. There were fights with guns and machetes. It was a place made of tin, a jerry-built place

by the Lake Van. We even escaped from there late at night, with nothing but only our dancer clothes in the cold winter. I mean, we eluded so many troubles. From time to time, we couldn't receive our money after they made us work.

What happened?

For instance, they told us that they were going to give us our money in the morning. So we worked. They didn't give the money in the morning. When we went to work in the evening, they still insisted that they were going to give the money in the following morning. Night-club owners started to lock us down in the houses where we stayed with the girls, in order to prevent us from escaping. They unlocked the doors in the evenings. We went to the night club again. They didn't give money again, and the waiter escorted us back to the home. We were locked in again.

It was sort of slavery.

Yes, slavery. We somehow managed to escape from there. In the early morning. We were dragging our suitcases.

Were you subjected to violence? By the bosses, or...

There was a night-club in Izmir. I was working there. The cousin of the club owner came to the club for months. Every time he saw me, he used to insist that I sit with him. I used to turn

my eyes away in order to avoid eye-contact, and sit on other tables. I did my job very good in the tables to which I had taken refuge, so that I could escape from him. Those tables used to offer me champagne and all kinds of booze, so I was the number one of the club. While I was trying to escape, I still got myself into it somehow. Eventually they made me sit with him. The manager came and took me from my table. The clients at that table were angry as a girl was taken from their table. Guns were drawn. Then the real boss came and fired his guns. I was called to the police station for a statement. If I hadn't gone there, I was murdered. Those men weren't insignificant people. They would have killed me the moment I escaped. That colossal club was suspended for one week. The damage of suspension for one week equaled to 50 thousand TL. There wasn't only one working girl there. The club had 50 - 55 girls. That was such a place.

So, you didn't stay there after that incident?

For sure, I immediately escaped to Istanbul.

Did they try to find you? Were you threatened?

Of course. I have never revealed the hotel I stayed to any club owner. I used to give a false name of the hotel. I never took a taxi right in front of the pavyon. I used to walk away to find another taxi driver. When I was touring around in daytime, I used to take phone numbers of the taxi drivers from irrele-

vant places. I used to go home with a different taxi and from a different route everyday. So I was able to escape to Istanbul easily as they didn't know either. If I were a novice...

They would immediately find you.

They would kill me. I used to learn from the women in the night-club. I applied their methods. And it worked, oh it really worked. Now I go to streets for prostitution. When people ask if a particular place is my home, I lie to them. They ask where I live. I say in Bornova, Alsancak, Hatay... I always say a different place. I reply with the streets or quarters that I know. I am trying to keep my address as a secret.

**Is it possible that there are still people who are after you?
Or is there such a risk in the future?**

If I had been stupid enough to reveal my place, it was inevitable that something bad happened to me. Particularly if there was an incident or an obsessive man. I never reveal my secrets to even my real friends. If I reveal a secret, I don't say that it is my secret. I say that it is a secret of another friend. I mean, there is no need to come out into the open.

Doesn't this cause a great psychological pressure?

It does. Sometimes, I just can't stand it.

Because, it is as if you were living a different life. You cannot trust people or turn your back on them. You are compelled to this.

Of course. This is really troublesome. How should I express myself? Sometimes I feel like I can't take it anymore. Then an insane search begins. Because I try to erase certain things in my mind, and replace them with some newfound things. But I become unsuccessful. Or, you seek the solution in booze. I used drugs for a while. I was knee deep in all kinds of foulness all my life. But still, I didn't use alcohol, tobacco or drugs. I was right in the middle of prostitution and other foul things, but whenever someone used something, I would have escaped from there as I had nothing to do with that kind of people. But I became depressed after my mother passed away. And there was an environmental pressure as well. Although I hadn't used anything all my life, I closed myself home for eight months and became high. Not only pills or marijuana, but also cocaine and crack... I used IV drugs that nobody dared. Maybe if I had put a high dose in the syringe, I was dead now. I got off cheap, maybe it was karma. But after I shook myself off and looked at myself in the mirror, I came to realize that I had spent everything including my money and home. I started over from scratch. My arrival in Izmir is a new beginning to my life.

How did you quit?

It happened momentarily, by my own will. Nobody gave me support. So nobody can claim that I am here now thanks to them. Not for my earnings, transformation into a female appearance or finding a job. Nobody can claim anything. I have survived my every struggle by myself so far. I mean, nobody can prevent me from telling anything to you. I am very comfortable in that matter.

How would you define your life since you have first started as a sex worker?

Grouse. It was very nice in the beginning. I was getting attention, men were being nice to me and I was wearing beautiful clothes and shoes. It was nice because you get the nicest attention that even your family didn't give to you, from men in a foreign environment. You wear nice shoes and have nice perfumes... The attention is really nice, too. For sure, some of those men might love and caress you with different feelings. But you assume that the love you haven't found in your family is in that man. Then you realize that years have passed and nothing has changed. It is all for nothing.

It is all for nothing, but you are in this life because you have to.

It is for nothing, but you have to do it. Like they say, like it or

leave it. Most sex workers are trying to like it to the best of their ability. When they cannot take it anymore, they either commit suicide as they don't receive any support at all, or they have to pay the smallest mistake with their lives. You are compelled to survive. You shouldn't even blink for one second. Your brain should always erase bad things, automatically.

Most people don't have such a willpower.

Certain incidents occurred to my trans friends. They weren't reflected in the newspapers or news. These are very foul, grouse things but maybe, if these things were reflected in press, people would have a clear conscience. But I am not hopeful as Turkey already has several problems. What will happen until we finally become prioritized? But even doing something is putting up a fight in one way.

Are you pleased with your life now?

Never.

**Is there something in your life for which you are grateful?
That you feel blissful for?**

I don't know how to say it. I never had an esthetical operation. I don't have breasts; as you can see, they are small. I am happy for not having tried it.

Hormone, right?

Yes, sometimes they make jokes about me being a gay instead of a trans woman. But all men on the streets think I am a woman. I am the only one they mistake for a woman. I am the only one they mistake for a woman on the streets. We are about 60-70 transvestites working on these streets. Some of these are beautiful transvestites... They have the body of a model, impressive looks and clothing... But nobody pays attention to them. However, when someone comes to me on the streets, I tell them my price and they never refuse me. I climb the stairs and get into the bed. Then they get surprised and say; "I thought you were a woman!" God damn it, I am on the notorious transvestite street. We are 60 transvestites there. I used to work in a night club crowded by women, then it was natural if they thought I was a woman. But the disappointment is really absurd when they choose me among the transvestites on that street. I want those men to choose me intentionally. They still take me for a woman. It is really absurd.

How about in psychological terms?

Even though we are laughing at this, it is actually a depressing situation. Just imagine, a client comes and pays for you. He doesn't refuse your any demand. You look at him and see a handsome, clean, rich and elite man who wouldn't give you

any troubles. You go upstairs only to see that he doesn't want you. Why? He thought I was a woman. He takes a look at you and leaves in disappointment. It is really depressing to be refused there.

You aren't in contact with your family, are you?

Not anymore.

When was the last time you came together?

It was 4 months ago, I went to Mersin. While I was there, I wanted to see my sister, for saying our last goodbyes in some aspect. It had been 5-6 years since we last saw each other. I didn't know that she had children. Those children didn't even know me. I asked her, "Shall I come, sister?" They invited me. They welcomed me in the bus terminal. They couldn't recognize me. They asked what I have become. I was when I went to them, but I didn't have any hair extensions. It was my own hair. Then they got me inside the house at night. We sat together for a while, then went to bed. We got up in the morning. My brother-in-law and my other sister were gone. Then, a friend of my sister came. My sister immediately locked me in to the bedroom and told me not to leave the room until that friend left. My phone rang and I was speaking on the phone when my sister's friend heard me on her way to the bathroom. She said to my sister, "There is a woman in the room, I heard her voice." My sister lied to her: "It's my friend from

the university. She visits me one a year.” Her friend wanted to meet me. She got me out of the room and we stared at each other. She looked at me and looked at my sister again. She asked her, “Is this really your friend?” “Why?” “She resembles you way too much... Her nose, lips, everything...” We tried to explain ourselves. Right at that evening, they kicked me out from the house. They took me out at night again, and they didn’t use the roads inside the city either while they were bringing me to the bus terminal. They used the highway surrounding the city center.

What kind of a fear is this?

You cannot know how they think. They aren’t aware of our thoughts either. There are several movies on transvestites. Those transvestites are executed by their families with gunfire. I have never seen a comedy movie featuring transvestites.

They all have bad endings.

Yes, they all are dramas with bad endings. Wouldn’t it be nice if someone decided to make a comedy movie featuring transvestites? I mean, this is comedy. How can you make someone love something? By making them laugh rather than making them cry.

Or by showing the positive aspects of something instead of only negative aspects. Correct. It is all way too arabesque...

It shouldn't be arabesque. It should be in a comedy genre, like it is in the west.

How was your childhood? I guess your relationship with your family started to deteriorate when you were admitted to the university?

Violence all the time. This is how my childhood was.

Was it because of your identity or other reasons?

I guess it was because of my identity. Because, you understand it when you are a child. People always reacted: "Why is your child like this? Look, they are at the same age. My child has become a man, he has hairs grown here and here, he looks like a man..." They look at me. I am a thin, petite boy with a doll-like face and girlish hands. So I was subjected to violence all the time. I mean, this was the actual reason for violence but they always justified it with other things. For instance, I didn't have any friends until I graduated from the university, and I came to Istanbul. Nobody can claim that they are my childhood friends. I had classmates, that's all. I remember going to the teachers' room with the teachers, and getting into the class with the teachers. I was always distant from other children. My parents were retired from the court-

house, so they were influential people. They weren't standard people. My father was also a nationalist, he was pro-violence. He didn't like queers, women who had sex, prostitutes, women with mini skirts... I mean, I came here from a very disciplined life.

Did you ever plan to escape when you were with them?

No, I am not a troublemaker. I don't like violence either. My life is too precious, I don't risk getting hurt. I have never gone crazy and risked myself so far. I am the one to escape whenever there is a fight. I don't care for whoever is left behind, sorry. I should have 20 friends with me at the very least, so that I can get involved in a quarrel. In such a circumstance, I would still keep my distance. I don't like violence or beating as I was subjected to violence several times by my family. I have a scar from my father on my leg.

How many siblings are you?

We are four siblings, including me.

Were they subjected to violence as much as you were?

None of them were subjected to violence as much as I was. The worst case scenario for them was to be warned to keep silent and sit down.

You don't currently see them, do you?

I don't see any of them. My brother has become a policeman, he is a commissioner now. He is assigned in Beyoğlu, and this is one of the reasons why I came to Izmir, so that I don't run into him everyday. But I cannot recognize him now. He has grown up, he is 24 years old now. I don't know even his face. My oldest sister already has a nice marriage. Both she and her husband have nice careers. She is also attending to Bogazici University, Department of Mathematics. Even if she doesn't go to the lessons, she never misses her exams. My other sister has a really nice marriage and life. I mean, they all are doing thousands times better than me. I could have lived a very luxurious life with their smallest effort, but they aren't willing to help anymore. They are of the opinion of "every man for himself".

Do you ever cry when you are alone?

For sure. I continue my life for a long time without crying, but then I burst into tears and cry by screaming for hours. I don't want anyone to intervene, so I don't cry in front of other people or I cry silently.

Are your friends mostly queers?

Queers consist of 30% of my friends.

Really?

Yes.

The remaining? Are they heterosexuals?

I have many friends who are heterosexual men and women.

Why is that so? Don't you prefer queers as friends?

Well, even though we live the same life with my queer friends, I sometimes get bored. I mean, they focus on certain things too much. They show off with what they eat and drink, and stuff. I can't take it anymore. My family used to look down on people like that. I attended to a private school with a private driver. My father had an official car. His driver used to drive me to school and home. We used to visit people who were the highest authorities in all of the provinces where my parents worked. A chief police officer used to visit us, and we used to visit the mayor of somewhere. I had such a nice life. When they just show off to me with their clothes... It feels empty and meaningless. I feel that raggedy, easy-going people are more sincere. Natural people who don't lie.

You don't trust most people, do you?

I don't trust in anyone because everyone is liar and dreamer. They all tell their feelings that they want as if they were real. I mean, they tell those as if they actually lived them.

What does come to your mind when I was “violence”?

The greatest violence against a human being is psychological violence. It scars you even worse than troubles of life. Troubles are only secondary.

Is it because that their impact never wears off?

Never.

Is its impact permanent?

In comparison to a bruise on your body, its impact is nearly permanent. Sometimes I have goose bumps whenever I remember them. The worst violence was my father’s; I will never forget it through my life. I am telling you because I haven’t been still able to forget about it.

By whom have you been subjected to violence so far?

My family ranks in the top place. Then, at school.

Friends? Teachers?

I was verbally abused by my schoolmates. In the university... I was subjected to psychological violence in my workplace before starting to prostitution as well. I was subjected to violence by my bosses in the clubs I was previously working. I was subjected to violence by my heterosexual woman friends. Once I had a man in my life. I never like violence, I am fond

of kind and nice men. I was locked in my home, and beaten up for months because of his jealousy. I have been subjected to violence too many times in my life. While I tried to escape from it, it always found me.

This is the difficulty of interviews like this. If I was just another journalist, I would just feel sorry for you while listening to you. But there wouldn't be anything left in me after the interview was over. As I have been somehow within the queer circle –actually, not somehow, I am right in the middle of it in Ankara- I have been interviewing people for 8 years and all that psychological burden stays with me. Because I don't forget these.

Eventually, you are carrying out the work you are capable of. You cannot erase certain sentences you hear while working from your memory.

I cannot erase them. Also, being a queer myself has an effect as well. Let's continue; I guess you have never been subjected to violence by the police so far?

Never. Because, I am attentive to how I speak within the society. A civil officer isn't different from us in terms of how we want to be behaved respectfully by elite people. Because, my father was also a high rank civil officer. If you just go and challenge a civil officer with a slang language, he takes off his uniform and approaches to you with his own personality. But

if you express yourself to a civil officer in a kind manner, he will tell you nothing. I also went to a police station and filed a complaint against my boyfriend while I was escaping for him. In response, the police went and attacked at him, because it was clear that he was lying. I, on the other hand, spoke decently. I would have been beaten up if I had lied. I have never heard anything bad from a civil officer. Maybe, my friends from this environment experiences this, but...

In general, what do you think of the attitude of police towards sex workers? They shouldn't necessarily be queers; consider sex workers including women as well.

I also saw people getting really beaten up. It was like nothing else I had ever seen before. I would commit suicide if I was the one to be beaten up like that. I couldn't have taken it psychologically. I guess Allah protects me somehow, because I was never beaten up like that by a police officer. Each public door that I knocked on was opened wide for me. I am very lucky in that regard. Maybe I have always eluded troubles as I am the child of a civil officer family, so I already knew how to approach to them. If it weren't for that, maybe I would have been beaten up, too. But I have many friends who were beaten.

In your opinion, what is the reason behind the government's current attitude towards sex workers? What does the government want in terms of prostitution?

I don't know what the government wants in terms of prostitution, but our requests are obvious. We want to have rights just like it is abroad. The government has to do this. If girls are prostituting themselves, the government should provide them with a place and collect its taxes, so that we could have an insurance and retirement pension when we get older. This would be very advantageous. The public treasury would benefit from the taxes as well. It could cover a part of domestic and foreign debts of the government. These are small things, but they can help with major issues as well.

Do you believe that there is justice in the country?

I don't think so, because each reigning party rules their own justice.

Do you trust politicians?

I never trust them.

None of them?

Those so-called respectful people have quarrels with each other with street language. What will the others do if they are the ones to behave in this way in the first place? Our pol-

iticians are very foul-mouthed. They speak ghetto language.

Like bullies, right?

Not bully-like either, it is ghetto language. It is like gypsy women. They are yapping empty talk. They aren't cultured or well-raised. Maybe they apply the aggressive attitude they saw in their own family.

You must have heard that brothels have been continuously shut down in various provinces for the last 10-12 years.

I have heard that, yes.

What will happen to the brothels?

The government should pity itself instead of those girls. Girls will prostitute themselves everywhere, including streets. They should open brothels to ensure that women work in nice settings. It makes no sense to shut those places, they will suffer the greatest harm as the government. Because, sex workers are always determined. It is clear that sex workers always struggle to the best of their ability. So the government cannot dismay them even if they shut down those places. They will fuck either there or here. It would be better to keep these places open in order to prevent them spreading into society.

Transvestites aren't accepted to brothels.

Yes.

You have to have a gender reassignment operation, have a pink ID card, etc... Let's assume for a minute that brothels are open again. There are post-op trans women as much as there are those who don't want to have the operation. Should there be a brothel for them?

For sure, I would love to have such a brothel. Instead of having to work on the streets or online just because of not having a vagina, we could work in one street in each province. People would go there to do any dirty work they would like to, and leave those streets all clean. Girls would receive their payment and pay their taxes for the development of government as well. Smooth life.

Do you believe that there should be such a thing for gigolos as well?

For sure. There was a gay street in a foreign movie. Both passive and active gays were working there. It would be very nice, we would even turn into a European country. We would be applying European standards. At least, there would be no more pressure made to homosexuals by the parliament or political parties. If they resolved the problems of homosexuals, they would have received their votes, from a large au-

dience. But, most of them aren't smart enough to think this. They aren't aware of the number of homosexual population. Almost half of Turkey is homosexual.

In your opinion, what is morality? Is there such a thing? Is it oppressed or created?

Morality exists in our culture. It was shown to us by our forefathers. If you behave properly according to the place and time, nobody can question your morality. Morality isn't specific to homosexuals. If a normal woman and a normal man do an immoral thing like kissing, making love or physical harassment, this is involved in the subject of morality as well. Because morality covers everything. But, if you oppress morality for only homosexuals, it isn't morality but only something that is politically applied to everyone.

Is there violence among trans people?

I don't think so. I have never witnessed such violence. Or, I am not someone that pays attention to those things.

Or, you have never been involved in such an incident so far.

I have never been involved, but transvestites also fight sometimes, as much as a woman fights another woman or a man fights another man. They experience envy or some of them have too suppressed egos while others have too inflated

egos. The envy is inevitable.

Are there any gangs that form within transvestites?

No, never. I haven't seen them. If there are such gangs, I am not aware. I had heard of a girl in Bursa who was racketeering, I guess.

Do you trust in NGOs?

All staff members and all queers who worked in Istanbul LGBT in the past were the best in helping each other. They used to help each other actively. I was very involved back then, but I don't know their current status. I haven't heard much from them because I didn't stay in one city, instead I continuously moved from one to another. I will go to them again.

If you could wish one thing from the politicians for your life, what would it be?

Having a social security.

Like a healthcare security?

Yes, I mean, I wish we were covered by Social Security Institution. I want to pay may taxes to my government, so they should take takes for prostitution. The government would develop, and also I would be registered. I could move my address to anywhere, I would register myself with my current

address in Izmir with only one petition. If I went to Istanbul, I would register my address in Istanbul indicating that I had moved. I could both pay may taxes and deposit my insurance.

Something like a one-person brothel?

Like a one-person brothel. You can move anywhere on the condition that these are assigned by the government. But these should be the correct locations. For instance Beyoğlu... You cannot change Beyoğlu. Even if the President came there by himself, or another government declared war and invaded there, we would still defend that the street belongs to us. So, Beyoğlu as well as Alsancak, Izmir should be assigned to queers. Each city has a designated district like that, those should be assigned by the government. Families shouldn't insist to live there, they should move some place else. It would be the best for everyone.

[FREEDOM]

“Three people forced me into intercourse while the others held me down with baseball bats and beat me up. They hogtied me and left me there, completely naked”

MERSİN

At first, can you briefly talk about yourself?

Ethnically, I am of Asian origin. My family settled in Kahramanmaraş in the past. Then my father got married to my mother, then they moved to Adana. I was born in Adana- Seyhan in 1970. We are five siblings: one girl, four boys, and me – just like all queers say. I completed elementary school in Adana. I was the child of a poor family, and I encountered difficulties. I didn't know what homosexuality is as I didn't have a well-educated family that followed TV or newspapers. I felt something, but I didn't know what it was. I wasn't aware of homosexuality in the first place. I had my first sex with a boy called Şükrü who was 15-16 years old in my neighborhood. I was still surprised and wondered if all men including my brother and neighbors do it like this. There was a fear, I did it but it was somehow weird. I slept with Şükrü, who told another, who, in turn, told another one. My difficult days began. Then I met someone called Murat from my neighbourhood. I didn't know him or his homosexuality. He was the first homosexual I have even known in my life. I was going to work with someone from my neighborhood while Murat was returning from the night shift. I didn't know him at all back then, he was working at the factory. We ran into each other. He was kind of girlish. My neighbor's son Ismail said, "Look at him, he is like a girl." Murat didn't react, so we went on our way. I was working in the industry back then. I was on my way to work

on the following day when I saw Murat coming towards me. I didn't know his name either. I became afraid, thinking that he was coming to beat me up. I was on my way to the industry when I understood that he was following me. I looked at him and thought that he was looking for a suitable place to beat me up. After walking for a while – we were still in the neighborhood – he called me with a “shush”. I became really frightened, I was just a child back then. I didn't know anything about homosexuality. He said, “Girl, slow down. I am like you, too.” I was somehow comforted. We became friends. We were educated, too. Then I met other homosexual friends: Yağmur Anne and another trans friend who went by the nickname Über – she has passed away now- and the others. I was confused. I was within a world of confusion back then, it was a difficult period for me. Maybe I was going to learn everything in the future anyway, but back then, I learned this life thanks to Murat. I had lots of opportunities to see its difficulties. My mother was an old woman who was very willing to see me as a soldier. So I went to fulfill my military duty. After I returned from the army, my wavering had stopped. I went to Cyprus. I went to Saudi Arabia. I couldn't make it there. I had lovers. I stayed one month in Cyprus. It was the new year's eve in 95, when I came to Turkey to celebrate new year. I am a cleaning freak and we had our own house with mulberry trees in the garden. My mother swept all the garden and cleaned all fallen leaves as a preparation for me. Then, she turned her

back to an electricity heater to warm up. There were electricity heaters back then, we used to brew tea on it. Her dress caught fire. My mother was burned. She passed away 22 days later. I say that my mother was burned to death. Then, I went to Saudi Arabia. I couldn't make it there either.

Did you go there to work?

Yes, but not as a transvestite (laughs). I had a male appearance. I went to the meat market and worked for a company there. I had saved some money when I returned. I offered two friends to go to Ankara and become women. One of them was Onur and the other was İpek. İpek lives in Istanbul now, her status is really bad. Well, we went to Ankara. They suggested Tan Hotel to us. There was Tan Hotel in Maltepe, it was demolished and replaced with a workplace in 2000.

When was your arrival in Ankara?

It was '99. As soon as I came from Saudi Arabia, I went to Ankara. There was late Ahu, who was a very overweight transvestite from Izmir – then they killed her with her lover. When we saw her, it was the first time we saw a transvestite. She was overweight, may god rest her soul. She greeted us and asked where we were from. We replied her hesitating, “We are from Adana, we will become women.” She asked if I knew someone particular from Mersin. I did, he was from my own neighborhood. Then she said, “Why don't you stay

at his place instead of paying to hotel?” We were still hesitating as we were in a transvestite hotel and it was the first time we saw a transvestite; yet we still accepted. She brought us to her home in Dikmen. She was very good during daytime. When the night came, she turned into devil. I stayed there 2-3 days; I couldn't take it any longer. After I began to work, I realized that I have a dominant character. I mean, it wasn't possible for me to stay there. I returned to Adana. I struggled there a while longer. There was a police chief called Hoca Ahmet. I was working at a pub. They busted us there and took us to the police station. That was the first time my hair was cut there. Then, my friends İrem and İpek went to Tan Hotel again. They called me for a couple of times, saying “Sister, we left Hüya in Mersin and are staying at the hotel. We are making good money here.” Well, I hesitated for a few days but I was convinced to go after one week. They were insisting. I started our life in Tan Hotel again. We were working in İskitler district. Then, we all moved to Gaziosmanpaşa. Then, I got involved in a crime, and I was imprisoned on the 14th December 2000 with my accomplice. I was acquitted on 14th December 2004 when the Turkish Criminal Code was amended. Most of my friends had moved to Eryaman by then. I mean, we were living in Eryaman at first, but then we moved to Gaziosmanpaşa. When I was in prison, they moved back to Eryaman. I started to struggle again. I bought a car, I hadn't finished paying for it yet. Someone threw a stone at

me, and I crashed the car while I was chasing them. The car was burned down in 1. Etap district of Eryaman. The struggle began again. Then, A Team chased me when I was working in Etlik. I mean, I had a friend called Burçin. I looked at her, she was escaping towards the industrial area. The team was right in front of her. I escaped too, when I looked back, I saw A Team chasing me. With that fear, I intentionally threw myself under that car. When I woke up, my body was supported with platinum. I was confined to bed for 8 months. We used to live in Seyranbağları then. Thankfully, my friends took care of me during that period. When I recovered, I started my life struggle again.

Can you explain A Team for the readers? What is A Team? What do they do?

As far as I have heard of it, it was because of the then-municipality mayor Turgut Altıok. But when I speak at the panels, I say “Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turgut Altıok and Melih Gökçek broke my back.” I heard that A Team consisted of the workers who normally worked at the municipality during day time. When it was night, they were allowed to kill, beat up or do whatever they wanted to do with men who resembled to women, women who resembled to men, people who drank alcohol, kissed each other on benches or hugged each other. Well, after that, my back was broken. After I recovered, I was working under Devr-i Alem in İskitler district.

They got me onto a dark red Tempra model car while I was working there. I agreed with the customer and got onto the car. There was nobody sitting in the back seat; but it turns out that there was a thin man who was hiding at the back, in the car. He drew a machete on my throat. I begged them not to do anything. The car took two more people. Three people forced me into intercourse while the others held me down with baseball bats and beat me up. They hogtied me and left me there, completely naked. And God gave me strength. I survived that, completely naked. I was walking by myself, in the middle of wilderness. There weren't any houses or anything. I was shouting for help, but there was nobody. There was no asphalt, it was a macadam road. I found a nylon bag from a greenhouse there. I took the nylon and covered my body with it. I also found myself a stick, as if I could defend myself with it. Yet there were no people, no cars, nothing. Nobody lived there. The place that those men took me was near a gate. It seemed like a farmhouse, but I couldn't see inside. There were only utility poles. It was about 3-4 a.m. in the morning when I arrived in a construction site. There were construction workers in the site. I was yelling, "Help, save me, call the police!" They said, "Who on earth are you?" A blond person wrapped in nylon. Then, one of the construction workers came and gave me their own clothes and shoes. The gendarmerie came. I explained what happened to me to the gendarmerie. I described the location. They knew it very

well as it was their area. I said “There was a gate with yellow metal bars.” They directly headed for there. On the way, they were saying, “You must have come here by yourself.” I said to the commander, “Do I look like I have come here by myself? I don’t have clothes.” They insisted that I had come there by myself. They found the place I was saying, and when they saw my shredded skirt, shoes, and my belongings shattered from my purse – they also stole my purse – only then they believed that I was abducted. They took me to a hospital; I was afraid. I stayed for a while longer and understood that Ankara wasn’t a place for me anymore. I had already bought my home here, near Soğuksu Police station; so I moved there. It was difficult for me, as a trans to go there from a metropolitan city. I went to Adana and I had difficulty again. I can say that it was because of the attack in Ankara, and its impact on me. I went to Adana, and a man with whom I had a relationship threatened me. I had to sell my home. I sold it and gave him half of the money, that is how I saved myself. I sold my house and I had to start living in rented houses again. I dealt with the police, I had rearrange my life. I put up a great fight to have myself accepted here. Currently, I am living with someone again. I am happy. But the strikes, humiliations, being beaten up and chased during 20 years... They didn’t even offer us any food at the restaurant at the restaurants back then. They used to refuse serving to us, they used to kick us out. They used to chase us with clubs. We aren’t comfortable

now, but when I look back... It is still much better. Not the best, but it is still unbelievable for such a damaged generation like us. Even the traffic police used to beat us up back then. Let me be clear, we didn't know any police department like vice squad, public order or combatting with terror. But when I go to a police station now... Such a high rank police chef says "welcome". I mean, it is a bittersweet joy for me. I feel happy and proud. When something happens, the police call me "big sister". But when I reminisce about the past now, I think that they messed us up in the past. There is such a big difference now. We suffered great damage from the police or our clients. I recently went to a panel and spoke about T type prisons. A participant told me, "You shout too much at a fight." I said, "Well, even if I take a club or any offensive weapon in my hand at a fight, they will imprison me if something happens to my opponent even if I wasn't the one to harm him." They harm us in several ways. For instance, my crime wasn't armed robbery, yet they wrote that on my file. That is why I was imprisoned. There was no way that I was guilty of armed robbery. I was released after I was imprisoned for a while, but it was not armed robbery. Ah, the torture back then.. We weren't allowed to read our statement back then. We used to just sign it and abide by them. It is no longer like that. I mean, it is better now. When I look back in the past, I didn't know that the task of a traffic police was stopping cars. Now I know which police department is entitled to intervene

at us. I mean, I couldn't learn that back then, we were poor. We didn't have any opportunity to learn of any of these or nobody knew these things either. As compared to the past, what I see now is superb. I mean, a high rank police chief calls me with my name, says "big sister" and tells me "if you have any orders, if there is anything that I can do for you, contact me." It has been 20-30 years in this life, so look at the current status. For instance, now I take the file. I say "I will come back at the evening to give my statement." They reply, "OK, as you wish." I like that. In the past, we didn't know what were the contents of the reports written on our behalf. If you compare it to the current situation, it is good.

You briefly mentioned your childhood. Were you subjected to violence by your family for being a queer?

No, my father passed away when I was 2-3 years old. Whenever I asked my mother how my father was, she told me that he was a good man. But may god bless my mother and my father – even if I don't know him, I am his child. How were my brothers? They weren't oppressive, psycho types. They got married and moved away. Marriage is something different in our family. They say, whoever got married, moved away. My older sister escaped to my brother-in-law when my mother was expecting me. I have a nephew who is one year younger than me. I never experienced the affection of an older sister, because as I say, whoever got married moved away in our

family. Sometimes, they used to compare me with other boys at my age. They were wearing fabric pants, shirts while I was wearing stretch jeans. I was criticized because of my hair, too. American style hair was fashionable back then, but I didn't want it. I used to wear t-shirts, jeans and leather shoes with heels. That's why my mother used to get confused, but she never... Like I said, the poor woman didn't know homosexuality at all. She was just mentioning my style as compared to my peers in the neighborhood. Maybe it was unintentional and even if she were aware of it, she didn't want to break my heart so she was always kind to prevent me from escaping. She took very good care of us with the retirement pension of my father. There were two flats in our house and we had rented one flat out. We were putting bread on the table with that money, my father's pension and the salaries of me and my older brother.

How were your relationships with your siblings?

The last time I ran into my two brothers and my sister was at my mother's funeral. After that, we never called each other.

Are you cross with each other?

No. I mean, I don't know. We never asked each other anything. I didn't come out to them or asked them why they weren't speaking with me. They never asked my whereabouts or warned me for anything. I never heard anything from my

brothers. I received the title deed of that two-story house from them by means of notary public in the past, but I forgot to add annotation, how would I know what an annotation is? After I was released from the prison, I met my older sister for this reason. It was the first time she was me with my trans appearance. I was expecting that we were going to hug each other and cry. She is a dominant and rough woman. I know there is a storm breaking in her heart. But she didn't say anything. She left the title deed department, and said "May God bid you farewell." I have never seen her since 2005. I also have an older brother. He divorced from his wife. He is living in that two-storey house now with his son. I keep the contact with them. My brother doesn't call me sister, but he says "sibling". I don't feel sorry for that. I used to wish she called me sister about 15-20 years ago. Now, I am experienced with beating up and life... My certain friends also mention that they want to see their brothers. I tell them "Acknowledge them to be right. I was thinking like you, but I didn't have the problems you had anyway. If someone doesn't want me now, I don't want them two-fold." If you were a normal man who was married with children, and if your child came out to you as a homosexual, would you say "Well done, my child?" This is how I am comforting myself now. As I have said, whoever got married, went away. Nobody interfered with each other's life. I would like to see my sister. But it didn't happen.

Can you describe your social circle?

I know very important businessmen, and professors. For instance, I know a auto showroom owner from Ankara, from back in 99. We don't even have a client relationship. He calls me like a friend. They always recognize me at every workplace that I go here. For instance, my girl friends go somewhere to buy something. If they give my name as a reference, their work gets done immediately. All businessmen, businesswomen, restaurants... For instance, when I order a meal for home delivery, they immediately bring it if it's my place. I met with lesbian groups here by means of a NGO. There are maybe 50 lesbian/gay groups. They all call me mother. My neighbors are the best. So are my landlord and the police station. So, I can say that I am happy now. I am respected. If they go to a hairdresser or a shop... For instance, there is a watch shop near the NGO building. I previously went there to change the battery and band of my watch. The man there offered to sell me a pair of sunglasses. I found a pair that resembled to my previous sunglasses in Ankara. I wore it, the man said it suit me well. I asked the price, he said "It is 300 but I'll discount it to 180 for you." I said, "It's expensive, I'll buy later." He said, "Take them now. You can pay whenever you have the money." I said, "How could it happen, no. I am a transvestite, I work on the streets. I mean, I might forget it, I might be unable to pay it, or if something happens to me, I fall into sin." He

said, “Sister, may god forbid. But I give it up to you.” I went to his show twice. I also have a jeweler, my dear, we are friends with him now. He is in the fish market. We previously went there to buy silver jewelry. I said, I will use the credit card. He said, “Big sister, my pos device has malfunctioned. You can bring the money later.” I was shocked, I denied. I said, “I will pay in cash.” When people approach to me, talk to me, they look at me in a different way. For example, when I was living in Bahçe Quarter, I used to look at my neighbors from the door viewer. They used to pay visit to each other with their children. I am a cleaning freak, so I used to pretend as if I wasn’t at home. They used to feel sad when I went to wheeling at nights. “Please sister, let your friends go but you, please don’t go.” Bahçe Quarter wasn’t somewhere that anyone could walk in easily. It had everything that could come to your mind in it: drugs, guns... I used to wear my shalwar – I don’t wear it anymore – and visit my neighbors. We used to make barbecue. It would be the same if I went there now, too. You know, there is a prejudice against the trans people; they say “Here comes a trans, what will happen?” I inevitably encounter difficulties whenever I move somewhere for the first time. But I am sure that – maybe it is just me, I don’t know – we should make some sacrifices in order to be accepted as trans people. I made those sacrifices in Ankara and here. I made those sacrifices for my neighbors, too. If something happens to me here, all of my neighbors will run to help me, believe

me. But, for instance if tried not to take clients to my house. I told my friends who visited, "If you see an old neighbor while coming to me, help them with their koli. If a neighbor asks for half a glass of sugar, give her a full glass. If he wants one kg of onion, give him 2 kg." One of my friends said, "We don't have to do it." No, we have to do it. Even I say that, if my family lived in a neighborhood, I wouldn't let transvestites work there. So if they allow us, we shouldn't make a scene. We shouldn't throw condoms there. As I have seen and experienced everything, I teach these to my friends. For instance, a new neighbor moved in. She is a pharmacist. She said, "If you have any problems, let me know so that I can refer you to a doctor." These are nice things, I guess. Not "I guess", these are wonderful things. Why didn't anyone object to my homosexuality in my family? I only called my oldest aunt in Maraş when I was in prison. My sister didn't help me at all, or didn't call me for that matter. I was in need of two morsels of bread there. My aunt just told me: "My son, you have become a woman." This is the only thing I have ever heard from my family. I wasn't offended at all. It isn't a bad thing for me anymore, after having experienced so many things. I said "OK aunt," so she hung up. Maybe she was saying in the bad sense. As I have said, I only see my brother and nephew. My social circle here isn't only consisted of transvestites. There are lesbians and gays as well. We are already close with transvestites in my home, a total of about 15 transvestites. There are several

families from business world or police station who know me, and who don't want to see me harmed – so they don't want me go wheeling. They don't want to see me like that. Sure, I have to go wheeling. But they don't develop an attitude towards me or stop speaking to me. Imagine, a conservative woman who wears hijab is my next door neighbor and these are indecent things for her, I know that. But she told me that she was expecting a daughter as if I am a normal woman, as if I am a close friend. Children aren't shy of me as well. I always sent them to market or to buy alcohol, they never refuse me.

How was the time you stayed at prison? Did you experience anything serious? Even being imprisoned itself is serious, I know. But, was there violence?

Unfortunately, yes. After we were convicted, we were sent to Nevşehir Prison. We were imprisoned in cell for 25 days there without letting us out to the prison yard or anything. My accomplice and I were locked down, so we made a decision. There were terrorists in the next cell, they weren't allowed outside at all either. So we rubbed out spoons on the door to make ourselves a knife. But we have also heard that there were certain prison guards who felt sorry for us, too. They said, "There are two people from you, but they have a male appearance." One of them was Digin Şoray and the other one was Sevda. I didn't know them. They were queers with male appearances. They were from a group, working in a home in

Bentderesi with an old man as their boss. How should I express myself? Those queers weren't like us but...

Gay?

So they were from there. We said, "We will either commit suicide or you will take us from here today." Managers came. They made us write a petition, saying "Yes, we want to stay with these people." They had a male appearance while we had a female appearance with long, blond hair extensions. Four of us stayed together. We wanted a radio; they didn't give us a TV or anything back then. So they gave us a radio. Şoray was released by the way, long after he was released, we broke the radio. Just because we broke it, they took us they call hamam in prison. They took there my accomplice and me one by one, and beat us up. They tortured us for just a radio. We had so many difficulties. We could find either detergent or soap. My friend's mother used to sent 100 TL in every three months. I was living with that money. I didn't know how to do beadwork, so I was trying to learn it. When I learned beadworking, I was able to make some money by selling my works. Then, we were transferred to Adana Pozantı Prison 9 months later. I was somehow comfortable there, they were helping us. There were chief guardians in Pozantı, may god bless them. It was forbidden but they pitied on us; so they gave us tobacco. They were saying, "Don't throw us any notes or anything, we will bring cigarette to you." For in-

stance, there was Mahmut Gennemoğlu. He was an inmate, and he was mafia from Adana Ceyhan. He took good care of us, may he rest in peace. His crimes don't matter to us. He helped us in our very dire moments. Then, the manager was replaced one or two years before we were released, so that place became more difficult for us. There was a guard from Gümüşhane. He told us, "Write a petition to be transferred to Gümüşhane; that is a good place." I mean, we wouldn't even be able to think of Gümüşhane. So we wrote a petition and it was accepted. We had two years. They behaved us really good, we were so comfortable. But they were confused as well, they couldn't understand what we were. It was the first time a trans has ever gone there. They were so good to us. When there was one year until our release, Turkish Criminal Code was amended and we were released early on 14. 12. 2004. So I returned back to Ankara, I have already told about that period. But it was still difficult then. We were unable to find cigarette. We found a note thrown by a prisoner, asking for a cigarette. We opened the note, and the reply was: "We cannot find cigarette either. We dry the brewed tea, roll and smoke it." We did so. We dried tea and rolled it with newspaper paper. I had to sniff glue there. There was a workshop, it was optional and took about 2-3 hours. I wasn't so much into tobacco anyway but in that restricted life, I would even eat okra – I hate okra. Because, you want things you couldn't even think of in real life when you are there. You crave for

almost anything. For example, I scarcely eat desserts. I used to crave for desserts when I was there. For example, I stay away from garlic or onion before wheeling. I used to crave for onion. I learned that leeks can also be eaten as onion there. It was really difficult, my time in prison. I am grateful for it is now over.

They say that the ill-treatment of the police was far worse in the past. Yet that violence still continues as we see in certain incidents. In your opinion, what is the government trying to do with such oppression? Do they really believe that they can put an end to prostitution?

I don't think that they will ever be able to put an end to it. It is not possible. I mean, it won't succeed even if it resorts to killing people. Everyone, even they are aware of this. Let me explain the current attitude of the police. For instance, they don't intervene at men who act wrongfully, but they don't intervene at us either. They just let us ho. For example, they used pepper spray on us 1-1.5 months ago. They haven't written down out official statement for that period. The other day the police called me, saying that the incident was reflected on the newspapers and internet. "Can you come and give your official statement regarding the incident about the police?" I mean, they should have done it back then. They didn't take us to a doctor or receive our statement on that day. Nothing.

Can you tell the incident in more detail? What happened?

For instance, I start drinking at 8 o'clock. I do my make up. We leave home at about 11 – 12. The place of incident is called Tulumba Bus Stop. We went there, got off the car and sat down there with 5-6 queers. There was a man who was coming there for the last 2-3 days. He was sitting there with his beer. He said that day "Once I wanted to kiss your cheek, but you didn't allow me." I don't remember such a dialogue, but I said "OK dear, I will give you that kiss one day." That day, we came to sit down there. That man came after us, he sat down, too. Then, the police arrived, rudely asking us why we were sitting there. I said, "We just arrived here, why are you speaking rudely?" The man also confirmed me, saying we had just arrived there. The police said, "Why are you protecting them? Are you their guardian or something?" He replied, "I am just a citizen, sitting here. Nothing more." The police said, "You cannot sit here." He said, "No, I can sit here." Then we saw police cars coming from the opposite direction. When did you announce it? Well, they took the man. I told the girls, "Don't move at all." They took the man to the stairs behind the bus station. They beat him up with batons and used pepper spray on him. We were just sitting and chatting in our place as if nothing happened. All of a sudden, they pepper sprayed right into my self eye. None of us could see a thing. They took us to the police station, where the officers gave us cold water

and lemons for my eyes, but I couldn't open my eyes anyway. We were saying, "Receive our statements already, so that we can go." The man just said to us, "After sahoor." So we left the station and arrived at home. It has been 1 – 1.5 months, and now they are ready for receiving our statement. It had been only 5 minutes since we sat down there. We didn't have the chance to have a laughter or anything. A few people from the NGO said, "You must have done something." What if we did something, what could have we done anyway? Do we deserve to be beaten up? I wasn't offended by the act of police, but hearing this made me feel offended. If you, as a transvestite, don't believe what I am telling you, I am not sorry for what the police did to me. The harm was done to me and me only. It is a shame that you don't believe in me I just spoke about something. Believe me, these shouldn't be in this way. While we all should be comfortable enough to tell ourselves in the NGO, my friends are telling me, "Sister, don't take us, we don't want to be there." Why don't you want, isn't that our place? Yes, but it isn't ours in the same time. We aren't there. Maybe you wouldn't want to write down some of the things I will tell you, but we shouldn't miss a point. For instance, in this pride parade, I went to Istanbul and I was naked. I went there to live my freedom, why else would I go there? I won't simply go there to wave a flag or something. I didn't have my mobile phone with me. I asked a friend to take my photos and send them to me, and she did so. I looked at

the pictures, there weren't any nude ones. As nude, I mean topless. A couple of days passed, but I didn't receive any of those photos. The person who took my photos was chatting with someone on Facebook; I said "Huh, here are my photos. Why didn't the whore send them to me?" In fact, it was a nice thing, I appreciate her. I called her and asked why she wasn't sending my photos. She said, "Love, you are vice president of the NGO, maybe you were excited then and told me to send those online in the spur of the moment. Consider this well." I said, "Love, there is nothing to consider. I wasn't representing a religious party or something there; I went there to enjoy my festival, to declare my freedom." There is nothing left that I could be ashamed of anymore. We are still assimilating ourselves. If I am the vice president of the NGO, what does it have to do with the restriction of my freedom? This is what I believe. If they tell me that my thoughts or nudity doesn't suit them, what could I do? I want to be free. I have pushed my mother, father, brother, all family away so that I could have a world of my own. I mean, we did this, it isn't only me. As all transvestites, we said "This is how we will live, for our freedom." I have challenged the world, the government; I want to be a woman, I am a woman, this is what I am. This is how I want to live. They do anything to oppress us. They beat us up, they chase us, they swear at us, they kick us out of our houses. The government tortures us to the best of its ability. In response, we say "This is what I am." This is how it

should be.

May I ask a question about your private life? Have you ever been subjected to violence by a boyfriend so far?

No. I only had two boyfriends anyway. Each of these relationships lasted about 1-2 years. He had a male appearance. We weren't familiar with violence at all. I wasn't even aware of that what I was doing was homosexuality. I was feeling pleasure. There was a pleasure in our intercourse with each other. I didn't know anything about homosexuals, transvestites or gays... I came to realize these when I was 18-19 years old. I started the life fast after I became 20 years old. I was very timid. For instance, I used to go to Atatürk Park. We didn't have a mobile phone or something back then. I would go and sit by myself. I would feel relieved if someone from my group, for instance if Yağmur Mother or any other friend came. I used to feel intimidated if someone sat with me. I started the life early. I have a dominant personality. I have never been harmed by any of my men. The latest relationship I had was a boyfriend I lived together in Adana. He was a scum but he never beat me up. But, he took half of my home from me. This is the only harm I suffered from a boyfriend. The man I am living with now is from Ankara. He comes from a rich family, and they are two siblings. They are financially very well. He hasn't inflicted any damage on me in any aspect. You can ask it to all of the trans people in Mersin, I have been in a very

nice relationship that could be envied, for 4 years.

What do you think of the relationships of queers?

Most of the queers have very tough and bad relationships.

Why is that so?

Well, this is my opinion but, the reason is the loss of affection from their parents. There is no brother or parent to love. A foreign man tells you that he loves you. You are happy in bed as well. When you get out with friends, you introduce him as your husband. Let me give an example from myself. The man I live together with is a well-known person. I mean, he is a shop keeper. But he can come to have fun or have a picnic with me, together with 20-30 queers for the last 4 years. This makes me proud as a queer. I mean, we are all proud. Loss of affection from parents makes you give your soul to a man who tells you that he loves you. In fact, nothing changes. You only do it in return for payment from someone else. For instance, sometimes when you go to koli, you sleep with more handsome, sexier, richer men. So what about your husband? The essence is, having a husband when you come home. When you need him, there is someone to come with you. For instance, my husband calls me to learn how I am doing. In fact, we both know what I am doing. This is how it goes for the last 4 years. I mean, I am happy.

That's good.

The absence of your parents, the oppression from the environment, loneliness and a man telling you that he loves you... When you bring it all together, there is your husband. I mean, what will happen in the end? Disappointment. I had 7 or 6 relationships. When I reminisce about what I have given to those six men... One of them was very poor. He found a German girl when I was in prison, and he became rich now. He is in Germany. I don't need anything. There is a life we have shared for five years. He took care of my family, me... For five years, from top to toe. We lived just like a husband and wife. I wasn't prostituting myself back then. My uncle had workplaces here. I was very rich, I mean, I was going well. It was because of my uncle, not my immediate family. I used to manage my uncle's business when he was abroad; he was in Netherlands. I never cheated on him with another man for five years. He was my husband. Because, I loved him. He was handsome. I didn't feel the need to cheat on him. I mean, even he doesn't wonder where I am and how I am doing now. It is very easy to find me. My brother has been living in that area for years. He could have asked him without actually seeing me. But no. You are left alone with yourself, eventually. There is no father or mother. Out of desperation, you have a husband. But eventually, he will be gone as well. I always say, except for those who save their money and do something

about it, the end of all of us as queers will be diminishing at a corner.

Do you trust in politicians?

I don't trust any of them.

Why not? LGBT groups associated with certain political parties have recently emerged... What do you think of them?

I am always strictly pro-Atatürk and nationalist, in addition to being slightly religious. I mean, belief is subjective but... A trans friend of mine became a member of their council. She was to be elected as a parliamentary member if she received 15 thousand votes. She said, "Sister, cast your vote to HDP for me." A party that I would never opt for. And I said, "Maybe it will be good for my friend, one vote still counts," and cast my vote to HDP in the municipality elections. I don't regret it anyway. After the election, Sırrı Süreyya Önder made a speech addressing the prostitutes. He referred as "Those women". How could I trust him? As you know, the closest party to LGBT is HDP; but I don't trust them after their words about prostitutes. I went to a general assembly of HDP; I saw that everyone from PKK was there. I was afraid. Then, I saw that LGBTQ banner within the huge stadium. I said, "Hey, we are represented, too." I felt happy then. I saw them different. I felt that HDP had a closer stance to us; but they suit themselves based on the situation; they can refer to "those women." I mean,

I don't know. We held a meeting at the lawyer's club here. CHP youth branch president was also there. We said that we received an appointment for the municipality elections, and told our problems about MHP and other stuff. Eđitim-Sen union was going to come to that meeting as well. Well, that meeting was for the first year anniversary of Gezi resistance. We decided to act together as a few NGOs. So, we explained the situation about LGBT individuals. The man said to us, "We may have fallen behind as CHP, but I am very pleased to meet you today. Let's discuss in greater detail after the meeting in Eđitim-Sen is over." He didn't even come to the meeting in Eđitim-Sen. I don't have anything to say about MHP either. AKP, not possible. Because, they ignore you in every enactment anyway. However, HDP cannot prove its sincerity either.

This interview is generally about the violence against trans sex workers... Do you think that the NGOs which carry out activities regarding LGBT rights can put sufficient effort for putting an end to violence?

I will say something even if Kaos GL hears about it or gets angry. When A Team lynched me, they visited me from Kaos GL. I was in some Ankara Research Hospital. The impact from the car made my testicles swollen like a balloon. We were using ice for that. I was covered in platinum, my legs were cut deep. Kaod GL arrived. I said, "OK, my life is saved now." And excuse my language, they took even the photos of my asshole. I

never saw Kaos GL again. Do you know how I was discharged from the hospital? I called my brother, asked him to issue a green card for me. Because, I was being held at the hospital. The physician-in-chief told me, “You have to pay that money, even if 10 years pass.” How could I pay? 10 thousand TL was too much then. So I told my brother, may god bless him. He put up a fight for that. At first they didn’t approve my green card. Then, I took photos of my every area and sent them to my brother. He brought those photos to the green card office. Thanks to my brother, I could get out from that hospital only after they photocopied that green card. I mean, when I suffered that injury in 2005 and 2006, neither Kaos GL nor Pembe Hayat helped me. There was Pembe Hayat and there was İnsanca Yaşamı Destekleme Derneği... None of them helped me. I am affiliated to an NGO now as well. I am in Mersin LGBT 7 renk. I am the vice president there. I believe that we haven’t been able to teach anything yet. I believe that – don’t take me in the wrong way, I am also a member of an NGO and this is my opinion as the vice president – we cannot do enough. Because, the activities of NGOs are steering to a different destination now, as I have seen. I saw NGOs that don’t do anything at all. If it weren’t like that, we could use the power vested to us by the government and we could prevent something from the beginning instead of mourning behind them. For instance, Red umbrella, Pembe Hayat, Siyah Pembe Üçgen, Mersin 7 Renk, Hebûn LGBT...If we united, we could

do something. Not necessarily as only trans women. For sure, include trans people as well. In fact, a major activity focusing on us sex workers is possible. If we came together as NGOs and took one step forward, that would trigger others, and we could be capable of achieving even more. But there isn't such a thing at all.

In your opinion, what kind of a legislation, a law needed in order to put an end to this violence? How should girls work?

I don't think we could do it like in the Europe but, as we have heard from those who went to Europe, there are certain streets and bars for prostitutes or trans sex workers. This could be a turning point.

Like safe working conditions?

Like safe working conditions For instance, if these locations were, say, in the district near Carrefour, and if they were safe... Or, as I have already mentioned, in Europe, there are zones specifically allocated even for selling substances such as marijuana or heroin. Because those men are aware of the existence of those things. They are also aware that banning them will not put an end. So, someone will eventually sell it in a dark alley no matter how you beat them up or punish them. I don't approve substances like heroin, I am not a user but these are the realities in the life. These damned substances do exist. There is no escape from this. Heroin is being re-

placed with bonsai now. So, it is obvious that you shouldn't escape from such realities of the world. I mean, yes this is a requirement in my opinion, if those renowned European countries say "Yes, these exist."

For instance, there are brothels in Turkey.

There are brothels. They cannot simply make us go away, neither today nor tomorrow. And, the solution for this is quite easy. They will allocate a certain district. For instance, say, there are a total of 15 working transvestites in Mersin. You assign them to a certain district that will be safe, and the taxes are paid for that as well. We aren't harmful, but certain people from the government – who stay on our side for a while only to say later that we are harmful – will be saved, so will we.

What would you ask from the government for your life?

If I was entitled to one wish, what would I want? A free life. Like a normal person; I mean, like my mother, father, brother, neighbor... To be able to go to a hospital, a restaurant or a dinner; to be able to get on a car without anyone exclaiming "Ohh a trans is here, a faggot is here!" If women are able to go to the mosque to pray and if this aligns with my beliefs, I would like to be able to go to the mosque for praying. I mean, I would like to have a free life. I would like them to know that I am a human being as well. Because, I was born from a

mother as well. To whom has the god granted the power to assert that we cannot do certain things, to say that we are blasphemers, faggots, transvestites? Who has granted you the right to interfere with my private life and my sexual identity? You cannot be a transvestite. Why cannot I? Then, why did you become the prime minister? Why did you become a parliamentary member? I was born in 9 months and 10 days as well. I was born from a father and a mother as well. I have a sibling, too. I eat food like you. You eat at luxurious restaurants, I eat at another restaurant. But still, it is a restaurant. What is the difference between us? If it is a crime for me to use my own body as I want, then it is a crime for you to use yours as well. If I had one wish, I would like to have a free life. I guess all trans individuals would want that.

[LONGING]

“Then they took us to the prison. The violence in the prison was like no other. I mean, being trans already leads to a prejudice, which is multiplied in a prison environment. Well, we were arrested and placed into the prison. We were subjected to certain acts of violence there. There was a confidentiality decision for the lawsuit. The situation was so serious that, we were charged with Ergenekon and everything. That is when I became frightened from the government.”

ANKARA

Can you talk about yourself?

I live in Ankara. I was a sex worker for a long time, I have quit it for the last four years. In general, I am not satisfied with my life.

Why aren't you satisfied?

Why am I not satisfied? I have a relationship now. I haven't been a sex worker for 4 years due to certain incidents that occurred to me. I am comfortable in regard to having no other men in my home. I am in a relationship, which isn't approved by people around me. I always face obstacles. My family doesn't approve because they believe that he is with me for my money and he is using me; he stays at my place and uses my car. He eats meals and takes a bath in my place. I mean, OK, these are usual things. But they cannot accept this. They say that they cannot share me. They fear from anything that could happen, as we witnessed so many bad incidents around us... Briefly, I am not satisfied. Even if I seem to have higher financial standards as compared to my other friends, I cannot still have my standards from a few years ago. Sometimes I want to turn down everything and live the life I want by means of being a sex worker. But, I am afraid this time. Because, after having experienced bad incidents including being stabbed and imprisoned, I am afraid a third incident will draw me apart from this life and my beloved ones. I don't

do it as I have too many things to lose. I am trying to content myself. This is how it goes. But, in essence, I am not pleased with life. Because, I cannot do anything that I want. I mean, I have a lover but I want to do certain activities, but I can't. I mean, his social circle, my social circle... I cannot do what I want.

What kind of a life would you like to live? I see that you aren't pleased with your life because of these reasons, but what would you wish?

I wish there was no prejudice at all towards me, my life or relationship. I would very much like to visit my family with my boyfriend. I would love to not being compelled to sent my boyfriend from home whenever my family is coming to visit me. They already know it; I have heard it even from our children... But, why is it so hard to accept it? I don't know or understand this. Then, I would like my boyfriend... He has his own wide social circle. Sometimes I check is accounts on social media, but I am always one step behind. I wish these didn't exist; these prejudices. As an example, I wish I could believe that there would be no gossip when I enter somewhere with my boyfriend. I would be even OK with not witnessing or feeling it. I mean, these are what I currently want.

Financially speaking, would you like to be working in another job now?

After being released from the prison, I really wanted this... I have made up my mind now. Because, if I was able to survive and stand tall in the prison conditions, I thought that I could succeed in the outside world, too. Because, I was receiving salary from my father as well. I mean, I have my own home and have a satisfactory income. I wanted to get into a job. I mean, the salary could be 1000 or 1500 TL, or even the minimum wage. I wanted to say “I have a job now” whenever someone asked about it. I used to be a sex worker until 4 years ago, but my financial status is better now. But achieving nothing while being content with the available money didn't feel like something to be proud. For sure, I would love to work. I wanted it and I let my boyfriend know about it as well. I told it to my family, too. I told them so as to ask for their help. Yet you cannot help me, why? Because of my sexual identity. If I were a normal woman, the worst case scenario for me would be a part-time child care job with a salary of 500-600 TL. But, the payment for child sitting services to working women in the neighborhood of my family is even higher. But damn my sexual identity, appearance are always an obstacle before me even if I want to work with my own money. Whenever I came up with an idea, they told me that I could earn money on the condition that I don't make myself too prominent. Why

should I stay in the background if I open a shop? Should I only go to my own workplace to collect money? I mean, I have really wanted it and I still want to work. Sometimes we even have arguments on this issue with my boyfriend. Maybe this is an unnecessary argument as he has nothing to do as well. But I am presenting my wished to people. Because, I don't want anybody to question why I am not working. I want to work but what can I do? I am already 36-37 years old, what can I do at this age? I have already gone beyond that age limit.

How are you getting along with your friends? Are you comfortable? Are you satisfied with your social circle?

Each and every one of my friends started to identify themselves with something. It has come to a point that I can no longer recognize my friends, so I joined them in this trend, too. Everyone is exchanging affectionate words and flattering each other on the social media. It is how it is. I currently see a few friends, who are sufficient for me. As I am no longer a sex worker, I don't run into most of them anymore. I just meet them when I visit a friend. I was also eliminated from the social circle as I don't frequent to their hairdressers and places like that, since I am not working. I believe, I mean I want to believe that my current friends are good.

By whom have you been subjected to violence so far?

By my clients. Even if it wasn't physical, I was also subjected to violence by my neighbors as well.

For instance?

Psychologically. I have been living in the same house for a long time. I am not a sex worker now. But I wasn't very active in that respect in the past either. But still, I face reactions whenever a friend visits my home. I have been living in this building, and I had several guests. There is an apartment with which I am experiencing problems. Besides, I have other trans friends as well. After they have tolerated me, they started to develop prejudice against my friends. It disturbs me to see someone staring from the window while I am entering into the building. In fact, I am not their sole target; all of the residents of the building face the same thing. As these problematic neighbors are living on the ground floor, they are always staring at outside and waiting for an opportunity to intervene.

Is this a decent neighborhood?

They say so.

It seems so.

It is, in general. We didn't have any problems with any other

residents of the street. Even in our most problematic periods, they didn't say anything even if they wanted to. Only those neighbors that I have mentioned give us trouble... So this is how we are being subjected to violence.

You have mentioned your clients. So I am guessing you didn't have problems with your family in respect to physical violence?

Yes, I haven't been subjected to physical violence by my family. But I always give examples, after I left home for good, we didn't stay in touch with my mother for 4-5 years. She had great dreams for me as she used to say until the very day I left. My father is more understanding as he has graduated from the university, so he can see the bigger picture. But my mother didn't have those standards. This was the violence I was subjected by my mother. I used to have a car back then, I would secretly pass through our street to look at my mother doing the cleaning. I used to think we were connecting in that way without being revealed. I used to wear a hat or take a boyfriend with me. This was the violence I was subjected to.

Were you working at home when you were a sex worker?

Yes, I was working at home.

Have you ever gone wheeling?

I went wheeling and I also worked at night club. After having maintained a standard, I didn't feel the need to get outside so I worked at home through online escort sites. After working there for about one month, I received an injury due to a stabbing incident. Then I quit that too. Then, I came to realize that I had too many things to lose, my health being in the first place. I experienced that hospital process. The process after the stabbing was even more dangerous than the incident itself. Or, not dangerous but far worse. I couldn't look in the face of my family. I was a sex worker all through those times that I supported them. I felt like I was caught while committing a crime. I also felt ashamed.

Actually, this is very normal.

Yes, that is correct...

Were you wheeling when you were stabbed for 14 times?

So, I was working at home and the client was an incall. It was about 7.30-8.00 p.m. on 8th February, Tuesday. I had worked the entire day and he was the last client of 5-6 clients. I didn't expect to live such an unfortunate incident. My home is guarded by the security as well as surveillance equipment. I had such a trouble in a residence where you have to give your ID card in order to enter inside. There was no problem at all in

respect to my neighborhood yet the environment wouldn't allow me to work by making a scene either. I was trying to work quietly. I had started a new life and I was determined to decrease the sex work so as to find more time for myself. Therefore, I opted for that home to live. Let me tell the incident briefly. We had intercourse and nothing negative happened. It lasted about 10-15 minutes, then he put on his clothes and shoes. Then, all of a sudden, he started attacking at me. I had turned my back to him then, I was going to give him a wet towel so that he could wipe his face. My clients in general had a certain attitude towards me... They used to think that I was doing financially really good since I was living in a home like that and I had plasma TV when it was yet a technologic innovation. I immediately told him, "You can take whatever you want from the home." Because I was feeling such a deep pain at that moment that it was nowhere near what I previously experienced from the police. I was beaten and I was subjected to violence before, but I had never experienced the fear of death. Because he was suffocating me and resorting to violence at the same time. He tried to communicate with me, then he dragged me until the bathroom. There was no window at the bathroom, it had just a vent hole. It turns out that the security guards of the building was already alarmed by someone, yet they couldn't understand from which apartment the voices were coming from. One of the guards started to search from the top floor while the other one started from

the ground floor. Then, while I was in the bathroom, he stole my daily earning. I was very afraid and didn't want to leave the bathroom, instead, I was trying to lock its door. But I was subjected to such a severe violence that I couldn't gather the strength to even lock it. I had a laundry cabinet. I tried to knock it over behind the door, but I couldn't even do that. Well, he came back with a knife again and started stabbing me. Although I had been subjected to violence several times until that say, none of them included an offensive weapon such a knife. I didn't feel any pain at all. Was it the feeling of shock? I am serious, I just found myself watching. As if I was being elevated from my place and watching what was happening below. I remember that moment so clearly that I will never forget it. Even though I feel sad about it, I always tell it again and again to my friends when the topic is started. Then he stabbed me, and tried to strangle me once again. While he was stabbing me, my biggest fear was to receive an injury from the face. The toilet bowl didn't have a pedestal; it was mounted on the wall. So I hid my face under it. While my head was hidden under the toilet bowl and my entire body was outside, I was stabbed 13 times from my back, body and neck. Then, all of it ended He said, "I am going to call an ambulance for you." I was shocked. I cannot remember if my mobile phone was in my hand, but I only recall him saying that he was going to call an ambulance. My mother was going to visit me the following day. I had recently bought that

home and I was even keeping minced meat for mother in my fridge. When I came to my senses, I couldn't stand up. The small bathroom was filled with blood. Both the home and me were unrecognizable. There was blood everywhere as if an animal was slaughtered. At that moment, I deeply wanted to call my mother and say, "I am staying over with a friend today so let's cancel tomorrow. Please come another day." Because, my biggest fear was receiving a call from my parents during the sex work and being outed. I had always been desperately afraid of the possibility of calling my mother one day and saying, "Mom, something terrible happened to me." My fears came true. I lived it all. In fact, it all lasted 6-7 minutes – being stabbed and his escape. He left the outside door open, so my neighbors came in. I had a neighbor who had medical training. He immediately pressed my wounds with sheets. Then the police and an ambulance came. My then boyfriend came and he was immediately detained as a suspect. Then, they took me to the hospital. The last thing I remember is being in the ambulance. My family came to the hospital. When I woke up, I remember hearing them cry. My girlfriends learned and came. That was the incident. Then, due to the stabbing, I had a permanent problem of numbing in my hand after that. Then, I received physiotherapy and psychological therapy but I couldn't leave it behind. I haven't recovered yet. I try not to turn my back to people. Even if I am watching TV in my own home, I should make sure that there is only the wall behind

me. That fear continues. I lived this and I was thinking that I recovered, but I couldn't. Even now I have goose bumps while talking. The person was convicted. He defended himself that I allegedly told him that his penis was so small that he wasn't capable of satisfying me. As if I had called him over for satisfaction. If it wasn't for the money... I have to have intercourse even if it's 5 cm or 20 cm. Because I get paid for that, what could I say? His defense was like this and he was convicted.

Do you know if he has received a reduced sentence??

For example, I couldn't prove the robbery. Why? Because they said, if the man had committed a robbery, he would have taken my wallet and my laptop on the table as well. I had a near death experience and was stabbed 14 times. The man maybe didn't see those on the table, but I couldn't prove it. He was sentenced due to very silly reasons such as causing disorder in a residence. He even attempted to have a settlement with me during his detainment. He offered me money so that I withdraw my complaint. He also had reduced sentence after being imprisoned. He was already released when I was in the prison for a different matter. Then, I came across him at a mall. He had his fiancée or girlfriend with him. I was with my sister. I immediately called my boyfriend and entered into a clothing store. I wasn't able to get out. Was he going to do anything to me? No. He didn't realize me but I recognized him. He was tall and had an outstanding appearance. I said to my

sister, “I cannot look behind. Check him out to see if it is really him.” She confirmed me. My sister remembered his picture from the social media sites during the lawsuit. I always live the fear everywhere.

Why do you think he attacked? Was it because of hatred, have you ever thought about that?

I asked this to him at the court. I wanted to hear things like, “I had come to you one year before that, and you didn’t give enough attention to me,” or another reason like that. I also said to the judge, “If he gives me a reason from the past or something, I won’t complain and understand I have deserved it.” Maybe during my silly times, I had deserved it. But now I am more mature and I don’t believe that I deserved it. Now, it makes no sense when I think about it. If you take something from a man, you should give something in return. If you have agreed for 10 TL, you shouldn’t insist for 20 TL. Even today, when I buy something, I don’t want to pay anything other than the price. I even ask for a discount. He couldn’t answer me. I wanted to learn if I had previously done something to him. He couldn’t answer as there was no reason. When I think back about that day, I don’t remember having any problem with any of my clients. If I had had a problem with any one of them, maybe that client would have hired another person to resort to violence against me. I mean, there was no reason at all. As I heard from people around me, he completed his

military duty in the eastern region and he became mentally unbalanced. He lost his parents. He had an uncle who was a retired policeman, we were continuously in contact with him during the lawsuit process. He tried to influence me by making me talk to his old grandfather who said “Forgive him, my girl.” But I didn’t give up and he was sentenced. Was I satisfied? No.

What about this freaking process called military spying? Isn’t this the reason you were included in the file in the first place? But you learned about this when you were detained, didn’t you? What did you live? How was the process?

The day before that day, I had a minor trouble with my youngest sibling. Then I came home and went to bed. My doorbell rang at about 5.30-6.00. I thought it was my brother as he works at the night shift at a hospital that is close to my home. When I checked through the door viewer, I was three people, including one woman. Then I opened the door and they showed me their search warrant. Then they roughly searched my home as if they were searching for a person instead of an item. Then, they started a detailed search. When I asked, they said, “Files have been charged against you for human trafficking. You have to give your statement, come to the police station with us.” I was so shocked that I didn’t know what to do while I was changing. The charges against me didn’t have anything to do with my life. If it were or prostitution or

something, I would have felt more comfortable as at least I knew my mistake. I took off my clothes and wore them back again, imagine my shock. The woman said, "You were going to change your underwear, but you wore the same thing back again." Then, I went to the police station and I was placed in the same place with a few escorts. I knew a trans among them, it made me feel easier to see her. Because, I was thinking that it couldn't have been the same charges pressed against her and me. She had her own life while I was living a more extreme life. After 8-9 hours, they took us to the hospital. They said to us, "A lawsuit has been initiated in Izmir and your statements will be received in this regard. You may have to stay in Izmir for 4 days, so let your families know." I guess the process for the organization was 4 days. We went to Izmir by bus. Then, trans people and escorts from all over Turkey were gathered and charged in connection with this lawsuit. When we were giving our statements, they were asking us, "Do you know this name? What about this?" They were referring to a third lieutenant and a pasha. All of them were high rank officers, I cannot even remember their ranks now. "Do you know them?" "We don't know." Then we were taken to court. Some of the defendants were detained while pending trial whereas others were not. I was among the detainees.

Were you informed at all during this process? Did they only mention the file?

There was no detailed information. It was as if they had recorded the men I was working with during sex work, since I had regular clients. You inevitably remember their name or maybe phone number. They asked if I knew people, I didn't. They didn't inform us at all. It was as if someone had committed a crime and they were trying to commit that. Those who declared that they knew those names were released while pending trial while we were detained. The violence in the prison was like no other. I mean, being trans already leads to a prejudice, which is multiplied in a prison environment. Well, we were arrested and placed into the prison. We were subjected to certain acts of violence there. There was a confidentiality decision for the lawsuit. The situation was so serious that, we were charged with Ergenekon and everything. That is when I became frightened from the government. While I was in my own bed, I was taken from my home. I was charged with spying like sharing, disclosing and spreading confidential information and documentation of the government. I was charged with crimes that have nothing to do with my life. I was imprisoned without any evidence or physical surveillance about me. Then, out court process began. They allocated a special court hall for us. It wasn't inside the courthouse, rather, it was some place like a conference

hall. It was widely reflected on the media. Then the other defendants came. We developed a relationship with the other escorts during our time in the prison. You are together under the same roof for 24 hours. So, we started to say, "Should we be proud of ourselves for being involved in this lawsuit?" Because, the lawsuit had historical importance, as it was reported by our lawyers. Or should we be ashamed? When we were listening to the lives of those pashas, commanders and their soldiers, we started to understand the subject. We were inside a conspiracy to defame the soldiers. But when we turned back to ourselves, you cannot defame anyone by using us. There were so absurd statements during that lawsuit. During the lawsuit process, we continuously believed that there was something wrong and we were going to be released. They hired a special speaker from TRT to read the bill of indictment, which was about 2500-3000 pages as far as I can remember. It lasted 2 months just to read the bill of indictment. The trial used to start at 9 o'clock in the morning and continue until 17.00. But, they used to take us from the prison at 4 a.m. in the morning so that they could make a body search on us until 5. We used to wait at the door until 6 and we used to wait for the soldiers to arrive until 7... We were subjected to every kind of violence possible. Let me tell you something briefly. When we first arrived in the prison as 22 escorts with trans people in the adjoining wings, we started to talk to each other in order to learn if any news had arrived. Each visiting

family would bring along news. We were collection information from newspapers. As we are trans people, the tones of our voices were different from the women. Inmates in the adjoining wing suspected whether we were admitting men into our wing like the male prison staff.

Did the inmates in the adjoining wing say, “These are escorts, I can expect them to admit men”?

Those women were imprisoned due to burglary, homicide or prostitution; so they could hide their charges. But it was very obvious that we 22 escorts were imprisoned as traitors of the military spying lawsuit in Izmir. Us being whores multiplied that influence. Then, they called me with –I don’t want to give her name- another friend. They told us that we were going to the infirmary, and that they didn’t know the reason. When you are getting out from the wing, they give you a full body search for 10 minutes. You are in contact with nobody in the prison, but I don’t know why they were suspicious. You are subjected to violence each time. I mean, if you leave the wing for five times in one day, you are subjected to violence each time. They took us to the doctor. “We will give you an examination.” What examination? “Have you undergone the operation, or not?” Our ID cards are pink. They checked us during admission to the prison. “They filed complaint from other wings.” We took of our clothes and the doctor checked us with hands. They said, “OK.” What is OK? What have I done,

did they see me touching anyone? Did they see me under or on anyone? Why are we being accused? They said, "OK, you are free to go back to your wing." I had already said when we were being brought to the prison, "I guess we won't be able to leave and we will die here." The violence continued there. Until we could make ourselves accepted, months passed by. I wouldn't wish it for my enemy, but eventually you get used to the prison conditions, rules and system. Then we started to attend to various courses. We expressed ourselves better to other inmates. "Look, you are accusing us with these but we are innocent." There are many innocent people inside, so they understand you. If we had been guilty, we would have received the sentence with an easier state of mind. But we weren't guilty and to crown it all, the people around us didn't trust us and made gossips about us. Thereafter, we attended to the courses. We had the chance to express ourselves better to those guardians. In fact, the prejudice didn't cease as everyone in the prison is guilty until the trial ends or you are released. So, they used to behave us like we were guilty.

You are stigmatized.

Certainly.

It took 22 months, right?

22 months.

Why were you released then, what was the justification?

The trial is still ongoing. I spoke to my lawyer 3 days ago. He repeated what he had said on the first day: "We are expecting a verdict for acquitting. Because there is no evidence at all for the charges against you." We are waiting to be acquitted, but we don't know why we were taken in the first place, either. Why did they choose me?

I was going to add the same thing. Why you? Do you think it was random?

They selected us. They selected from the online escort sites. In fact, this trick has been elaborated so good...

There are tens of thousands of escorts in this country.

No, this trick has been elaborated really good. The soldiers were the target. How can we defame them? It was a really good trick, very detailed organization. But the persons weren't actual persons. I guess that was because of being unable to reach the actual persons.

Do you believe that there is any truth to it?

They claim so. Because, foreign names were read out in our bill of indictment. Russian names. It made more sense to me, as particularly soldiers have a soft spot for Russian women as we have heard from others. They looked at a website and

showed the owner of that website as the leader of our organization affiliated to a greater organization. For instance, we are featured on the website of someone called Ahmet. Ahmet is using us; our ads, names and phone numbers are on that website. If our sex worker friends don't go to clubs or streets for work, they usually find clients from these types of trans and escort websites anyway. So they imprisoned this man as the leader of the organization, while the members were imprisoned as his employees. The man finds us a client, for instance, pasha whatshisname. We have intercourse with the man and don't receive payment despite of being a sex worker. In return, he gives me a confidential state document. Those so-called confidential documents are already available online, so I don't know about the confidentiality either. For example, the map of some place or an engine certificate for an aircraft, etc.

There were transsexuals and escort women. What about transvestites?

Yes, there were transvestites as well. Later on, we stayed in another prison with those transvestites; but we stayed in different sections.

So they claimed that there was a prostitution gang that tricked pashas. That prostitution gang was allegedly selling the national heavy arms manufacture data of Turkey to Russia.

So, they tried to involve this case in Ergenekon. There was an attack at a particular location in the eastern region. They accused us of making the plans for it. This was the reason for this incident and our profiling, which was, strangely, done at the same time on the same date for everyone. This situation is not possible in the first place.

Are any of the girls currently detained?

No, they all were released.

Have all of the defendants been released, or is there anyone who is being detained for pending trial?

As far as I know, all defendants have been released.

[COLOUR]

“But I see that gangs are being formed now. They are competing with each other so at to earn from CDs. The spots have been claimed to this end.”

İSTANBUL

Can you talk about yourself?

I live in Istanbul. I was born in Malatya, Akçadağ. I am a sex worker.

When have you first started as a sex worker

It has been a long time. It was 22-23 years ago. I was in a difficult situation.

How did you begin?

I was abroad, I had gone abroad without registration and I was captured due to counterfeit visa. I was imprisoned for one month in Austria. Then, I was deported. I was desperate when I returned to Turkey. I had to work. I started as a sex worker.

When was that?

It was early 90s, the year when the Gulf Crisis occurred.

How has been your life since first starting as a sex worker?

I believe that words fall short to express this, but I have to, I can say that it is “very difficult” and “a very difficult process.”

Because of being trans...

For sure, because of being a trans and a sex worker. I personally experienced the difficulties a trans individual faces in an

Islamic society. I lived everything from being sworn at and beaten up to being stabbed and shot.

Has it become easier to be a trans nowadays as compared to 80s, 90s and early 2000s?

There is a huge difference. When I was deported and came to Turkey, I only had a small ring on my finger. I covered my make up and hairdresser cost by selling the ring to a hairdresser in Tarlabası. I had spent my last money for shoes, a skirt and a sweater. And, I went out with – let me say it with a little bit of humor – a forest of hair on my legs. The day I first went out to work, I fell into a shit hole because of a huge stone thrown at me from a municipality bus. I will never forget that day as it was a beginning for me and I am still swimming in that shit hole.

So, is being a trans easier or more difficult now?

Being a trans is much easier now, as we and our previous generation prepared a very good infrastructure. I mean, they put up a fight. They were beaten and humiliated at the police station; and they were shoved by the society and social pressure. But now people think “These are human beings, they also have lives and a mother.” They have just started to recognize that we weren’t born from a tree hole. And the new generation takes good advantage of this; whoever puts on a wig is calling themselves a woman. The terminology has

changed as well. They used to call it transvestite in the past, yet now it has become CD, MP3, DVD while I haven't heard of these (laughs). We lived these difficulties. We used to stay at a police station for 3-4 days when they took us. But now they enter from the front door and leave through the back door. The police has the authorization to keep them there for a few hours. If your criminal record check is clear too, you can leave. It wasn't like that in the past. I mean, we lived it all and provided the current infrastructure. My generation deeply respects the previous generation. But we are in a situation that we will even be thankful if we aren't humiliated by the new generation. This is how it is now. But we still encounter difficulties now with the law enforcement forces. I guess they deserve it due to their homophobic allegations. Because, we experienced so many things that we didn't deserve, but even we didn't take those homophobic attacks seriously. Because, they used to bang a nail into your head, and cut you into so many pieces that even the body wasn't found. It was different in the past, they used to crush our heads with stone. But now whenever someone says something like "faggot", they go like "I am the victim of homophobic violence," blah blah... So this is my comparison.

What did you experience abroad?

It was difficult. I shared this experience with another friend who was collecting the thoughts of trans individuals as well.

It was my transformation process. I mean, I was receiving hormones and my breasts had grown, but I still had beard on my face. It was a difficult experience for me during my transformation process; but it was also something that I had to live. I lived it, and now it is over. But am I grateful for this experience? Yes. I learned the truths of life in respect to family during that period. And when I came back, I became a sex worker because I had to be. Why? Because I already understood that there is no such thing called family. I already understood that a friend or a sibling is no use to you when you are in prison. And I had to become a sex worker, I had to work and stand on my feet. I had graduated from two universities, but I was unable to find a job. I graduated from Akçadağ Teacher's School Department of Science and Literature, and Kemer Tourism and Hotel Management in Antalya at the same time. And now, I am a sex worker in Istanbul. Could I express myself good?

Are you satisfied with your current life?

Yes, very much! If I was born again, I would like to be a homosexual again. I will be happy if you can let the relevant authorities know it (laughs).

How is your relationship with your family?

Beyond perfect! People cannot express it here, so I want to tell this in particular. If you will compile a book or article from

these interviews, or if you will somehow make these public, this is what I will emphasize: From the moment when a trans, gay, lesbian, bisexual individual's family learn the truth, that individual has to have money in order to earn their love back. It is so upsetting that – I must underline these words – you can even buy the love of your family with money. They love and accept you if you have money; otherwise, they don't care about you. This is $2 + 2 = 4$. No matter how you struggle, nobody can offer an alternative to this.

So, your relationship with your family aligns with this understanding, doesn't it?

I love them terribly; I cannot breathe without them. I see them everyday. I cover all of their expenses but I do this intentionally. Why? I need their love. They need my money. I give them money, they give me love.

Does your social circle exclusively consist of queers?

No they are from every walk of life. I cannot live without queers but I also have other people. They are irreplaceable as well. I have never classified my social circle.

Do you think that there is justice in this country?

No, there is no justice.

Why?

When I speak of certain things, I burst into tears. I won't be able to speak. I have had enough of this. Please skip this question.

OK. What do you think of the government's attitude towards prostitution?

It is right.

In which manner?

It is right, dear. It is right and wrong in different aspects. You have to hand it to them. You just asked the difference between the current generation and older generation. This generation made the market cheaper. Besides, the internet has started to replace streets. We struggled on the roads, streets, under bushes. Just like they say that they struggled on the mountains. Now people sit at home, put on a wig, wear three layers of pantyhose over to disguise their hair and make their own market. They post pictures online to make advertisement. If you put my erect dick online, if you bend over and post my ass online, you are wrong.

Is it too much for the society?

It is too much for everyone. Maybe not for Europe. But we live in an Islamic society. How can this society tolerate this?

When I take a taxi, if that taxi driver overcharges me and makes it obvious, I should be willing to over pay. He cannot take it from me by force. But if you make it too obvious... If people humiliate you while you are walking on the street, you can put up your fight, I will give that to you. But if you post the photo of your ass online and then ask for respect, wait a minute. This is why I have started to wear a hijab; it has been 12 years now. Why? Because I respect myself. I respect the people in my social circle and my neighbors. I have to behave like this out of self respect. In fact, this is a protest against my life and friends, but people cannot understand it. Why? "Look at the queer, must be insane with that hijab!" No, if it is normal for you to open your ass, it is normal for me to close my head. This is as simple as that.

If the government recognized being sex worker as a profession and granted employment rights or at least offered safe working conditions... Would you like that to happen?

This is the underlying reason of our fight anyway. Safe sex work and having all of the social rights. What is the fight of us activists? Why do we fight? So that we can comfortably open our asses? No. We fight so that we can take our social security rights like humans. This fight doesn't exist so that CDs can post their asses and dicks online. They confuse these two topics with each other, but they should make a distinction. In fact, activists know this very well but they are no longer famil-

iar with the concept of respect, do you see what I am saying? This is our fight. For example, my current mission is reminding people their humanity and touching their conscience. I have taken this as a personal duty and I am pleased with it. I believe that we should consider the concept of respect.

Do you believe that there is violence among trans sex workers?

For sure. I observe this on my best friends. I am not clean as whistle; I had done it in the past too. When I used to work in Çekmece, I didn't want outsider queers to come to work there. Why? Because, people used to approach to and harm us thereafter. I mean, this was just evading damage rather than claiming a spot. But I see that gangs are being formed now. They are competing with each other so as to earn from CDs. The spots have been claimed to this end.

Is there an economical background for this violence?

For sure. The amount of money in this market is unbelievable. I hear and observe it from my close circle, and I also personally witness it. But you cannot do anything as both sides have accepted this as it is. You are CD, transvestite, candidate transvestite – this is how I see them now, like candidate candidate – you have to revolt against this. You shouldn't accept this. If you submit to this order, then you are wrong. Why are we putting up a fight anyway? We are struggling to make

our rights and life conditions better. There wasn't such things back in our time.

There wasn't this type of violence or organization of mafias and gangs, was there?

No, there was a mother-daughter relationship. They used to call each other like that back in our time. There is no such a concept now. Now it goes like your ass is beautiful, my boobs are beautiful and like that. Now it is different. I respect my mothers. I had two mothers. If it weren't for them, I wasn't here. Can you see what I am saying?

Various NGOs have been established particularly since last year in Turkey. Some of these are activists in specific areas while others are engaged in LGBT issues in general. Do you believe that they qualify as sufficient? Are there any aspects of them that you appreciate or criticize?

Let me ask something; am I an activist? I guess no, I am a volunteer. I am not an activist and I don't know what it means. Are people who search for rights and put up a fight called like that? I am an ambassador of heart. I am together with all of the NGOs. I don't know how many have been established so far. I see them on my page, there are several of them. I am trying to respond each one's requests regardless of where they are located in Turkey. Ankara, Istanbul, anywhere... For instance, there is an organization in Samsun now. I supported

them and reposted them on my wall. I had a conversation with the girls, too. This is wonderful, they must exist, for sure. But I am not involved in any of these. I am just with them.

So you don't have an organic bond?

No. I am with them as a supporter and volunteer but I am not within any organization. I was leading the rally of AK LGBT for "No to Drugs" the other day with my banner. I gathered my friends and went there, but there was nobody else other than me. I am a volunteer. It doesn't matter if this is AK LGBT , black or purple, I am there for them. Whoever is in trouble, I am there. I am ready to respond to the requests of all of them: Pembe Hayat, something like Caretta Caretta, also Istanbul LGBT, Kaos GL... No matter which of these make requests under any circumstances... I will be together with all of my friends as long as god grants me health. I specifically emphasize this each time. I don't have a political or ideological stance. I am just an ambassador of heart.

If you had one wish from the current government, what would you want for trans people?

I would want better working conditions, granting of social security and rights for all LGBT individuals, and I would want the LGBT individuals in difficult situation to be identified so that their life standards are enhanced. The good is already good, so what matters is the betterment of poor.

Let alone trans people, we see that in Turkey, everyone in the society is growing up with a culture of violence in which everyone resorts to violence against everyone. This could be psychological or sexual violence. Years may be required to eliminate this culture. What could be done? Do you have an opinion?

Everyone is saying the same thing: Education. It is not just related to education. I also know people who have graduated from three universities, but they haven't progressed any at all. But I know how my neighbors or people who have been grown up among animals and bake even their own bread in their village look at me. They embrace me as if I am their own child. University doesn't matter either. Being a human today is difficult and it stems from the training from your parents. So you must have it inside you. I don't think that it is related to school or education. We cannot take even one step forward since we unfortunately are wrong in this point. They all go like, "Education is a must." Why is that so? If I am inhumane, what good is it to graduate from two or five universities? So, the training you receive from your family is very important. Humanity is what matters the most.

Self improvement?

For sure, for sure.

Is there anything else you would like to say?

I want to repeat that I don't have any political or ideological point of stance. My motivation is humanity and conscience. I cannot repeat this enough: I am the ambassador of goodwill. Goodwill is what matters the most. I believe that we will be very happy if we are able to love each other. Because, I have been deeply hurt in this matter. So, I started to love everyone even more. This is why I try to love everyone more, so that they can perceive what love is. Can I express myself? I am not trying to spoil anyone from excessive love. I want them to understand love better. I cannot explain that feeling. We think too highly of people. I have had the same attitude towards everyone all my life. I think too highly of even my dog, let alone humans, you see? Believe me, I may face a very bad person and I overwhelm that person with my love. He may kill me with his malignancy but I kill him with my love. This is how I think. You have to love people more. People aren't bad, circumstances make them bad. Or it might be subjective: What is right for him might be bad for me. Therefore, I might have assumed that he is a bad person, unintentionally. This is relevant with what you consider true. For this reason, bad people are true to me as well. Because, you cannot know good people without bad ones.

Or there is a possibility to change.

Obviously. I have bad friends as well. I am grateful for having them, how else could I choose my good friends? I have no more to say.

[WAIL]

“Prostitution, when underground, is unhealthy and controlled by the mafia. This compels us to apply to pimps, which in turn makes our life more difficult – and while they are taking the benefit of it, I am working in unhealthy conditions. They ask me not to use condoms just to keep the client. When I refuse, they compare me to other girls that accept to stop using condoms. If I want to work in more healthy conditions, I starve.”

ESKİŞEHİR

Can you briefly talk about yourself?

I was born in Eskişehir. I have been born and raised here, and this is already the place I live, too. I am 28 years old. In fact, I am older – let me calculate ... (Laughs)³⁵. I had a koli last month. I told him that I was 28 years old. He asked me when I was born; and I said I was born in 1982. He said, “I guess you are naive.” The truth is even worse, I was born in '79. He thought I was younger.

When have you first started as a sex worker? And how did it happen? I mean, does it have a story?

I guess I was about 25 years old. The story is, I started after being fired. I was working at a factory.

What was your job?

I was a turner staff. Then they fired me. After being fired, I couldn't find any other job because of being a trans woman. Therefore, I had to become a sex worker.

So, how did you start? To whom did you go in the first place? I mean, you didn't know how to do it, did you? Did you get help from anyone?

I didn't get too much of a help, actually. I had trans and gay friends in Eskişehir, they helped me to some extent. I started by calling a client home from the internet.

Were you in contact with your family by then?

For sure. I have never lost contact with my family, I still see them.

So, when you were working, were you living on your own or were you with your family?

I was comfortable as I was at my own home when I started to work. I had lived with my mother for a while during my job at the factory, then I moved out to my own place. I was already expecting to be fired. After I was fired, I was compelled. When I looked around, I came to realize that nobody was obviously accept my applications. Therefore, I had somehow prepared myself to become a sex worker.

So, can you tell how you were fired? What did they say to you?

The factory – I don't want to mention its name – was a large workplace with a capacity of 300-350 employees. I had completed 5.5 years there when I got fired. I slowly started to receive hormones, which had already started to affect me. As I was living in my own place, I used to wear make up in the evenings, and clear it off before going to work in the mornings. I was thinking that I had removed all of my make up, but some remained on my face as I wasn't so good in using make up back then. It turns out that they told on me to the manager. Then, we talked with the manager. I cannot exactly remember now what I was saying, but I remember telling, "I have trans tendencies but I want to work." The next day, he said "We cannot tolerate this. What can we do if the police come to us?" I don't see how relevant that was. Why would the police disturb a working trans individual out of the blue? Do they see being trans as a crime? If someone employs a trans person in their factory, do the police come and say, "Why did you employ this faggot, we have to impose a fine on you now"? They gave me shitty reasons such as "We cannot tolerate it", and "What can we do if the police comes?" I was slightly familiar with the NGOs back then, so I had already let them know. So, as the factory couldn't risk themselves, they didn't justify it with my sexual identity. They gave the reason

as “There is no vacancy for this person in the new structure of work.” So, they took the blame on themselves. All of my severance pays were given. I guess it was an attempt to prevent a potential lawsuit in the future. So, the process was like this. I didn’t have any opportunity to work in another workplace after that anyway.

Did you try to work somewhere else? Or didn’t you want to try over?

I was receiving unemployment allowance for about 6 months to 1 year. The employment agency was continuously finding jobs for me.

The Employment Agency?

Yes, the employment agency. I had about 10-12 years of experience in a very lively sector. So, it was impossible for me to remain unemployed. So, the employment agency was continuously finding jobs for me. But whenever I went to a factory for the application, they were shocked and they were refusing me. As I got fed up with them, I started to send a friend instead of me. I was telling, “Go tell them that I don’t want to work and I only want the unemployment payment.” Whenever I entered in a male-dominant workplace, all of them were staring at me. I had already escaped from a similar environ-

ment, and I didn't want to return. It made me uncomfortable to be stared at like that. Then I told the employment agency to specify my tendency as a trans person, so that I could meet with only people who accepted me as I was. But they assumed that I was a normal – whatever that means- heterosexual man, and called me for interview. As soon as they saw me, they were refusing me. This created a psychological pressure on me. They answered, "There is no section on the document to specify that, so we cannot write it down." After seeing this reaction, I started to sent my gay friend instead of me. He was pretending to be me. A funny incident happened as well. I had told him to ask for too much salary to ensure that they wouldn't accept him. I also instructed him to specify certain work benches as a requirement for him to work. They accepted all of them. He eventually had to tell that he didn't want to work.

He didn't accept to work even though they said OK.

Yes but he couldn't accept it. He wasn't me anyway.

Yes.

If they saw me, they wouldn't have accepted me anyway. It is a male-dominated sector, too. If I could have worked with any of them, it would have been the company that I had worked

for 5.5 years in Eskişehir. It seemed like a decent place. The owners were from the class which seemed more intelligent, like elitists or something like that. But in fact, they weren't because they fired me the next day after I confessed this.

If you were able to continue your job, would you not consider to become a sex worker?

I wouldn't consider to be a sex worker, obviously. If I was now able to find a job other than the sex work... I mean, I don't do this for pleasure.

So, would you be OK with any job? Or would it have to be a job that you are capable of and satisfied with?

Well, we, in order to live...

Let me ask this in this way: Would you do cleaning work?

Actually, I would do that. What I am not OK with is: As you know, I have to live near the city center so as to live. I mean, I cannot live in the suburbs as they exclude me there. Well, living close to the city center is closely correlated with your financial status. I cannot for work minimum wage and live in an elite neighborhood. OK, certain people may live in the suburbs as it is cheaper. But they may make raids to my home in

suburbs. They don't accept me there anyway, so I cannot live there. I can only live in the city center, which requires money higher than the minimum wage. I have to make a living. On that condition, yes, I would work.

Other than your salary, would you still continue your job even if you didn't like it?

I guess no.

I am asking specifically in order to explain it. Because, they always reply from the financial aspect. But from my perspective, this also requires to love your work and to be free from pressure in the work environment.

Obviously. Don't take me in the wrong way, I don't think that being sex worker is a pleasant job. I see sex work as a profession and I respect those professionals. Maybe I cannot completely quit it, but I would periodically continue it if I could find another job. A union should be organized for this profession, so that work opportunities can be created for us. If I had an opportunity like that; I wouldn't think to work in another job. Eventually, this is a job, too. I have my own risks. People perceive it as easy money, but I work with a risk for my life. I am under continuous risk of being murdered. I tell people who see this as easy money, "If this is that much easy, why don't

you do it?" They blabber. So, it isn't that easy. I mean, earning this money isn't easy. Maybe I deserve this money more than the employees of other sectors. So, instead of an oppressive legislation, if the government started to implement a regulatory legislation and provided us with work opportunities... In fact, I would like the government to implement a quota system to us in a similar way to the disabled. Working in those conditions will also be difficult, I accept that. There will be mobbing and pressure, but I still believe that it would be nice to have such rights in respect to employment.

How has your life been since you have first started as a sex worker?

I can say that my eyes are open now.

How come?

I realized that I was a naive and stupid person earlier. I didn't know life. Seriously. I was only walking on the way shown to me by the society. After getting outside of the social teaching, I suddenly encountered the truth. But as they say, ignorance is bliss. When I came to realize certain things, I became unhappy. For instance, I accepted my trans identity at an older age; I was 25. Then, I saw that many things I accepted to be

true were actually false. For instance, I was of the opinion that women didn't get oppressed. I thought women and men were equal, but they aren't. I assumed that we LGBT individuals were similarly more... But we aren't like that, too. Then, I learned that the land that we deserve were stolen from us. I mean, lots of things. There are even more; these are only the ones which come to my mind in the first place.

Are you happy with your life now?

I am at least happy for living the feelings inside me.

You are happy for living your trans identity?

I am happy for living my trans identity. I am happy for shaping my body as I want; and for saying "This is who I am," and composing my social circle accordingly. But why am I unhappy? I am unhappy with the pressure of the government on me. I am unhappy for being othered, unable to find a job, and accommodation issues. Sometimes I am asked in a silly way, "This was what you wanted, aren't you happy?" I didn't want to be oppressed or othered.

Can you give an example of your experiences about the pressure of the government and society?

By means of the police, the government used severe pressure. They always imposed us fines and made raids... I mean, they have a continuous policy. There is a regulatory legislation in Turkey regarding sex work, but it is absent in practice. They always justify themselves with the legislation as the right wing parties are ruling now. They make home raids and make it seem like legal. Even though their act is illegal, we seem to be illegal.

In your opinion, would it be different if the left wing parties ruled?

No, I don't trust them either. It would be like lesser evil, maybe slightly better, but I don't think so. Because I also see that there are a lot of radicals in the left-wing parties as well. Particularly those fractions, or whatever they call them. They beat up a sex worker friend for oppression, which was very bad. It is everyone's own life. What the leftists defend about the women's rights seem funny to me; they are not so much believable. So, supposedly I will be saved when socialism comes. No, only the one who makes the pressure will change. While the conservationists use pressure, it used to be the military in the past. So I feel like only the one who uses

the pressure will change. I am guessing this since they are the opposing party now, and I evaluate them tomorrow if they become the ruling party.

Did you complete your military duty?

I did.

How was the experience?

I went there to recover. I came back without being able to recover. (Laughs)

So you had such an expectation. Can you tell about it?

Yes. As I mentioned, there was a time when I was naive. I thought I was sick, so I could recover. Therefore, I decided to become a soldier. I had delayed the requirement for another three years. I didn't have beard or anything, so there was a pressure from my environment, too. After those three years, I was inevitably going to become a soldier anyway as I was a high school graduate. I still am. I said, "It would be better for me to become a soldier, because I won't have to do anything else for 1.5 years." As if I was going to recover if I didn't do anything else. I had such expectations. I was hiding myself back then. I completed the process of 15 months as a soldier,

but none of my expectations came true. What happened? I wasted 15 months of my life.

Where did you go for your military duty?

I went to the eastern region.

How was the experience? Your relationship with other soldiers?

I learned how bad militarism is. I mean, I learned that you could kill someone just because someone told you so. I was naive back then, I could have done it if someone told me. Luckily, that didn't happen. It would be very difficult to recover from its depression. I was only given the gun. I wish I didn't go.

Did you experience any troubles about your sexual identity?

No. Why? I couldn't have accepted myself in my own essence, I was still believing that I could recover. Therefore, I was always stiff when I was walking and exercising. I had to seem proper while exercising, so that nobody would mock me. At least, I had to be average. As I couldn't accept it, I always pushed it away like that.

Were you crying when you were alone?

In the past. I usually cried. It was mostly because of missing my parents. I remember crying while writing to them. As I have said, there was great pressure on me as the society continuously directed you and told you how you should be. What I wanted then was to be someone as the society wanted. To be a man as the society wanted. I was putting effort; I became a soldier as the society wanted me, as my commander, my parents and neighborhood wanted me to be.

So, imagine that you were given all opportunities. What kind of a life would you like to live?

I don't actually want too much. I would like to have a middle level life; not very luxurious but not starving either. If I had somewhere to live and had the financial opportunity to make a living, I wouldn't want any luxurious things.

For example, would you like to complete your gender reassignment process? Do you plan this? Some tell me: I want to complete my gender reassignment, and get married. I don't want to be a sex worker. Another said: I want to be a housewife. A husband. Maybe children. Another: I want to continue as a sex worker, but in better conditions. I am asking in this respect, what would you want for yourself in

the next decade?

I don't want to get married or have a boyfriend.

Why?

I don't see family as a legit institution. Weren't we all oppressed within a family? I might want gender reassignment. I want to use my hormones on a regular basis for a few years, yes I want to have a vagina, too. But I don't want that if it will make me unhappy or influence me psychologically. I don't actually hate my thing. But if this vagina and these hormone levels will make me happier, yes I want it. So I want to experience this. I want to make my decision during this hormone process. I don't believe that deciding all of a sudden is healthy. I want to experience and evaluate the emotional and psychological reactions my body will give to those hormone levels.

How was your relationship with your family as a child?

It was good. We are four siblings. My parents love me, they always have. Their current acceptance stems from this love; otherwise they didn't know what transsexuality, homosexuality or LGBT is. I always say LGBT, and forget "Q" while saying it. Sorry, please add that on my behalf. I don't ignore them or

anything.

You have a good relationship because they love you, so it stems from conscience but how did they accept this? How did you come out to them?

It was emotionally very difficult to come out. I was still continuing my business life and after having realized that I couldn't hold it in any longer and I was going to start a life, I decided that I had to come out to my family even if they rejected me. I spoke to my sister at first, then I spoke to my mother. Of course, neither of these were easy. I phoned my sister, I remember walking inside my home for one-two hours while coming out to her.

How is your relationship now? Do you continuously see each other?

Yes, we continuously see each other. But this isn't because of their awareness of LGBT rights or anything like that; it stems from their unsuppressed love. My mother says: God created you like this, what can we do? You are my child, I accept you. So it is all because of her love. As you know, the religious people don't accept us too much. So the acceptance of my mother and family is based on their love. So I see my family, we don't have any problem.

Do they interfere with your life?

No, they can't.

Are they here? In Eskişehir?

They are in Eskişehir. I see them all the time. They cannot interfere with my life.

So are they conservative? Are they religious?

My mother prays five times a day and goes to reciting meetings but only knows how to pronounce Arabic. If she could understand what the book was saying, I guess she wouldn't accept either the religion or me.

We couldn't talk about your coming out to your family. What did you do?

I first came out to my sister. She is one year older than me. I am the youngest of four siblings. I spoke to her as I felt her closest to me then. Then I spoke to my mother. As for the reaction of my sister, she thought that I was joking and didn't believe me. "No, you are joking, otherwise, we could have realized it." I said, "But sister, you didn't." This is a habitual thing in a family; even if you make it too obvious, they cannot

expect you to actually do it and they vindicate you by assuming, “Our child is very kind, he is very well-intentioned, that is all.” Therefore, my sister couldn’t believe at first. Secondly, I spoke to my mother. Actually, it wasn’t much of speaking. I continuously cried next to her, but I couldn’t dare to speak. My mother asked, “What happened, are you sick, are you cancer?” Finally, she asked “Are you impotent?” She steered the topic to that direction. I said, “Something like that, mother.” I was crying so hard that I could only say that. My mother started guessing, and she found out by guessing and asking me yes-no questions like a riddle. . I wasn’t expecting to cry, but it happened at that moment. I was even saying to myself, “I will tell them even if they disown me.” Then, my mother responded positively. Of course they were sad, it wasn’t like “Hooray, our son is gay”. They all became sad. I had a brother, he came and cried next to me. I was surprised with his reaction. I was expecting the greatest reaction from my brother, but he clamed himself and became really sad by saying, “Couldn’t I give you something enough, why did it happen like this?” Interestingly, my sister – who is the first person I have ever come out- couldn’t still accept me fully. I used to think that I knew my feelings and people, but I realized that I didn’t. For instance, the people whom I thought as the closest to me haven’t still accepted me. I was expecting great reactions from my brother, but he accepted me. These surprised me.

Is your father alive?

Yes.

How was his reaction?

His reaction...He isn't asking. He doesn't want to speak so much about this.

But you see each other, right?

For sure. There is nothing I try to hide before going to him. I visit him with my normal self, he doesn't say anything. He doesn't ask why. But I don't feel his love is less than it used to be. He doesn't have an attitude towards me. He just doesn't want to talk about that. It goes on like it was in the past, as if nothing has happened. My father goes on as if I am what I was in the past. I guess he doesn't want to talk and face with it. As far as I have understood, he says, "OK, I have accepted this but I don't want to face with this." We can comfortably speak this with my mother and I ask her opinions. But I cannot speak these with my father. If my father is with us while I am talking with my mother, then it is OK. But my father doesn't specifically ask me questions.

Can you talk about your friends? How is your social circle and your relationship with your friends?

After I came out and started to live an open life, I started to make friends that are like me. I mean, people who are also living an open life. I couldn't become friends with people who were living a hidden life anymore, because I don't feel that they are sincere. I cannot accept people who will be friends with me in indoor areas but afraid of walking around with me on streets. I had to check my relationships as these were my red lines. These types of people became frightened and stopped talking with me after learning this anyway. Some of my friends ended their friendship with me. Now, my friends are usually from the LGBT community. I have a couple of old friends too. Other than that, I no longer have really daring or understanding friends from my former life. I have my family and a few friends left.

How are your relationships now? Are you happy? Can you say that your friends fill your life and you can consult to them? I mean, do they satisfy you?

I have friends whom I love and trust. I also have friends whom I don't trust. They aren't much different from the heterosexuals, actually. I have a social circle which includes people I just see as well as people whom I trust. It is better or worse

after coming out. Yes, my social circle has changed but I am not alone.

How is your work environment? I mean the sex work.

I work at home through internet. I don't go outside unless I am compelled to in financial terms. If I have to, I work outside too.

People go wheeling in this city, don't they?

Yes, they do. I work online. I don't want more, I want trouble-free work. I don't want headaches. You have to be tougher than the people that are outside if you want to go wheeling. That doesn't suit me well. After earning a sum that is sufficient, I don't look for more.

Are you pleased with your working conditions?

I am not. Being pleased is not possible in these conditions. I am just putting effort to enhance my working conditions. I mean, I am trying to create a safe environment by working at home, and by denying two clients at once. I am trying to protect myself from the law enforcement, government and society. It cannot be denied that these always reflect on us negatively and make our life worse. Therefore, our working

environment is not good. I am of the opinion that we are working with a risk to our lives.

Some girls always stay at home since they wait for clients, which makes them lonely. Some of them mentioned it. They said, “I cannot go outside while waiting for a call from the clients, I get bored but I cannot go out as I need money.” Does that apply to you as well?

Certainly, it is the same for me, too. I have to stay at home in order to earn money. You cannot know when you will be called. But, as I have lived by hiding myself for so long, I have developed an introvert personality. As I am an introverted, asocial person, I have started to enjoy loneliness. I can spend time in front of my computer at home. I can read a book. Therefore, I don't think that loneliness affects me as much as everyone else. But obviously I am a human and I need to have a dialogue with people and share my worries; it is bad in this respect. But still, I sometimes love it – this is something specific to me. But generally speaking, yes, this situation is isolating us. I have to stay at home in order to earn money. If I go outside to socialize, I have financial troubles as I am running out of money. If you ask me personally, I like sitting at home as I am kind of asocial.

What does come to your mind when someone says violence?

For sure, the first thing that comes to my mind is physical violence first, which is followed by psychological violence. We are close to all of these. Our clients, families and society continuously subject us to physical violence. Whenever physical violence is not used, they try to oppress us with psychological violence. All of these are used on us systematically regardless of whether they are intentional or unintentional.

Do you have a boyfriend?

I don't have a boyfriend now.

But you had in the past, didn't you?

Once. It lasted for a very short period of time.

How was that relationship?

It was bad. We always find drifters and vagabonds anyway. I found a vagabond once, too. I mean, it wasn't a nice relationship. I thought it was going to be nice, I was wrong.

Were you subjected to violence within this relationship?

Psychological violence, yes. But I wasn't subjected to physical violence. I realized that he was trying to bring me into a psychological collapse.

For instance?

He was displaying his power on me so as to intimidate me. I wasn't his target, he was just trying to make an impression of how he was. We girls always find a vagabond, and try to make our life supposedly easier. We look for an assurance. Yes, I made that error. I got involved in a love or relationship – calling it love would be wrong- that I mistook for an assurance. It was a mistake. I learned it by experiencing it. I actually don't have to experience something to learn it, but I learned that by living it. Therefore, I strongly oppose to –I wasn't so much willing in the first place- having a boyfriend now.

Were you ever subjected to violence by your family?

No, just minor things that we can call psychological violence. For instance, once my brother called to ask me, "Why do you do these things, don't you love us?" I was offended by that. Why wouldn't I love them? I cried out loud after he said that. It had an impact as if he beat me up. And, I came out when

I accepted myself. My financial status was fine, I was physically strong and mentally prepared. I knew who I was and what I wanted, so I had answers for any question that was asked to me. They couldn't make me end up being wrong. As I came out in such a strong period of mine, I wasn't subjected to physical violence. If I had come out when I was weak like when I was 17-18 years old, I believe that I would most probably have been subjected to violence by my family. They would have done it unknowingly, with the intention of making myself come to my senses with some beating up. But, my coming out was in a period that they couldn't use physical violence on me, because I was physically strong, too. So, I wasn't.

What about clients? Did you experience something like a battery, scuffle, armed offense or stabbing from your clients?

No. As for why, I believe that I have been very attentive so far. For instance, even if I have 3-4 friends with me at home, I still don't accept 2 clients at once. I don't let them home. Only one person should come. Also, if someone speaks to me on the phone in a way that humiliates or disturbs me, I don't let them in either. For instance, I don't accept a client that says "What is your price to give me?" He should talk decently. OK, I might be a sex worker but he cannot ask questions like

that. I pay attention on the phone as I am a nervous person. Therefore, I didn't have so much trouble. I hope I don't have any in the future, too. There is another reason. When I say that I am a transvestite, the clients are also intimidated as we are biologically stronger than a woman. There is a transvestite terror in the society as well. Clients are afraid when they come alone as that image of us still continues. They are afraid of picking on us by themselves. I don't pay them too much attention, too. If I take someone home, I close the other door and turn on the TV so as to make him feel that I am not alone at home. If you are careful, you can mitigate the risk. But, I can't prevent a person who has still set his mind on something.

You think you are lucky then, don't you?

Yes, I certainly think so. I don't know, maybe it was out of luck or maybe it was being very attentive. I couldn't decide yet.

What do you think of the attitude of the police towards trans sex workers? Have you ever been in trouble with the police so far?

No, because I don't work outside.

Didn't they come to your home?

They didn't. As I have said, I am attentive at home, too. As I didn't bargain with clients by means of other friends, I didn't allow room for that, therefore I didn't have much trouble with the police. But as far as I have heard from other friends and a few minor incidents I have experienced, we are aware of the transphobic and homophobic attitudes of the police. As they are an armed hand of the government, the violence of the government reflects on us by means of the police.

What do you think of the attitude of the government towards sex work? What is its purpose and intention?

The government reflects the society. As they say, the rear wheel follows the front wheel. The government doesn't think any differently from the society. They believe what we do is immoral and sinful. And they believe that they can put an end to it through oppression. They don't consider a policy for your own body and rights. We don't have any administrators that are capable of thinking this way now. As they are elected by the society, this reveals the level of intelligence of the society. As the society perceive smart people as either insane or fool, someone who can support our thoughts can never become prominent. I mean, the government is a part of the society. The leaders are not different from the society.

So, I guess we shouldn't expect miracles from the leaders. I believe that this is the best of its capacity in this order. There should be another method so as to make smart people leaders. The current leaders of Turkey are people who can lie and speak in a nice manner. They are not smart. They are elected as they are good at speaking and lying. If someone is really smart but cannot speak good, that person doesn't have a chance at all. Maybe he could be a wonderful leader, but he isn't elected as he isn't good at expressing himself.

What do you think of justice? What is justice for you, is it something written in the law or is it something far different? Is there justice in the country?

The current justice only serves to protect the law of the superior. With superior, I mean the rich. These laws exist to protect the rights of the rich. If I deviate from these, I am being punished. So, I don't think that these laws exist to protect the rights of the poorer people. The justice that I perceive and want is equality for all. But now, the justice doesn't serve equally to everyone. It isn't equal to me. My rights are exploited.

Because of being a trans and a sex worker.

Yes, I am being exploited in every aspect.

In your opinion, what kind of a legislation or law is needed so that you can be comfortable in terms of sex work?

I believe that the sex work should be under the control of government. It is intimidating to say “under the control of government”, it also intimidates me but this is how it should be. Because, there is something called societal health, we cannot ignore this. The professionals in this work should be subjected to regular health controls. I know some friends who don’t go to examination even though they have disease. The client that goes to her comes to me, too. Both my and the society’s health are under risk. The treatment should be mandatory for people who refuse treatment, in my opinion. It should be implemented by the government in safe places, and the government should ensure the safety of my life. If I am doing this job, it should protect my rights and I should work in places where I won’t be subjected to psychological or physical violence. If I cannot do this job, the government should place me in another business sector so as to ensure that the society gets used to us and we get used to the society. We shouldn’t be in this situation at all, that is another subject but the first thing the government has to do is to increase our visibility. The legislation should be regulatory instead of being oppressive. Oppressive legislation only causes the prostitution to become underground. Prostitution, when underground, is unhealthy and controlled by the mafia. This compels us to

apply to pimps, which in turn makes our life more difficult – and while they are taking the benefit of it, I am working in unhealthy conditions. They ask me not to use condoms just to keep the client. When I refuse, they compare me to other girls that accept to stop using condoms. If it were under the control of the government, condom would be mandatory. I mean, I am being forced to work in unhealthy conditions. If I want to work in more healthy conditions, I starve. This is my dilemma. Therefore, if a regulatory legislation – even if the current legislation in Turkey – was implemented, it would be useful to us. Unfortunately, it is not implemented. It is in place, but it isn't implemented.

How do you see the future? This government has been ruling for 12 years and we are aware of their policies for sex workers for 12 years. Do you think that this pressure will get more severe in the future? Is there a danger like a different legislation amendment?

I am scared. I am scared from a potential increase in the violence. I used to be hopeful for the future. I used to believe that trans individuals and women were going to be granted better rights, so it was going to be better in a decade. We always advance in terms of technology. So, I was thinking, why would we go back in terms of mentality? But then, a right-wing ruling party disrupted my thoughts. I experienced how

a human mentality can go back. It was better 10 years ago, there were better mentalities. Now I see more conservative, moralist and fanatic mentalities. I am horrified when I see the new generations, it is scary. I hope this doesn't go on like this. I am scared.

Do you think that there is violence among trans people themselves?

Yes, certainly. Trans people have created their own trans culture, too.

What kind of a culture is this?

This culture also has its own rules. For instance, I cannot go and work in another city. If I try to do this, I get beaten up. Then, there was a mother-daughter relationship. You had to respect old trans people. I mean, from the language to the life style, we have created a trans culture.

Do you believe that this trans culture builds up on the current culture in the society and it is influenced by it?

For sure. We have completely adopted the roles of man and woman. While a friend complains about her boyfriend who beat her up, you still feel that she is proud of it. Like "I am

a woman and I can get beaten up.” She sees being beaten up by a man as being woman. The culture gives something to all of us. They think like, “I have to sleep with men as a trans person, because I am a woman now, There cannot be any alternative to this.” We actually aspire and copy from the heterosexist culture. As we benefit from it, it is impossible for the trans culture to remain unaffected.

What kind of a violence is the violence between trans people? Can you give an example?

I believe capitalist gives opportunity to violence against each other like no other setting does. I accept being a trans person and I have only one option which is being a sex worker. After becoming a transsexual, the people I will compete with are my trans friends again. I have to earn money and provide for myself. Well, she also has to do this. People get jealous of each other and bear each other grudge since materialism and competition are involved. Yes, in biological terms, one of us may be more attractive than the other, so she may get more clients. In return, the other one gets so jealous that she discounts her price. When this one discounts her price, the other one reacts to her. Then, a continuous conflict and competition continue, and we hold more grudges against each other. We feel grudge and hatred. I believe that we live this, because capitalism compels us to compete at each other. If

this weren't the system, if I weren't in a competition with my friends, maybe I would have a much nicer friendship than now.

Speaking of capitalism, do you think a change in the prostitution legislation would eliminate this competition? Because, you are continuously being controlled by the police pursuant to the current legislation: the police follows you, makes raids to your home and imposes fines while the number of trans people are increasing everyday. Therefore, the prices are being reduced. The places that you can find yourself clients are being shut down due to the pressure from the police. Considering all of these, do you think that a prostitution legislation that cancels out all of these negative aspects can lead to more respectful attitudes of trans people towards each other? I mean, if the work was in safe conditions and the income for all was guaranteed?

For sure... If we had a social security... If I am no longer scared of being hungry, these all diminish by time. The fear of starvation will make me aggressive. I mean, even the calmest one becomes aggressive. If we are a social state and we are taking steps towards being a social society, the rights of sex workers should be regulated again in accordance. I shouldn't worry about what I will eat when I get old. I should be retired too. I should be able to benefit from healthcare services properly

when I go to a hospital. It doesn't necessarily mean changing capitalism. That isn't a solution either. If we have to live in this system now, at first, our social rights should be regulated.

What could be a pattern for organization in order to eliminate the violence that is claimed to exist among sex worker trans women?

I have never thought about this. Establishing these NGOs is important in this respect, for us to be able to talk. Establishing NGOs isn't enough by its own. Even if we gather and ask ourselves our opinions about what should replace the old system that we complain about, we start blabbering just like I am doing now. I cannot think of anything. Let's assume that everything has changed like you said, what will we introduce as an innovation? We don't have an idea Maybe we are scared of thinking. They made us forget thinking, anyway. Watch TV, be content with what is given to you, spend and consume, that is all. Don't think. As we scarcely think, I have noticed now that I have never thought about this.

If you had one wish from the politicians – this doesn't necessarily refer to the ruling party or the government, consider all politicians in general – what would you want?

I would want the correction of our rights in the constitution.

No more hatred homicides and reduced sentences. I would want gender and sexual identity to be introduced into the constitution and all discrimination against us to be punished. The grocery store doesn't sell me bread since I am trans. You are a grocery store, you cannot choose your client. If someone comes and buys their needs without giving you trouble and pays for those needs, you have to deliver that service whether you like it or not. That grocery store should be fined if it doesn't give you bread. This might be a grocery store, a night club or a mall. If the security doesn't let me in there, a fine should be imposed. I want all of the constitutional rights that will give us a humane life to be introduced into the constitution, and I want them to be implemented.

Do you think that the political parties are candid?

No. For instance, the parties that are base on the Kurdish policy now demand rights for the homosexuals as well. We also have a vote potential, too. We are gathering strength on an increasing basis now, we aren't like what we used to be. Therefore, they behave candidly to us and continuously ask for our votes. If they became the ruling party now, the situation wouldn't be any different. But if you ask me to whom I will cast my vote, yes I will give my vote to them. Why? As an opposition to the other. In the future, I will still give my vote to the opposition since I don't have any alternatives. There is

no party that reflects me.

So you give your vote to them for strategic reasons and not for you believe their sincerity. Is that so?

For strategic reasons. For instance, the closest election is the presidential election. Neither Ekmeleddin nor Tayyip reflect us, they are both from the right-wing culture. I mean, if AKP was able to offer another candidate other than Tayyip, this would be someone like Ekmeleddin. Thanks to CHP, they offered Ekmeleddin. The lesser evil is Selahattin Demirtaş now and I will give my vote to him. I don't have any other chance. There is no candidate who fully reflects my wishes, so I am giving my vote to the closest one.

[EQUALITY]

“When the people in the restaurant I was working in learned about me, they proposed intercourse to me. People didn’t say anything when I accepted them, but the ones that I rejected told on me to my boss.”

GAZİANTEP

Can you briefly talk about yourself?

I was born in Gaziantep. I am 31 years old. I live in Gaziantep. I have been here for a long time.

What do you do for a living?

I am a sex worker. I work online. I have been a sex worker for 4-5 years, so I have been in this circle.

How did you start as a sex worker, from whom did you get help?

I was living in Antep, I was looking for a job but I couldn't find anything. I had gay friends. I was sleeping with people before, but I wasn't prostituting myself. I was compelled to do this for financial reasons. When I saw that people weren't accepting my job applications while those who accepted were molesting me or firing me for my homosexuality, I became compelled to start prostitution.

Did you start with the help of your friends?

Sure, I started with their help. I first saw them do this. They were just like me and they were sex workers. I was in a financial distress. I was compelled to become a sex worker. I have been continuing for 5 years now.

Are you satisfied with your current life?

I am not satisfied with my current life of being a sex worker. Because, I sleep with people I dislike in return for money instead of being together with people I want. It is out of obligation, in return for payment. If I had the opportunity now, I wouldn't be a sex worker.

You don't have any trouble about earning money, do you?

I don't have a problem now. Thankfully, I am earning as I am a sex worker. But if I had the choice, I wouldn't do this.

If you had another job that could offer you money like your current job, would you choose it?

Sure, for sure. I mean, it would be much more better than being a sex worker. I encounter every type of person and enter into every type of environment. I drink alcohol and sleep with people that I dislike just for being compelled to. I face troubles, I encounter problems. These are very difficult. I am in distress.

How has been your life in these 5 years?

It had its ups and downs. What is the good side of it? I used to have nothing. I mean, I was like nothing. But now I have minor things. I started to earn money and pulled myself together. People started to look at me differently. They weren't

even looking at me in the past, I mean they used to ignore me. But now I have a home, the home I am living belongs to me. Even for this reason, I started to see people around me from a better aspect. Even this is an advantage for me.

Were those people who ignored you from the trans circle, or...?

There were queers and heterosexuals. I mean, I had heterosexual friends as well. But none of them paid attention to me. Why? I was an unnecessary, unemployed person with no belongings or ability to take care of himself. Now it is all different. Those who used to turn their back on me then are talking to me now.

Is it all because of money?

Yes. everything is money. Without money, you are nothing. As I am compelled to be a sex worker, they see the money I am earning. As I am doing fine now, they all are with me. The same goes for my family.

How was your relationship with your family in the past? Were they aware of your queer identity?

They didn't know it earlier, so they kept their distance from me when they first learned about it. Then, after I started to stand on my own feet and earn money from prostitution,

they changed and became closer to me.

Don't they know that you do koli?

They know now.

Did you work in another job earlier? You mentioned that you couldn't find job.

I did. I have a profession, I am normally a cook. I have a profession. I worked. About 4-5 years, I worked in a famous place frequented by the middle class and workers. When they learned my homosexuality there, they started to exclude me.

Were you a waiter or a cook?

I was a cook, I was preparing meals.

How was their attitude? What did they do?

After learning about me? Just for their own interests, they pursued only one thing. They proposed intercourse to me. People didn't say anything when I accepted them, but the ones that I rejected told on me to my boss. "The person who works here is gay, homosexual or – in an offensive language- a faggot. What is he doing here? We won't come here to eat again." But when I slept with them, it was just the opposite. They accepted me and said nothing. These all are based on interests.

You said that you are pleased with your current life, didn't you?

I am pleased with my current life.

But you are unsatisfied with your job?

Yes, I am unhappy for being a sex worker. It would be better not to do this. I got fed up with it. I have been a sex worker for 5 years. It isn't too long, but it was enough for me to be fed up with it.

What kind of a life would you like to live, exactly?

Regular. I mean, I also would like to be involved in a family and quit the sex work. Not accepting all of the clients that call whenever the phone rings.

But you have to accept?

I have to accept. I have my own expenses in accordance with this. I mean, we are not like the normal people. If a normal person can buy something for 1 TL, they ask 5 TL from us. What should I do for this? I have to be a sex worker.

You have to earn more...

I have to earn more. I would like to live a normal life. A regular life and a job. A home that I go and come. I would like not to be a sex worker. I would like to sleep at 11-12 in the evening

comfortably without thinking anyone else. But this is not possible in our environment of sex workers.

As far as I have understood, your relationship with your family is better now? Does money have anything to do with this improvement?

A hundred percent. Because I don't need them, I stand on my own two feet. I help them in every aspect, but mostly financially. Therefore, they accept me.

If we return to your childhood now, were you able to make your queer identity obvious? How was your relationship with your family in your childhood?

I used to wear girl clothes and play with other girls or dolls. My family was already sensing this.

How were their attitudes?

They didn't say anything as I was a child. It was like, I was just a child yet and it was only a childhood thing. But, it was obvious in my childhood that I was going to become like this.

When did you tell them that you do this job? Or did they realize this?

They realized that I am a sex worker. I left home 7-8 years ago. I had to leave.

What happened?

Some family problems.

About whom?

They were about me. My older brother was jealous of me. We used to fight all the time. Eventually, I had to leave home. I met someone. He rented a home for me.

Your boyfriend?

Yes, he rented a home and furnished it for me. I didn't prostitute myself in the first times. I was dating him. They heard about it but didn't say anything since I was standing on my own feet. I was being helpful to them, too. He used to help me, so I was helping my family as well. So, they stopped objecting at me. But I don't know how they would react if this happened now. They wouldn't disown me if something happened now, but they wouldn't be there for me like they were then, either.

Do you find the attitude of your family towards you and your relationship candid?

Yes, I believe that it is sincere. They see other people around me; homosexuals, gays and transvestites. They know what they are doing. When they see those friends, they have a warm attitude towards me. Why? Because most of the peo-

ple around me do not see their parents or relatives. They find themselves in worse situations and all kinds of unexpected things happen to them. They are there for me so that these don't happen to me. For instance, my sisters are closer to me.

How many siblings are you?

7 siblings in total.

Girls, boys?

Five girls and two boys.

About those two boys, are you one of them?

Me and my brother.

Is your relationship with your brother is different than your relationship with your sisters?

For sure. We are more detached with my brother. For instance, I cannot behave comfortably around him and the same goes for him. He is more distant. But I am closer with my sisters. They understand me better.

Have you ever been subjected to violence by your family?

By my brother. In my first times. For instance, he was meddling in my glasses, armless shirts and jeans all the time when I first started to enter into homosexual circles. 2-3 years later,

he got married and moved to Germany. After moving there, he was different when he came back. He overlooked these, because he saw everything there. Most of the people from his own social circle were living in the streets frequented by transvestites there.

Where are they?

I guess they are in Berlin. Thereafter, his attitudes towards me changed greatly. After seeing their lives, he stopped meddling in my jeans, t-shirts, armless shirts, glasses or long hair. But he was different back then, because he didn't know. After seeing them, it became easier for him, too. As compared to the past, I am 50-60% more comfortable. Because, he saw the reality. He saw that I exist and I am not the only one... And he saw the truth since he lived among them there.

Are your parents alive?

My mother is alive but it has been 20 years since my father passed away.

I was going to ask his attitude but...

His attitude... I was small, I was attending to 3rd or 4th grade then.

So, I guess there wasn't much of a trouble?

No, but he was fond of my brother. I can recall this even though I was a little child. He was fond of boys. I was playing with dolls and playing house while he was playing with ball. He used to go to trips with my brother and take him around but I wouldn't go with them.

What is the age difference with your brother?

Two years. Not so much.

How is your relationship with your current social circle including queers or, if you see anyone else, the people you see?

I have a good relationship now because I understand and analyze people better now, and understand how each person will approach to me. I try to keep my distance with certain people to the best of my ability. But in our circle, people always become friends based on self-interest. I mean, they are with you if it is useful for them; otherwise, they are away from you.

Your social circle generally consists of queers, doesn't it?

About 90-95% of my social circle consists of homosexuals including gays, transvestites, CDs and lesbians. Maybe even more than 95%. But I actually see only a bunch of people.

What is your working environment?

I work at my own home. I admit clients from the internet.

Did you ever have a koli house in the past?

No, I always worked at my own house. I mean, I have the advantage of having my own place. And several people worked at my home, I mean a lot of people earned money thanks to me. But I was always constructive and never destructive towards them. I mean, I lent a helping hand for each one of their needs. Because, I didn't have any homosexual friends who were there for me and helped me in the past. I was there for them, I supported them both financially and otherwise.

**Do you think that you are loved by the people around you?
You mentioned interests, but...**

I am very much loved by the people around me. I am benignant and good-willed. I don't do anything wrong to anyone, even if they did something wrong to me. Lots of people, even the people whom I had admitted to my home did wrong to me, but I never did wrong to them. In response, I tried to teach them what is good. I am honest. I am honest from my own perspective. I am sure that I didn't do anything wrong.

Do you feel yourself safe in your work environment, I mean, here?

I feel myself safe at my own home, because I have been living here for 8-9 years. My family used to live here before me, so I feel safe. But inevitably, the people around me, my neighbours show their reaction to me.

Is this your family's home?

My family used to live here before me; it belonged to my aunt. I bought it from her. My family was living here, then I moved in and lived here. But, I experienced troubles from the outside in my previous home.

What does come to your mind when someone says violence?

The attitudes of men towards us. I mean, fights with guns and knives... These things come to my mind, because these happened to me.

What did you live exactly?

I lived this when I was with the man I loved. My clients also did it. I lived these. I was shot. He shot me from my leg. Besides, I saw it from my client as well.

Armed?

With a knife. I was attacked with a knife. We were fighting; he drew his knife on me and stabbed me in the leg.

Why did you fight?

I wasn't a sex worker back then; I was dating with him. I was about to start this job. I had to, because he was no good to me. I was compelled. So when I started as a sex worker, he got jealous of my client. He became jealous and started to speak like, "Don't do this, you can't do it, you are mine." Then, it started to get worse. His reaction became more severe as he saw more clients coming in. He drew his knife on me, and stabbed me.

What happened then?

After stabbing me, he regretted this. He took me and brought me to a hospital. Obviously, the police asked me who did it. I couldn't give his name there. I said, I was stabbed on the road by glue-sniffers. I couldn't tell them.

Do you regret now not telling them?

No. Why? Because I am still in touch with that person. It isn't like it used to be in the past, and we had so many troubles but I still see him.

How long did your relationship last after that?

8 years. It lasted 6 years more after this incident. We were together for 2 years then. I have been seeing him for 8 years now, but it is about to be over. There is no love, only habit. We cannot give up our habits. Why? When we cannot find what we were looking for outside, we become attached to that one person. We love them. After a while, love is replaced by habit. Because we expect certain things from him just like love and respect. When we cannot find them, only habits remain. And we cannot give up this habit.

Would you like to give up?

Yes. I would like to have a better and respectful relationship. I would like to have someone there for me in my life.

Were you involved any violence with the police?

No, I wasn't subjected to violence by the police. They just make rude comments, but it feels normal to me.

Where? Have you ever gone wheeling?

No but when I was walking on the road or whenever they came to my home for the noise.

Did they ever come to your home?

Whenever there was a loud noise, for example when I was

fighting with my boyfriend, they were coming to my home.

What do they say?

“Is it you again? What happened? What does this man want from you?” I was telling them, I wasn’t hiding. I was saying that he was my boyfriend. They were asking, “Why are you fighting then?” I mean, these are normal. I am dating with an illicit man. He doesn’t work. He is unusual, too.

Have your clients ever beaten you up?

Yes. Why, for instance? I received a blow on my eyebrow, because he was rough to me during the intercourse even if I didn’t want that. Then he insisted me to stay, I refused and I was subjected to violence.

He battered?

Battery, yes. The scars of those stitches still remain.

Did you file a complaint against him?

No, because I knew nothing about the man other than his phone number. How could I file a complaint about him? So, I didn’t because I had no information about him.

Do you believe that you would have received any results if you had filed a complaint?

No, I don't think at all. They were going to ask me how I met that man. I cannot tell them that I met him online and I am a sex worker. The attitude and stares of the police at me would change at that moment. Therefore, I couldn't tell them. Inevitably, you keep something hidden.

Have you had any trouble about the queers?

No, not like that. I had minor quarrels, but not fights.

Why did you have those quarrels?

They were unimportant quarrels for money, boyfriends and dates. I didn't have any other quarrels. They were mostly based on money.

How is the working environment of queers in Antep? How many girls are working?

I was the first transvestite to work in Gaziantep. There was no other working transvestite at all. Then, my friends from Istanbul and Ankara came. They were young yet, I didn't want to encourage them for prostitution. They were here when they were 16-17 years old. They came to me and wanted to work, but I didn't accept them. But then, to my surprise, they returned once again after Istanbul with new noses, breasts

and hair styles. I saw myself in them. I saw my younger version when I first started prostitution. There was no home, so I was compelled to stay at hotels... Then, I helped them. I had to be. I mean, I supported them to prevent them from staying on the streets so that nothing bad happened to them. I didn't want the things that happened to me to happen to them. I was their greatest advantage. I told them what was wrong and what was right. I have been prostituting myself for 5 years now but I had about 2 years of experience back then. I didn't know a lot yet, but I taught everything I knew to them. I was there for them. If you ask me whether I regret this, I don't. Because I supported them and I don't regret this. At least they had someone who older who knew better than them. If you ask them, you will see that all of them love me. Why? Because I showed them the right way. I never taught anything wrong to them. I never encouraged them for theft or robbery. I always kept them away from these things. If you do this job, you have to do it good. If you cannot do it good, then you have to give the man his money back and send him back. I always showed them honesty. If you ask them, they all love me. They have to, anyway. Because I have never done anything wrong to anyone.

Is there a wheeling environment in Antep?

There is no such thing actually. They once attempted to create such an environment in the vicinity of university. They tried

it. They disgraced themselves. I had warned them. This is Antep. It is a small place. It cannot tolerate different things like wheeling. They received reactions from families. They were stabbed. People attacked at them. They went to the police station. They ended up being wrong. As this is a small place, it cannot tolerate wheeling; they shouldn't have walked on the road here. "But they do it in the big cities." They can do it. I also saw them do it there but it cannot be done here. Because Antep is still a developing city but its people aren't. Therefore, it isn't possible now. 5-6 years should pass and people should get used to this.

Is there a difference in your income from this job as compared to 5 years ago?

Extremely. When I started prostitution, I was earning very good money as a sex worker. There weren't too many transvestites. But, 1-2 years later their number grew including the people I supported; and cross-dressers and gays also became involved. The business volume has been reduced by 50-60%. There is an extreme difference between then and now.

Is there any difference in respect to violence?

People can resort to violence more comfortably now. When I started as a sex worker 5 years ago, violence wasn't exten-

sive. People didn't know that there were transvestites in Antep, because there weren't too many of them. There was me, and 2-3 friends who stayed with me. There was no violence. When people increased thereafter and started to go on streets, the violence became more. But, I was never subjected to violence during my first 2-3 years as a sex worker. Not in any matter. They were abstaining from us. They hadn't seen a transvestite before other than on TV, therefore they were abstaining from us but now they feel more at ease when they resort to violence now.

Is there a difference in the attitude of the police now as compared to the past?

There is some difference. Now they are used to us now. They have seen us by now. I mean, they didn't know us back then but their attitude is normal now as they know it.

Are there raids to homes? Do the police issue fines when they make raid?

Not yet, as Antep is a small place. It should develop more before these start. We are 10-12 people. So, these things don't occur that much here.

Do girls file complaints against each other to the police here?

Yes, that happens here, too. Girls get jealous of each other and they fight because of their instable attitudes. I mean, they go to the police station and courthouses. They change drastically when they use alcohol and substances. They fight with each other. Even some of the police complain about their current situation. A lot of them fight with each other, but then they regret this. They all do these to themselves. Because they already exclude us and don't want us. So this time, they look and see the truth. Then they stop the fight.

Is the use of alcohol and substances effective in the violence towards the girls?

For sure, extremely. Both alcohol and also the substances they use change your attitudes drastically.

If you had the opportunity, would you like to work in a brothel?

Yes.

Why?

It is safer and more secure. I mean, I would feel myself safe. You cannot know here who will come and what will happen in the home. You also have an insurance and a future. So, you

are safe in every respect as it is a regular thing.

What do you think of the government's attitude towards prostitution? What is the government trying to do?

They are shutting down the brothels and making raids to home... What is the government trying to do? They are trying to ruin and destroy us. They don't want us.

Will this ever be over?

Never.

What will happen then? The pressure is increasing.

It will be much more hidden, but it will increase. No matter what the government does, -let alone us- they cannot prevent women and prostitution. Prostitution will continue as long as the world exists. Their struggle is pointless. I would rather see them give support in this respect. An opportunity... Instead of shutting them down, it may open more brothels.

Would you like a separate brothel for queers?

For sure.

Regardless of which party comes to your mind, do you believe that the politicians have candid attitudes in respect to sex workers?

No, I don't. It is all until they become the ruling party. Once the start to rule... AKP used to say certain things too, but everything changes when they became the ruling party. They don't want.

Do you think that there is justice in this country?

The justice exists for the rich.

For the rich?

For those who are financially better. The justice serves to them. There is no justice for the poor, homosexuals and some others. Justice cannot be provided.

What kind of a life would you like?

I would like a nice life. I wish we had rights; all of the people. I would like to see that they stand up for my rights. I would like to be behaved as a human. I don't want to be excluded. I am a human being who lives on this world, too. There are so many people in the world. I believe that homosexuals have a vast number in the world – not just in Turkey, but in the entire world. Hidden homosexuals are plentiful. Not all can live like they want to.

[HEAVEN]

“For instance certain women... They say to the client, “Are you choosing a transvestite?” Or they say, “That one had her penis cut.” This is why I fight with most of the women in the brothel. Sometimes I cannot take it anymore and I say, “Why are you messing with us? We both have the same rights. We both work here with registration. We both go to our medical examinations. We both have pink ID cards. What is our difference? How dare you talk to me or a friend of me like this?” There are several instances to this. They talk behind your back, they talk to your client or they talk out loudly.”

MERSİN

To begin with, can you briefly talk about yourself?

I was born in Ankara on 29.06.1968. I am living in Mersin.

Are you currently a sex worker?

I am a sex worker. I work at a brothel.

How long has been since you started at the brothel?

5 years.

Where was your first brothel?

İstanbul.

Did you move around other brothels?

I went to Adana and returned to Mersin again from Adana. I am still in Mersin.

Was your longest stay in Istanbul? I mean, how many years did you work for?

I worked in Istanbul for one and half years. It has been about two and half years since I arrived here. I worked in Adana for four months. So I worked for 5 years in total.

You previously worked without registration. So, you weren't in a brothel, were you?

Yes, I was working outside.

Where were you working? Was it Etlik?

I was working in Ankara, Etlik. I was wheeling. I had a near-death experience when I was attacked with knife. After I returned, one of my friends lent a helping hand to me. She opened her home to me and took care of me for a while. Thereafter, I entered into Istanbul Brothel upon court verdict. It was 5 years ago.

Was the knife attack in Ankara related to the Eryaman process?

It was an attack related with the Eryaman process.

What happened? What did you live then?

I was suddenly attacked by 5 persons while I was working outside. One of them was a woman. My official statements in the police station is the same as my statement in the court. One of them was a woman. After attacking at me, these persons attacked at other transvestites and transsexuals as well. They were captured by the law enforcement a few days after this incident.

What happened after that? Were they sentenced?

Yes. I can't remember exactly but they were imprisoned for one year and two months or one year and three months.

Do you believe that this sentence was insufficient?

For sure. Because, I was subjected to an attack that I didn't deserve at all. I mean, this wasn't something I deserved in the first place. On what grounds did they attack at me?

Who were these people?

Eryaman gang. My trial is still published online. You can look it up to receive necessary information.

It was a severe attack, wasn't it?

Yes, I was back from death's door. I was hospitalized.

Did you stay in Ankara for a while longer or did you immediately flee after recovery?

No, I stayed in Ankara 4-5 months thereafter but I wasn't able to get out from home as I couldn't overcome that fear. I became unable to work. I started to wait for clients via phone. I made a living with clients who came on a weekly or a biweekly basis from time to time. After that process, my friend offered me to move in with her. She said, "I already cook meals, so we can eat together. What's the harm in it?"

Did you also go to Kuşadası?

I went to Kuşadası as well. I had a friend there and she took care of me for one and half years. Then, I learned that admittance to Istanbul Brothel was possible with court verdict. I was admitted with a court verdict.

When was this?

It was almost 2010. It has been 5 years since then.

If you compare your work life in brothel to outside, what could you say about it?

How can working at the brothel be same as the life outside? Greater difficulties wait for you when you are outside. You are comfortable in the brothel in every aspect. How? At least in respect to health, safety and everything. But, it has its own difficulties to the same extent of comfortableness.

For instance?

For instance, the torture from the bosses as well as violence certain girls are subjected to from the bosses, even if these are only verbal. There are also beating incidents. I mean, they compel a girl in return for money, and make her work like a slave. I witnessed each and every one of these myself and I experienced these, too. Well, I wasn't beaten up but I saw my friends being beaten up. I saw my friends being subjected

to violence, even if it was verbal violence, within these five years. Only God knows what we will witness from now on.

So it is psychological pressure and violence in general.

Pressure, intimidation... If you cannot make money with your pussy, you have to get your ass fucked so as to earn that money. Inflicting such a deliberate cruelty to oppressed people is violence. This is like turning sex workers into slaves...

Do you believe that this is the case in all of the brothels or do only a few bosses behave like this?

When I worked in Istanbul, which was supposed to be worse than all of them, I didn't witness such a pressure. But if I should speak for Mersin and Adana, yes all of those bosses are like that. I couldn't comprehend the intentions of the bosses in these places.

Can you give any examples to the difficulties? On what grounds is this pressure inflicted? For instance, do they make you sign any promissory notes?

For instance, a girl was paid 10,000 TL. In return, they expected her to earn 700-800 TL on a daily basis.

So the girl received money from him and in return...

Yes, he wants the girl to earn 700-800 TL for him on a daily

basis. For example, if the girl doesn't have the same workflow each and everyday, she is subjected to violence.

What kind of a violence?

Some of the bosses beat girls up while others verbally humiliate you...

Psychological...

They imply things like, "If you cannot make money with your pussy, you will get your ass fucked. You will earn this money, just create that money for me." Well, there are also girls who are tenants of rooms. Those girls rent a room for a daily fee of 100 TL. They just pay that fee.

So they are free to do as they like.

Yes, even if those girls earn 10,000 TL, all of that money belongs to those girls themselves.

But they have to pay a daily rental fee.

For sure, they have to make the payment for the room. Whether they work or not, the boss takes that money from them.

What is the system in your current workplace like? Do you rent rooms?

I rent my own room, so it is a room-rental system but nobody has the right to inflict pressure on us as we operate the house ourselves.

So, there are no issues?

I don't have any current issues, but I have friends who have. I saw them being oppressed even if it was done verbally. Did I see anyone being beaten up? Yes, I saw them, too.

Cannot that girl file a complaint to the police?

Yes she can, but she is scared. Maybe, they are threatening you with your family or something else like your children. The scam is different. Not everyone can dare to tell these. If they told on these people, these things wouldn't happen in the first place.

In fact, the current legislation prescribes this very clearly: The boss or the proxy cannot oppress a working girl by any means.

For sure, they can't.

They can by no means forcefully seize the girls.

They are not allowed to forcefully seize the girls by any means. For instance, the house system was not used in Mersin Brothel when I first arrived. What is the house system? If you have

looked at the by-law, you must have already read it. None of the prostitutes can accommodate in that house. So, 90% of the girls were working during day or night shifts. The bosses didn't let the girls to leave for their home after work with the hidden support from the police as well with an attempt to prevent girls from escaping from there. When – I cannot mention his name – a police chef arrived there and made it possible for the girls to go home after work, the system actually changed. Otherwise, none of the girls used to be able to leave the brothel. If they received a leave, they went to the police station and received the permit for, let's say, 10 days. It was only for those 10 days that they were able to stay outside of the brothel. But eventually, they had to come back. It was like a semi-open prison. The only difference from the prison was prostitution. You were waking up to admit clients, and you were continuing to admit them until you slept. You weren't able to see anything else while you were stranded among four walls.

So, there was no social life...

There was no social life. I guess it has been less than two years since the house system has been implemented. The girls have started to feel a bit more comfortable ever since the implementation. The bosses cannot inflict that much pressure, but I can't say that they don't inflict pressure on any of the girls. There are still women who are subjected to violence.

It was last year or the previous year when an incident; some insisted that it was a slander – a woman’s...

The rape incident?

Allegedly her child was raped.

I don’t know that woman in person although I had seen her. I don’t know the child or the rapist but...

Do you believe that it actually happened? Because, certain documents regarding slander were circulated.

No. There was a proxy from Adana. She was their proxy during that period and was a prostitute before that. I asked her, she told that it wasn’t true. I mean, everybody told that it was real, but I cannot say anything as I haven’t personally witnessed this. For example, you just asked me if I saw a prostitute being subjected to violence. I said yes as I had seen them. But I didn’t see this incident. How can I say that it is true? I can’t. Whether if this is real or not is something between them and God.

If you knew the truth, would you tell?

Why wouldn’t I? But confirming this incident like a reality wouldn’t be right now, because I don’t know anything about it. I would be slandering that person if it was a lie.

Do you think that she works there comfortably after all these, regardless of whether it was a slander or truth.

Her mother?

Yes, her mother.

I guess she worked for about 2 months after that incident. As far as I have heard, she was either transferred to somewhere else or she escaped after 2 months.

I see. Other than you have already told, how are the working conditions in the brothel? For instance, what do you do during the day starting from waking up until the evening?

For instance, I wake up at about 10 in the morning. I drink a few cups of tea and coffee, and then I do my make up. Then I do my hair and go to my room. I get prepared at about 1-2 and get down to the hall. I may scarcely have clients on daytime because Mersin Brothel is busy in the evenings. The people of this place come in the evenings. The clients are very scarce during daytime, so I just wait. The work gets busy in the evenings, so I just start working. I mean, I agree on the price and go to my room with the client. If you are asking how the work is, I have seen several clients being beaten up by the women. I have also seen the shirts of clients being torn apart because of women pulling them by force. I have also heard that money of several clients were taken from them by

force. Because they agree on the price on that moment and eventually the police come upon a complaint. For example, if I am fighting with a client, I might have overcharged him. Is the client wrong? No, they are right. If we worked with a fixed price, it would be different. Now the clients come but they refuse to get in, saying that his shirt was torn the last time he came inside. Or the clients say that their money was taken by force when they went to the room of a woman. Or there are certain clients who say that they paid 100 TL for anal sex, yet they couldn't have the intercourse despite having made the payment. The women aren't very honest at all, but who causes this? After all, we return to the same point: The bosses. If a boss inflicts pressure on a working woman and tell her, "You have to make money. You have to get your ass fucked if your pussy doesn't make enough money," then that woman has to behave like this. Because when your daily earning is counted in the evening, the boss says, "What the hell is this? Is this all you have earned?" The boss doesn't appreciate it. He says, "Is this all you have earned? If your pussy doesn't make money, you will get your ass fucked to earn money." So what can that woman do in response? I am asking you.

Nothing. She is compelled to work.

She will do this. She will work.

However, if the girls had a raised consciousness... I know that they are scared. As someone who doesn't personally experience all those loans and everything, it is easy for me to say...

Darling, I will tell you something and this applies for not only transsexuals but also all women who work at the brothels. The reason for this is these people are scared for their families and children. Do you understand it? Most of them are under a constant threat. Most of these are lonely people in need who were found by bosses. They are being told, "If you file a complain against me to the police station, I will kill you with my own hands." So women just ask themselves, "Which one is more valuable, my life or money?" They choose life, so they sacrifice from everything. However, when a transsexual encounters such an approach, she has better knowledge regarding what to do. I mean, different tricks are being played. How could I tell you? These should be seen rather than told. You should see it with your own eyes and watch it like a movie to see that these actually happen. The vice squad should tell someone to go to a brothel as if she is a registered prostitute so that someone can witness these and record the voices and everything. I mean, you should have an agreement with the vice squad so as to witness and tell these.

For the first time in Turkey, an NGO for prostitutes, transvestites and gigolos was established last year. You know, it is our association. As you know, the brothels are being closed one by one. We defend that they should change the by-law rather than closing the brothels. The by-law should be changed based on the needs of the girls, not those of the bosses. The injustice, infraction of rules, violence and discrimination there should be prevented by them while they protect the girls. But, more brothels should be opened.

For sure.

There should be brothels which work in civilized conditions just like in Europe. Let the girls work on their own account and pay their taxes. They should have a defined place to work.

Yes.

Outsiders are left in a dilemma when they listen to what you have told in addition to what other people I have known from this sector for the last 8 years have told. They say, "These places are the cradles of cruelty. We should shut these places down." But we say, "No, they may have become cradles of cruelty. This should be prevented and the girls should be protected. If you shut down these places, the girls in those houses will be subjected to greater violence."

Obviously, they will all go out to the streets. But as you see, we come to the same point again. The reason for being subjected to this cruelty is that these girls owe money to the bosses. For instance, if you are the boss and I borrowed 20,000 TL from you, the boss is after that money plus interest. So the boss has to make that girl work on a double shift. If the girl is not making enough money, then they inflict violence on that girl. I am against this. As you have just said, girls should work for themselves in brothels while paying their taxes so that they earn their needs in their own conditions. But the bosses lend them money and if they lent 10,000 TL, it becomes 20,000 TL when you have to for for two people. If you earned 500 TL today, 50 TL is deducted from that amount for meal expenses. The remaining 450 TL is divided into two: 225 TL for the girl and 225 TL for the boss. They keep a record of your daily earnings for each day until the end of the month. When the end of the month comes, the boss looks at your total earning which makes, for instance, 5,000 TL. They say, 400 TL for electricity and 400 TL for water should be deducted as well. However, there is no utility bill that they can show you even if you ask to see it. They just list your expenses and the remaining money for you becomes 1,500 TL with an optimistic estimation.

You put in effort...

You put in effort, sell your body, endure the torture while he

gets to enjoy the pleasure. Well, you get the money but...

You cannot get what you deserve.

The boss doesn't give me what I actually deserve. They don't register me to the insurance system.

How is that? Can you explain the insurance system?

I have been working at the brothel for five years yet my insurance premiums for only 4 months were deposited while I was in Adana.

Why is that so?

The bosses here never deposit the insurance premiums for the girls.

If you filed a complaint about this, they would burn down that place.

You don't have to complain or anything. This is the system that they have been accustomed to for years. Look my darling, what I want to tell you in short is: Those who are managing this brothel intend to use the girls as if they are slaves. In fact, they should be kicked out from this brothel.

If the irregularities are just like what you have said, a legal action should be taken.

What if you take a legal action? What would you win?

The suspicions about them would be revealed.

The suspicions about them... Listen to what I am saying to you: 10 people tore the girl's hair as if she was a chicken. She ended up being wrong in spite of being right. She had to come inside with the police accompanying her just to take her belongings before she could escape. This is how hussy these people are.

The chef of the vice squad here arrived just about 5-6 months ago. He mentioned that there were so many irregularities that I hadn't been aware of.

Darling, let me interrupt you. When I was about to leave for Adana with a transfer, the former police chief asked me why I was leaving. I said, "How could I stay? I am in need of bread." When he asked the reason, O said, "The shopkeepers and security guards that are right outside the brothel receive money from each client. The shopkeepers and security guards receive 30 TL from the clients, so the clients offer me 20 TL. I am in need of bread." He asked me if I knew certain bosses. I replied, "I received my transfer from the house of that boss." He asked me how I knew them. I replied, "As far

as I know, you know them better than me. We come here and tell you our complaints, but until the complainant girl arrives back to the brothel, her complaint is already heard in the brothel.” He asked, “What are you trying to say?” I said, “You know what I mean very well. What we tell here is being told to the brothel. There must be a trick in this.” He said, “Nobody discloses complaints here.” Then, I asked, “If that is so, how come they know about which girl filed a complaint against them? Sometimes even a complaint about the loud music is made to you. You let the boss know which girl made that complaint. So what happens to the relationship between that boss and girl?”

But they always issue reports for the houses. I mean, even some bosses suffer from vice squad.

What happens if they issue reports anyway?

Well, after the second or third report...

Well, think of the signboard. They just register another signboard on another person’s name, so it makes no difference in the event. I will see how bossy they are if the police don’t allow another signboard registration for the same place.

They don’t allow this in some places...

Yes, they shouldn’t. Why do they allow them to register new

signboards if they ban their previous signboard? What difference does it make? Do you really believe that there aren't any houses inside that don't work without a signboard anyway? If you would like, you can go to the police right now.

How can a house work without a signboard?

Because, even if the vice squad is coming to check on the houses, the bosses are informed before by the police regarding when they will come.

So, are they closing the houses before the police arrive?

Those houses are immediately closed. Where are they coming from? How do the bosses learn about it? As I said, some shady tricks are played.

So you say that they work in some sort of partnership?

For sure.

They scratch each other's backs.

For sure. I mean, as I have told you, I am scared of the people here. Believe me, I am scared.

This is not happening in other brothels, is it? At least, not to this extent?

No. I didn't witness such a thing when I was in Istanbul or

Adana. As you have said, they immediately issue reports in Adana. For example, before I arrived in Mersin, the bosses in Adana instructed us to stay behind the glass and refrain from calling clients. We were told that we simply had to sit in our seats until the client came by himself. They didn't inflict any pressure in this regard. When they saw me while I was calling clients, they issued reports and shut the place down for 15 days. But this is also wrong as we work in a brothel.

You have to call clients in.

I have to call them in. How can I work without calling them? I tell this to them from time to time as well, I am not a 20 year old young girl. I am not a young woman capable to being adored by the client so that he comes by himself.

How is the attitude towards transsexuals in brothels?

As I work by myself, I don't work with another transsexual. I work by myself with a normal woman. There are transsexuals as well, but when two transsexuals work together, they find each other's faults. Or, for instance, if one transsexual receives extra money from the client, the other one immediately finds something to say about it. There are transsexuals who have this attitude as well, so I cannot say that they are completely right, myself included.

How is the attitude of non-trans women towards you? Do they gossip?

For sure, for instance certain women... They say to the client, "Are you choosing a transvestite?" Or they say, "That one had her penis cut." This is why I fight with most of the women in the brothel. For example, I cannot take it anymore sometimes and I swear at them. I say, "Why are you messing with us? We both have the same rights. We both work here with registration. We both go to our medical examinations. We both have pink ID cards. What is our difference? How dare you talk to me or a friend of me like this?" There are several instances to this. They talk behind your back, they talk to your client or they talk out loudly.

Do you believe that the attitude of bosses differ towards transsexuals and women?

What they do is flattery and nothing else, you see? They do nothing but flattery. If I earn money thanks to you, obviously I defend you. Do you see what I am saying? But if you leave my place... "Whore, she is so cheap that she went because nobody wanted to fuck her." Or if she is a transsexual, they say, "She couldn't get herself fucked, so she went." You should actually nip in the bud. You cannot change anything unless you change the bosses. When a girl says something about another girl, the boss should say, "Why are you messing with

that girl? What did she say to you? What is your trouble?” If that girl is wrong, the boss should go “Get out of my house. You caused a problem today and I am sure that you will cause another problem tomorrow.” The bosses should immediately terminate that girl’s employment.

What kind of a brothel would you like to have? How should the girls work? Should there be bosses or proxies? If any, how should your relationship with proxies be?

For sure, I want new admissions to be started so that girls are admitted to brothels. I mean, I want brothels so that they can offer a regular working life. Then, the bosses and proxies should know their places. I want everyone to work within a framework of respect. But as you have just said, all of the brothels in Turkey are being closed. I don’t believe that they will start new admissions from now on. Even if new admissions begin, this time the bosses will be too big for their britches. They will dismiss the former girls just like they did in Istanbul. For instance, I was admitted to the brothel system in Istanbul. Matild Manukyan had recently passed away and most of her houses were shut down, so the bosses admitted the girls with an elimination during the admission process. They admitted the girls with good work. They girls who weren’t that popular were dismissed. Those girls have their registration into the brothel system while there is no house that they can work with. Does this make any sense at all?

Do clients come? I heard that the number of clients dropped as compared to the past.

Honestly, I used to work for 2 hours a day when I first came. My daily earning was no less than 800-900 TL, even a thousand. I used to earn that money in two hours. But now, I start to work at 7.30 in the evenings but my daily earning is 300-400, 600 or very scarcely, 800 at weekends. Could I earn 1000 TL? No. Am I still grateful? Very much. If I am able to pay for my room and have 300 TL left for me after deducting my expenses, I am grateful. I don't aim for 1000 TL anyway, but the business is dropping. Why? There are so many elderly women inside. For instance, there are a lot of women who are way over 60 years old. The clients don't pay 30-40 TL for them. Sometimes, they offer 20 TL to me. How can they pay 30-40 TL to them?

In fact, it is as if they are attempting to out an actual end to the brothels by not beginning new admissions, so that the age gets older.

What will happen to those women? She is 60 something years old, yet no boss has deposited her insurance so far. She doesn't have any assurance from the state. If the bosses kick those women out, where can they go? If she had a retirement pension, she could go to a nursing home and pay for her accommodation there until the end of her life. Yet she has noth-

ing at all. What will that woman do on the streets at that age?

Cannot anything be done about this insurance issue?

What can be done? I am saying that her insurance premium wasn't paid for years. She is old now. even though she is old enough to become retired and live her life at home, she is still suffering at brothel.

Has your insurance never been paid here?

Never. I didn't want it either, as I have insurance from my father and I was receiving my salary. But, insurance is mandatory in Adana, so I had to cancel my father's salary.

This was similar in Istanbul, wasn't it?

It was similar in Istanbul. The accountant told me to register in the insurance system, but when I said that I didn't want it, he said "Suit yourself." I mean, it serves their purpose as well. Why? Because they keep 400-500 TL insurance payment per girl for themselves.

The insurance premium is based on minimum wage, isn't it?

I was depositing 440 TL in Adana. I deposited 440 TL each month for 4 months.

You are on the leave now, aren't you?

I am on the leave.

Due to the health condition issue?

Health.

So, in fact it is somehow mandatory?

Not mandatory. This isn't a disease. They are aware of this as well. VDR levels in my blood are 1.6. What is VDR?

What is it?

It isn't something like HIV or hepatitis. It isn't a disease that is transmitted through blood. It is just a germ. It is treatable with injection. But they intentionally leave you out for 30 days. My 30 days outside made me spend my saving for 4 months. Because I am spending my savings. I have to pay my rent and utilities.

Why do they do this?

I don't know why, but I am not the only person who suffers the consequences of these. There are many others like me. So, we come to my previous point again. The woman suffers and when she is in need, she has to borrow money from her boss. Then, she becomes compelled to give half of her earnings to her boss. She has to pay her debt. When she cannot

pay her debts, she becomes subjected to the humiliation of her boss.

When a woman borrows money, she has to give half of her earnings to her boss, right?

For sure.

Cannot she rent her own room?

For instance, if I call my boss right now and tell him that I am in need of 10,000 TL, he gives me that money. But when I go back to work at the brothel 1 month later, I have to give half of my earnings to him.

For sure, he wants the money.

For sure. And daily meal expenses equal to 50 TL, regardless of what you eat. What are you giving us to eat, are you slaughtering sheep or something?

Where does that meal come from?

For instance, if there are five girls, they buy 2 kg of spinach and cook it.

In the kitchen?

For sure. They serve yogurt and salad with it and charge you 50 TL for that meal. If there are 6 girls, the boss earns 300 TL.

Is it fair?

The boss profits from your meals.

For sure. 300 TL a day makes 9000 TL a month. You already take 9000 TL from that girl who has to give half of her earnings to you.

If you had the opportunity, to which brothel would you like to be transferred?

For work?

For work. I mean, somewhere that you can earn money and work comfortably without the troubles from bosses or proxies.

These troubles continue regardless of wherever you go. They stay the same. There aren't any brothels left in Turkey anyway. If you fail to pay for your room's rent for three days, the boss says; "You will either pay for that or evacuate the room." Let me give you a simple example. At which brothel can you be happy anyway? Everyone is defending their own interests. If you become sick for one week, the boss tell you to give your money by means of your proxy even if only 2 days have passed since recovered. There isn't a proper boss in Mersin brothel. All of them are hungry bosses. I witnessed that bosses make you work like a slave and inflict cruelty on

you in Mersin Brothel.

What would you want from the NGOs? For example, what would you want from our association? What should we do?

What should I want, what should we do? You know what's happening. You have told with how many people in similar situation with me you have talked. You should think well on these. You may compile a book with these interviews, so that you read that book and put yourself in my shoes. So you can say, "I want to do this."

What would you want from the government if you had one wish?

Do you know what I would want from the government? A salary of 1500 TL. I would like to work at a normal job with a salary of 1500 TL and I would like to quit this environment.

So, you want the government to provide you with a salary and insurance...

Yes and a job. In return for the job, I would like to work after quitting this environment.

Would you like to quit the brothel to return working outside again?

Honestly, it would be difficult for me to work outside. But I

don't know what the life will bring to me. If I become compelled, I obviously don't starve and go outside to work. But unless I am compelled, I won't do that That is why I am responding your question by saying I wouldn't work at the brothel if I had a job that could provide me with an income in the first place. If the salary I was receiving through my father was higher, say, 1500 TL, I wouldn't work. Honestly, I would quit.

[PEACE]

“A man can come and –excuse my language- get himself fucked inside, but when he goes out, he reports us for prostitution. When there is a home raid, he becomes our first and most fierce opponent. Everyone starts to behave like the vice squad all of a sudden before others. They have an understanding like, “We Kurds don’t do such things” and “People from Diyarbakır don’t become like that” - so it is very difficult. “

DİYARBAKIR

Can you talk about yourself? How old are you, where were you born and what do you do for a living?

I am 26 years old. I was born in a village in Diyarbakır. I attended to elementary school in the village, and I attended to the secondary education in a boarding school. These YIBOs (regional secondary boarding schools) were established with the intention of assimilation. I attended to YIBO and I attended to high school in the city center. I attended to university in Mardin. After graduating from the university, I was unable to find a job. I was admitted to a few jobs, but I was unable to work due to harassment or I was rejected for being a queer.

Did you work in Diyarbakır?

Yes, these all happened in Diyarbakır.

Which department did you graduate from?

Construction Technician Program. Then I went to Istanbul. Obviously the only solution was becoming a sex worker, which was difficult in Diyarbakır. I went to Istanbul. I was subjected to discrimination due to my ethnicity and I had to return.

What kind of a discrimination?

The queers there were making fun of me for being Kurd, but this isn't a nice thing. I suffered from discrimination twice. I returned to Diyarbakır. I worked here for about 1.5 years. My family found out. In fact, it wasn't all of my family. Only a few people from my family learned about it. Then I took a break. I was aimless without money for 8 – 9 months, then I found a job at a private hospital. While I was working there, they weren't giving me so much of money. They didn't pay my salary either. It wasn't specific to me, they didn't pay the salary of the entire staff. I have been unemployed again for 10 days and I am compelled to do this again because I have my rent and overdue bills to pay...

Did you quit for being unable to receive your salary?

I had to quit because they weren't paying my salary. I worked for about 1.5 years, but I had to quit as they didn't pay my salary.

You briefly mentioned this, but can you explain when and why you started to do this? How did you come up with this?

I was attending to 2nd grade at the university. I was a queer and I was penniless. I was having so many problems with my

family, particularly with my sister. I ran out of money when I had problems with my family. I was attending to university at another city, therefore I needed the money. I had to pay my rent and transportation expenses for commuting between the school and home.

In Mardin?

Yes, in Mardin. You need to put bread on the table. I remember being hungry for 10 days. When I was at the second grade, I remember being seriously hungry for 10 days. I mean, I was eating nothing for 1-2 days. Maybe a cheese sandwich. I was unemployed. Then, I ran into 1-2 queers at a bus stop. They understood that I was a queer as well, so we started chatting.

Did those queers have male appearance?

Yes, they had male appearance. They said, "Of you don't have money, why don't you become a sex worker?" I said, "Are you kidding me? Why would I do such a thing?" But I was broke and nobody accepted my job applications in Mardin. I was hoping that I could work and attend to school at the same time. But that didn't happen. Then, those queers gave me their phone numbers. I wasn't still considering it. I went back home, and there was nothing home. I was hungry again. I was unable to do anything. I had no money and I wasn't able to

do anything or go anywhere. I became compelled, so I called those queers and met with them. They arranged my koli. It was a normal man. When you looked at him, you wouldn't suspect anything. He was a normal man, like a family man who had a job and had a strong appearance. It lasted 15 minutes, but that intercourse felt like a century to me. I was feeling nauseous, I was about to throw up. I even ran to the bathroom as soon as it was over, and I threw up. I went home and took a shower, as if it was going to clean me. My payment was 70 TL, so I put that money on the coffee table and I didn't touch it for one week. I went to koli for I was hungry, but I still lived hungry for another week. I didn't touch that money for one week.

Why?

Well, it felt very awkward to me. I sold my everything to that man. My emotions, my personality, everything that belonged to me were lost at that moment. When I looked at the money... Well, when I had to spend that money, I ran out of money again. I had to do it a couple of times more at each grade, then it was over. I was very hopeful, saying to myself, "I will get my diploma and work now." Obviously, you can't. I mean, nobody accepts your applications. Nothing happens in Diyarbakır. I was accepted to a couple of places and worked for a few days before quitting again. I mean, my style made

it obvious. And my behaviors... Then, I was accepted somewhere else and I worked there for two days. On the third day, the boss called me to his room and wanted me to become a husband for him. I mean, he wanted me to be active. I said, "What are you doing, what is this?" I didn't accept and left the room. He called me in the evening and told me not to come work anymore. After experiencing a few incidents like being unable to find a job and being kicked out when I was accepted again, I was stuck in a very difficult situation. So I started as a sex worker when it was 2011, I guess. Yes, it was 2011 when I started as a full-time sex worker.

If you reflect on your life since you have first started as a sex worker, how has it been?

It isn't a stable psychology, you cannot be really happy. You may have a good time, but how can you be happy with an unstable psychology? We aren't happy.

Why isn't your psychology stable?

Our profession poses a risk to your own life. I encounter with clients who take out their gun and put it on the table, psychos with knife in their pocket, sado-masochist types with disgusting fantasies... So, all of these disrupt my psychology. Your mental status has to be very strong. I mean, you go some-

where to have some fun, but you cannot stop suspecting if they are dangerous. You have to think these all the time.

Are you pleased with your current life?

Partially. I wish I had a better job, there was a better society and I had more sensitive people around me, but I am still pleased.

Let's assume that you earn 5,000 TL per month as a full-time sex worker –because there are people who can even earn 10,000 although it depends on the city and your working conditions- but you have the opportunity to work in another job with a monthly income of 2,500 TL. Which one would you prefer?

I would opt for another profession.

Why?

Even if I earned less, I would face no problems.

What kind of a live would you like to live?

I decided to transform, so I want this. I always had it inside me. I want to complete my gender reassignment process so

that I can be with my family, boyfriend, husband...

You don't want to do this job, but you can work in another job.

Yes, I don't want to do this job. I don't want to be a sex worker. I am seriously doing this just because I don't have money.

Can you talk about your relationship with your family?

We were really good when I was working. Now that I quit job again, we are starting to have problems again. Because they know what I will do; they also understand that I will do this if I have to. When I sit down and talk to them, one of them gets angry and starts shouting. We start crying and it all turns out bad. But this isn't like this if I am working. I can come home and get out again anytime that I want. Nobody says anything. Now, if I go home late or don't go home, we start fighting.

This is koli house then, isn't it?

This is koli house, yes.

Are you living with your family?

Yes, I am living together with my siblings. This is a koli house.

I haven't left here for a few days.

Do they say anything to you?

They call me all the time, asking "Why aren't you coming home?" I mean, problems arise.

But they know, don't they? They understand it. But I guess you don't speak of these things?

They know, they understand. We never spoke about these by any means.

How was your relationship with your family in your childhood?

I didn't spend my childhood with my family; I was with them only until the 5th grade.

Then the boarding school...

Then I attended to the boarding school and I wasn't together with my family at the high school either. I couldn't spend much of my childhood with my family.

How was your relationship with them?

I was a village boy. All of the children in the village had their chores and they had to do them. I mean, you had to feed the calves and chicken, you had to fetch things. All of the village children work all the time. They always give you orders, so you may hate your father when he instructs you to do something. I mean, it wasn't a nice childhood. There were times that I felt happy, too. I used to feel myself happy in the village as well, because it is where all children would like to live. The village is a heaven for children, but it is very bad that you have to work.

Did you have any problems regarding your sexual identity back then?

Children always used to make fun of me. For instance, I was playing with girls instead of wrestling on the grass, so boys were constantly making fun of me.

Did your family give you any troubles?

For sure, my father used to get angry with me. For instance I used to milk the cows and help my mother and my father used to get very angry in response. He used to shout at me, "These chores aren't fit for a boy!"!

Was there violence?

Yes. He slapped me. There were a few more instances like that. People used to get angry with me since I spoke like a girl.

Can you talk about your current relationships with you social circle?

I don't see heterosexual people. I have just a few heterosexual friends. I see my friends from the work exclusively in the work environment, too. I don't call or meet anyone after getting out from the work. I see heterosexual people for this reason. I hang out with homosexuals.

How is your relationship with them?

Fine.

Do you ever have troubles?

For sure, sometimes somebody says something, which leads to jealousy. Like "You made my man cry, you did this and that..." So these things happen. Or, "Why aren't you coming to have fun with us?" These things often happen. I mean, this

is the queer environment. How could I express this?

OK, I will skip this part. So, are your working conditions good? Are you comfortable while working in the koli location? Do any other things bother you? You work here now, don't you?

My boyfriend is currently bothering me.

Doesn't he want you to work?

He doesn't know.

You don't want him to know... What if he learned about it?

He wouldn't say anything, but he would become deeply sad. I don't want him to know. Therefore, when I call him or when I am working, I am worried about when he will come. I have to go and clean my make up and complete all these preparations.

Is your relationship poor? I guess you have a good relationship but is it uneasy from time to time?

We are good but he is married. He was already engaged when I met him. He had been engaged for 15 days when we met. It

started with a joke. Then it got serious, and he got married. He doesn't go home and instead stays here several nights. He says that he got married since his family wanted this very much. He got married with the daughter of his aunt. This is what he is saying, but I don't know whether it is a lie or the truth. I cannot say anything as I haven't seen him at his home.

Does this bother you?

For sure, I feel deeply hurt when I go home.

Have you ever considered to leave him?

For several times. I even left him, but he managed to maintain the relationship in each time.

You returned to the fold...

Because I can't stand to being without him, I flip out if I cannot hear from him.

What do you think of when someone says violence?

Gun and stabbing.

Is it due to an experience?

This has been the way it is since my childhood. I guess I was impressed by a movie or something. I always think of guns and stabbing when someone says violence. In fact, when I was a child, the gendarmerie came and took my brother from home while they were beating him up. They had guns on their belts. This might be the reason as well.

By whom have you been subjected to violence so far? This might be a scuffle or battery as well as psychological violence.

When I am walking on the road, people made rude comments at me. My cousin and I were right in front of our building, heading to home in Bağlar. A group made rude comments from their car.

What did they say?

They said faggot, boy, transvestite... We were in front of the grocery shop from which I regularly buy my needs, I mean all the time. The shopkeepers kept silent. If they hadn't known me at all, maybe it would have been acceptable but I was their regular client. If I had kept silent, it would have implied that I was accepting the situation. So I swore at them, and

one of them got out from the car and came at me. I was assuming that they were 2-3 people in the car. It turns out that they rented a car, so they were as crowded as possible in the car to take a tour together. When he came, I punched him. Then I looked up to see 10 people. They beat me up real good there, right in the middle of the street. I remember having been kicked in the face for 6-7 times.

When did this happen?

I guess it has been 6 months since then. When I was on my way to get laser epilation 4 months ago, a sick man in the plaza made a rude comment. When I said "What, what?" he started swearing and shouting at me. Then we started to beat him up. While we were beating him up real good, the shopkeepers reacted, like "How can queers beat up someone?" My finger was broken in that incident, and I had an operation. My finger has remained like this since then, it isn't like it used to be. So, these things happen. Psychological pressure is quite extensive, too. I mean, even being called "faggot" or "boy" makes you feel bad. It also happens in the workplace as well. They stare at you awkwardly and whisper with each other when you turn your back at them. All of these are violence, there is also psychological violence.

Sexual violence?

As for sexual violence, I was removed out from my home by force with gun.

Can you tell about it? I mean, if you would like, obviously...

No it isn't a problem, I am just thinking of how to piece the story together. My cousin is younger than 18 years of age. He is with me all the time but he doesn't do anything; he works at the law office of my uncle. He is homosexual, but I didn't do anything to him. I mean, he didn't become a homosexual after emulating me. I mean, it is inherent to him. He felt that he were close, so he was with me all the time. Well, I had a koli house and I was living apart from my family. He used to come to stay at my home for the night from time to time. Then, he used to go home so as to protect me from any potential problem that my family could cause since he was with me. His older sister was in an attempt to protect him, as she sees it. She came after the child and followed him. She also found my account on the internet. I was a sex worker back then. Supposedly for protecting my cousin, I was attacked online for a few times. They were hoping that I could get better or something. She had a psycho boyfriend, she sent him to my home. My cousin was outside then, he was about to go home. My cousin couldn't find a bus at the bus stop, so he rang my door and

I opened it. I saw two psycho men at the door; one of them had a scar on his face while the other one was...weird. How could I express this? They looked like homicidal types. They asked my name, but they used my alias I used for prostitution while asking. I said, "No that person moved away, I recently moved here" and I closed the door again. They knocked on the door again and when I refused them and attempted to close the door once more, one of them stuck his foot in between and took his gun out. They came inside. I had two other friends at home then. I don't know if you have ever heard of their names, but they are currently members to the association as well. So these men came in and dialed my phone number. When my mobile phone rang on the coffee table, I was revealed. Maybe they would have gone otherwise, but I was revealed. My friend fell down on the floor and fainted. They took me outside my home at gunpoint. While they were taking me downstairs, my cousin was climbing upstairs as he couldn't find a bus at the bus stop. They took him with us as well. They were intending to give a lesson to me. They took me to a wilderness and raped me at gunpoint. You see, they raped me at gunpoint.

What were they talking about while they were taking you? Because what they said is important, isn't this strange? They want to punish you, but they do the very thing they were criticizing you about. The rape.

They didn't disclose their identity. They just took me from my home as if their sole intention was raping me and they didn't know me at all... After it was over, they took my photos at that moment. He told who he was and why he did it.

Doesn't this feel strange to you?

Yes. While they were taking me, I was thinking that they were going to kill me. I was at gunpoint in the car, so I assumed that they were about to kill me since I didn't know who they were. If I had known who they were, I would have been so at ease that I wouldn't have allowed them to do anything. They revealed who they were after they were done, and I even swore at them then. After learning who they were, I felt courageous. They did it, and they left me. I couldn't go to the police as my cousin was a minor. If I had gone to the police, his sister was going to be involved as an accomplice as well. My family was going to learn about it. I was having some big problems with my brother and uncle, too. They were looking for me everywhere as they had learned that I was prostituting myself. I was unable to do anything, because I had no op-

tions at all. After crying frantically for a couple of days, I took refuge in my village. Then I came to Istanbul for the Pride Week, hoping that it could help me with getting better. That didn't go well either. I realized that I was unemployed and nothing had changed. I forgot to mention that the man, while he was dropping me back to my place, said to me "If you have any troubles, call me. I mean, just don't let the child to come to your place." I wasn't inviting the child to my place anyway. But when he comes by himself, I cannot tell him to go away. I am fond of that child, do you understand me? It feels like I have raised him. Thereafter, I decided to mind my own business after recovering.

I changed my home and rented a new one. I didn't have money, but a friend helped me. I was intending to work at that home for 15-20 days. I received a message to my phone, addressing me with all of my real name and ID details. They said that they had my photos and they had uploaded them to the website where transvestites worked. They were threatening me with bringing those photos to my father and uncle, whose addresses were also written. When I asked them what they wanted, they said it was 10,000 TL. If I had had that money, I wouldn't have received money from my friend. I thought to myself, "What will I do now? This message must be coming from that man." I guessed that. Because, he had mentioned the name of my uncle while he was taking my photos that

night, too. He had mentioned my uncle's name and workplace. So I said, "That must be him, he knew these details." I phoned the sister of my cousin – well, she is also my cousin. I explained her what was happening. I told her, "Tell them to come and find me. Whoever did this should find me." She asked, "Did they do it?" I replied, "No but they should find who did it." I wasn't sure of who did it, but these people who sent the message knew the address just like the men from that day, and they also had the photos. He came to talk to me. I sat down and drank tea on the same table. Imagine that, I did this with my rapist; I met my rapist again. He gave me the photos and said to me, "I took the photos from those men, but I promised them to bring a gun." I said, "You shouldn't have done that." He also specified the model of the gun I had to supply. I said, "How could I bring that gun? How much does it cost?" Its price was 5,000 TL without registration and 7,000 TL with license.

Cannot they probably be the same persons?

They are the same people. I was asking for help, not a discount. I ended with a discount. I accepted to buy him a gun and came home. This time, he started to threaten me. I left there for the village and I didn't leave home for one month when I was at my village. I was psychologically disturbed, I had dropped to 50 kg from 70 kg. Thereafter, I arrived in Di-

yarbakır, seeking for help. The person who helped them to come after me and gave my address to them was a trans friend. A trans friend was involved, too.

Why could she have done that?

She was doing koli, so I was a competition for her. I asked for help from a few friends. It remained unresolved, they did nothing. The people from whom I asked for help were an association, or an organization. They did nothing.

But you shared the situation with them, didn't you?

For sure, I explained everything to them. They advised me to take legal action, which was going to create a stir. I didn't want anybody to hear or learn about this. My family was calling me in the meantime, but I wasn't speaking with anyone. So there was another way in Diyarbakır, they helped me.

What kind of a help?

They showed me the way to do this. For example, I was unable to go to my own home as they knew my address. I was preparing for public employment admission exams then, but I was unable to attend to my lessons either. They provided me with accommodation. I was invited to stay at their place.

When I went there, I said that I didn't want to take any legal action. So, a few big guns, I mean powerful people went to see them. They went to speak with them, and they convinced them to give up.

So it worked?

It worked and he gave up. Nothing else happened thereafter.

What do you think about the attitude of the police towards trans sex workers?

I didn't have too many personal encounters with the police. I was staying with my friend early on. She is a member of the association now as well. We were staying at the same home when the police came at our door before the national holiday. I was ill and I was in bed, I remember this very well. I will tell you this but please don't laugh, I had taken ecstasy.

So you were high?

I was intending to recover by sweating with the pill... I was lying in bed when the door bell rang. There were 4 policemen at the door, shouting there. They were intending to disclose us, obviously. They tried to search the house. We were 4 people at home: me, my trans friend, her boyfriend and another

friend. They were giving orders to us, telling us to come to the door. They were trying to get inside, but they were prevented as they were asked for a search warrant. The police said, "Come downstairs with us so that we can show you our search warrant." Such a nonsense. Well, they took my trans friend, his boyfriend and our other friend downstairs and started interrogating them separately. Supposedly they were going to show their search warrant, yet instead they were questioning each one of my friends in another corner.

If they had the search warrant, they would enter inside anyway.

Yes they would. Yet there they were, shouting in the building. I was ill and standing at the door. I was asked if I was high repeatedly, and I always answered them saying I was ill. Then the police said, "Go and sleep." Their intention was very obvious. I mean, that raid was arbitrary. They were intending to get some money before the national holiday. I mean, we guessed so. Another day, we were at the house of another trans friend. We were so crowded: me, 3 trans friends, my cousin, the boyfriend of a trans friend and a koli. They police came to our door. When you think about it, it is actually funny. They took all of us and brought to the police station.

On what ground?

Someone reported us for prostitution, therefore they took all of us and brought us to the police station. The koli deliveries were smart, so they didn't disclose anything. They said, "There was nothing, I went to their home to meet them. Can't we go to anybody's home or something?" The police were saying, "We will issue them fine if you state that you have given them money." The client said, "No, I didn't give any money. But I wish I had given. I didn't know that they were poor." He was making fun of the police. We weren't subjected to any ill-treatment at the police station, but their words were quite grouse. A policeman asked, "Do you have sex with each other? Do you stay together?" Ugly stuff like that. These things can get you depressed.

This is psychological violence... In fact, this is ill-treatment...

Another thing happened while they were taking us out from home. We were taken downstairs, and waited in front of the building to get on the car. The policemen were crowded as well. The people around us saw us. I mean, they disclosed us to everyone. I mean, that was a very ill-treatment as well. My friends also told me of their attitude when they go wheeling... Sometimes they go outside to buy a pack of cigarettes at night, but the police issue fine to them anyway. I guess I

didn't encounter the police so many times.

Have you ever been subjected to violence by your boyfriend?

Psychological violence.

So there is no physical violence, is there? Nothing like sexual violence or forced intercourse, I guess. While saying psychological violence, are you referring to the incident you previously told?

Yes.

Have you ever been subjected to violence by the clients?

I grappled and fought with some of them a couple of times.

What was the reason? Couldn't you agree on money, or was it something like "I couldn't come"?

It was a nonsensical man. Their understanding is based on that you have to sleep with everyone if you are a sex worker or a trans person. If the client has chosen you, you are obliged to like that client. There is no alternative for them. So he comes in, touches you, tells you to take off your clothes

and all. But when you tell him to get up and leave once you are done, he is bullying you. What would you do if someone bullied you in your home? You would grapple, in an attempt to hold him and kick him out. This was the most usual reason. Or, they just make a trouble at the last minute. When it is over, I ask them to give the remaining part of the money. This is why I grappled. Or I really trusted some of them, but they refused to pay. Everyone is cunning in our day.

Do you believe that there is justice in this country?

No. Certainly not. If there were justice, sex workers would have unionized. Actually there are several reasons. If you are being othered, there is no justice at all.

For instance, people talk about Hezbollah here. They talk about Hüda Par, ISIS or that even Kurdish freedom movement so conservative that trans sex workers are ignored.

There is also that. Kurds have an understanding that they don't have trans persons among their people. We don't tell our clients that we are from Diyarbakır. I say that I am from Adana. If I said that I am actually from Diyarbakır, maybe they can bring me trouble. I mean, they have adopted an understanding that their people don't do such things. It is very difficult in Diyarbakır, because "Diyarbakır people don't do such

things.” This is very difficult and everyone behaves like the vice squad, you see? A man can come and –excuse my language- get himself fucked inside, but when he goes out, he reports us for prostitution. When there is a home raid, he becomes our first and most fierce opponent. In comparison to the western cities, the level of education is fairly low here. So they haven’t seen anything. I mean, that also has its effect. Education is a must.

Do the political parties help? For sex workers to work in safe conditions or to become trans individuals...

They don’t help sex workers at all.

Really?

They don’t. I have never been helped. I haven’t seen any of my friends being helped either. Therefore....

What do you think of BDP, or as they are called now, HDP?

I have seen nothing. Is there anything visible that they have done? I have seen nothing. As you said, action is very important here. Yet they do nothing here. We previously applied to the municipality for our association here and we were turned down. There is nothing. There is no help at all in any form. If

you cannot do anything, at least give us a place like a home with the rent paid for two years, so that we can start an association and invite people there to raise their awareness. They didn't help us even in that respect.

Would you like the government to offer you safe working conditions?

Yes, for sure. As I have said before, if sex workers were unionized, maybe I would have a policeman and a signboard at my door. It would be better. Maybe I would have the opportunity to become retired, to be safe. Everything would be smooth. I wouldn't have to see that everyone is against me. I would like to be protected by the government.

What do you think about the perspective of this region towards prostitution? I mean, the society here, how is its perspective towards prostitution?

They are conservative. They are obsessive about sins and filth, but they do it anyway. I mean, everyone here is doing it. If there are, say, 100 working queers, there must be another 200 working women. The city isn't that big either. I mean it isn't small, but it isn't big, too. 300 sex workers. If each one receives 5 clients per day, calculate how many clients there are. I mean, maybe all of Diyarbakir is involved in prostitution

within one month. All of them are against it, but all of them are doing it. Their objection is based on religion as well as their understanding of “Kurds don’t do such things.” You see, supposedly Kurdish girls cannot be whores and Kurdish boys cannot do these.

What is your opinion on the Kurdish political movement’s aggression towards sex workers or its actions in regard to pointing the sex workers as targets?

Don’t those involved in this movement think how to create employment for the youth? I quit my work and am currently unemployed. If I applied to BDP, would they offer me a job? I will be compelled to do this as long as they don’t offer a job to me. They are forcing me to prostitution, then. To top it all, are they organizing rallies? As I was saying, they are both objecting to it and doing it. This is their world.

Do girls here report each other’s houses?

Of course they do. The police came at my door for numerous times. I was new in this job back then, yet the police were coming to my home before I was able to do anything. They are jealous. I guess they adopted this behavior from the women here.

Firstly, do you trust politicians? Secondly, if we assumed that you trusted them, what would you want from them? What would you request for them for your life?

I would like everything to be more proper and equal. And I don't trust them, they lie all the time. None of their commitments are fulfilled, all of them are made of lied. Therefore, I don't listen to them or follow politics. But, I would like a more equal life. A more equal life. For instance, BDP youth could have tried to find job solutions for people engaged in prostitution instead of marching against them.

Or, there are a high number of people who are engaged in prostitution willingly. They have adopted this as a profession and they earn their life with it.

If sex workers organized rallies for unionization, everyone wouldn't engage in prostitution. Only those who paid their taxes to the government would engage in prostitution while those who didn't pay taxes wouldn't.

[RAINBOW]

“You know how the police in Turkey perceive us? The police perceive us as null. They do not perceive you as Turkish citizens. Not even as a citizen in fact they do not even threat you as a human. Let me describe it this way, for them, we are now talking about the police, even the stray dogs mean something, we do not. They would shoo the dog but kick and swear at us. .”

BURSA

Could you tell about yourself first please?

My birthdate is 01.11.1983. Born in Tunceli. I have Zaza roots. I am a member of a very good family. In terms of culture and life-sustaining and education I come from a very fine family first of all. Besides this, being good in terms of culture and education, of course there were difficulties I faced in this family as a homosexual. Thus I choose this way. I choose this way because; let us not say it is because of the domestic oppression since my family did never oppress me, because of the inner contest of myself, my inner problems. I mean I was not comfortable near them. I constantly hurt them. My moves, I was not able to hide them. But let me also say this one, what I regret the most is to be a transvestite.

Why?

I did not choose to be transvestite just to experience the sexuality better. Or did not choose it in a way that I thought to be female. I choose it completely for myself, to be myself, to live myself. However, to be honest, the society we live in, the state, life conditions, financial problems made me regret very much. I would definitely prefer to keep my life as a gay if a had returned back to the past.

When did you first start to do sex work?

I was 20. Sure.. this has some 13-14 years of history. I mean 16-17. Yes, I took the chance of this as I was 17. I had the thoughts of being able and unable but it was at the age of 20 in the end. I became a sex worker at the age of 20.

You were meeting your family then?

No.

How did you begin?

I was not meeting them for sure. I mean my family did not have any such feeling for not meeting me. I had the fear of them to accept it. I mean it is that that may call me back home and convince me and I might upset them. Otherwise I had absolutely no problems at all with them. I repeat grew up very good, rich in culture... I am able to talk with my mum as if i was her daughter, her own daughter. One of my siblings, can you imagine, call me sister. So I have such a great family. I have a little, 12 years old sibling, call me brother, I accept that. He hugs me so cordial. Look, calls me brother and hugs me cordial. Becomes so happy when I buy him a gift and he is able to call me and express his wishes. I have no complaints at all about my family. Well now, I regret the most for upsetting my family. So much, I regret it so much.

You think you upset them to become transvestite?

Yes, sure. Because I could stay with them as a gay. I mean I speak of the actual life conditions. I am graduated from high school. I got the third grade of the department and the school, imagine, I got diplomas of Adnan Menderes University. I learned the life not by seeing, not by knowing but by reading. Look, you live by both seeing and knowing and I learned the life by reading too. I did step in some things consciously, I repeat. But I faced the regret later on. Let me say it this way, I mean being transvestite is something totally different. Really so different... You are neither a male nor a female. Nobody shouldn't ever and ever fool themselves saying that they are females. You are female if the Holy God has placed a womb in this belly. You are a woman as long as you give birth. There is no femaleness of the way you sit and stand, the lipstick you wear, your hair you dye and tie up. That is already shown us by the society and the people, by filling it in our face. Sometimes I think, yes I choose this way, I risked some things by choosing this way, so much hot money came. I mean, making money seemed easy. Nice flow, you can dress up, spend, you are not under anybody's command. I mean there is a sort of comfort, economical freedom. It is rather, easy money. We've got to admit that. I would not know, instead of carrying stones, we observe the construction workers, sales clerks, road workers, trash collectors. 1500-2000 TL

for a living, there are peoples for this. May be this seemed better to us. Or if I should speak of myself, I found this better. I got such friends that have 3-4 kids and doing this for money. I do never take any offence of life, I am a strong transvestite, look, I don't say I'm a female, I never said that I was a woman for all my life. I am a very strong homosexual. Many things have I confronted. And I have many friends like me who confront some things and still confronting. When I look 10 years back, we didn't have the right to live. They shaved our head, beat us with dogwoods, dragged and given a kick into the riot police cars, abused.. What for? To become a woman? What for? To experience our sexuality freely? Wow, I say, wow. Got my face smashed, got emboweled, got stabbed on the legs... I mean, when I think, I lived but why? All vain. On the other hand, there is the obligation to live. The God takes back the life God gave. Look, the obligation to live. You get in the circle and get the first hit there from your friends, your sidekicks. Why did I get in this circle? You get used later on and then you are not envied in various ways. You hair, your brow, your nose is not envied. It's a matter if you blossom and you are held against with your ugliness, too. I recall, I had the facial palsy at the age of 14. Many operations and heavy traumas, etc... My close friends called me the awry mouth, skewed mouth from my back, they said that I looked like something, there were the times I heard such things. I mean the life is really difficult, living is so difficult. I mean I don't believe a

very rich one; even Mustafa Koc does not live so comfortably. Everybody has a life concern. Everybody has a life experience.

**Could you tell how you began? What did you do the first?
You met whom?**

Let me say so, there is a change of your moves, that is something every homosexual live. I mean, feminine moves in a body of a man, feminine laughs, and feminine talks. Mimes change. And this is odd to me. Why odd? Because I am a child of a family that is being proud of. Yes, not a rich family's but I am proud of my family. My mother has always told me this for all my life: If you have femininity inside you I am even ready to have you operated, ready to take you to doctor, either psychological or the other way. But I felt abused and run away next to a female escort friend of mine. Cleaned her toilet, washed her things, I mean the clothes, washed her dishes, and cooked her. I mean, we call it 'domezlik', it's to say handmaiden, maid. However you conceptualize it, I became exactly the maid. Because you need to start somehow. She would yell at you when she is short of money, he would say you stole it. She would stick the problem when she has trouble with the customer, she would have you as the problem. I mean, you are a slave to her. You, yes, are sleeping at her place, there is an obligation. No one else would accept you. But no one. Because the human flesh is heavy. I mean we

all have lived this. We may live this at a transvestite friend's house and female friend's house, too. Nobody's flesh is ever light. Everybody is heavy. I suffered a lot. A lot. So begins my life. Before anything else, I left a family behind that I could oppose because there is no one to oppose, only me. It all began so.

How would you describe the life you had since the first time you begin? I mean you don't have to give a long answer to that.

A total nightmare. Believe that. I mean each one have a dream. You are born with this dream. I speak of the world on my behalf. I had a dream. But it is only a nightmare.

I don't know if you would 'no' it but are you pleased with your life today? You may take that in any aspect; financial, social...

Not at all. I repeat. I didn't get into this for money. I mean I'm not doing this to make money. I mean, I underline that, I'd not know how this will be expressed or reacted but I mean that, absolutely but absolutely I did not choose to be transvestite for money, this life. I choose this for myself. But I am not pleased.

Why?

Society. Forget about the state, it is already enemy to us. Society. Your neighbor, friend, fellow, lover, look what I say, your lover. Bus driver, banker, nurse, doctor, attorney, all. I mean external factors, internal factors...

Are you in contact with your family now?

Yes, I am.

What sort of a relation do you have?

Maybe I am alive because of that. I am a child of a very poor family. I am 30 years old and I got 3 little brothers, I said, one is 12 years old. One got married, did the military service. The other is back from the service, set in his life way.

How is your relation with your father?

Bad. We are not seeing.

Have you tried to set a relation?

Sure. Before they were back in the hometown, they lived in Gemlik, my father was not leaving his room when I was at home. The younger of the middle child, I have so many problems with him. He is no enemy to me but all he wants, he accepts me even the way I am but he wants me to be back home. My mother says that he calls me some; I mean moms

never lie, never, us the homosexuals are very into our families. Our money, properties, goods, lives; we are so into our family that we could give our lives away. So, we may be abnormal according to the external world but we are more familial than the normal as the abnormal. More dominant to our family and more into them. He said my mom this, I absolutely accept him all the way he is, I can take care of him. Look this one here is a totally different feeling but a very nice one. But let me get back now, look this is also so different, I'd like you to listen to this very carefully, let me get back home, how can I be there? What can I do? Because I have to take care of them. I repeat, I am someone who has to take care of his family. I am not responsible only of myself. When you get to the fridge, there is nothing to eat. Bills of electricity and the water have not been paid, so on. The family needs a huge support. Otherwise I see them so nicely and my relation with them is very good really.

Could you tell about your relations with friends?

I am so proud of myself. Yes, I had many friendships that I had many troubles but I am definitely not a vengeful one, everybody likes me very much. So much I mean, I might be fooling myself but me, as for myself, I have no harm to anyone. I make no gossips. No jealousies. Never. If I have something, may the God give the others more. I speak this with my entire hearth. All my sidekicks... I have many beau-

tiful female friends, many beautiful male friends, I have a very nice affair for 6 years, and look 6 years with a normal man, I repeat, I am having a very good relation with a man who can be active. So it is to say that my human relations are very good. You observe that, you hear that. But I'd not know how my friends see me. I mean, the friendships in our environments are: ah so sweat you are, you are so cordial, you would get through this door and just after you leave they would say fucking fagot. I repeat it, fucking fagot. They would add ten more to one word, a life truth. The human relations, look it is not only by my point of view, so, not only our homosexual society, in all concepts; woman, man, homosexual. Lesbian, gay, transvestite, I mean male and female, this is even so with the animals, speaking honestly, there is a huge jealousy. Jealousy, this is what ruins all the friendships.

I'd ask the working conditions. In what sort of environment you are working?

I used to work on the highway. I mean, when I started to this, I started at the highway, not exactly outside the city but close to that. After that, I work at my place now. I mean, my own place, where I stay, the place I rented.

For how long?

The sixth year now.

**When compared, which one you would prefer the more?
The street or the home?**

Well actually a nice question. Nice question but if that was up to me I'd not prefer any of them. I mean, wish there was no environment like this, neither the street nor the house. Yet the question is asked. I would definitely prefer the house.

What do you recall when we say violence?

Despair. Hopelessness. Obligation.

Whose violence have you been exposed so far?

I swear to God that I was subjected to violence more from the friend than my father, from the police of Turkish state, my neighbor too. This is not meaning the beating. I was subjected to psychological violence too, got assaulted too. I mean I faced everything. But believe me my parents did not ever beat me even once but so many have I been through.

Would that be too hard if asked you to tell me one? Or there is no need to?

No, I can tell. The first times I was doing "the wheel", wheel, I mean when I was at the highway, on the road, you stand on one side of the road, the car stops, you make the deal on the price, you get in, you get them somewhere you know, and

get back after you are done. I saw this first from my friends. In fact we were couple of friends. I was still CD then. Actually let's not say CD. I was a gay then. I still did not know what was dying the hair, the female dresses, I mean I was still at the recovery phase yet. Exactly underneath a bridge, all my hair torn, all my hair I repeat, all my face smashed, all back, feet, chest.. And you know how many friends I have? How many female friends.. May be 15 of them and the males with them. How would you come this here? How can you work? I faced this may be thousand times, I repeat look not only once, so many times, I faced it so many times, I was left all naked in central Bursa, only with my panties on me. Look, I repeat, only with my panty and I am running back home this way, all naked. No mobile phone, no purse, where? We'd not know. So, believe it is more than 100 times. Now, let's not say thousands, it'd be nonsense but I experienced the violence so many times, too many violence. From my own friends, my sidekicks, friends circle, transvestite friends, transsexual friends.

Dou you have any friends you trust now?

No, there is not. I only trust, one man that I am with for 6 months. I mean I'd not know how wrong is that. But he is the only one I trust and my mother. I trust no one else, no one.

What do you think about the attitude of the police against the queers?

That is the main question. Whose violence are we exposed to as the citizens of the Republic of Turkey? Some part of it is from them. Not only by beating. By swearing, by insulting, by immoral treatments. Not everything is only slapping. But you know how the Turkish police perceive us? Null. They do not perceive you as Turkish citizens. Not even as a citizen in fact they do not even threat you as a human. Let me describe it this way, for them, we are now talking about the police, even the stray dogs mean something, we do not. They would shoo the dog but kick and swear at us.

Have you ever been subject to the violence of your lovers?

Not at all. I can do this for all my life but I am for monogamy. For I earn my life this way, I mean I provide my finance this way, I live this life but my husbands, same for the ones in the past, they did clothe me my socks, did prepare my breakfast. I never was, by my partners... Absolutely and absolutely, with a care for woman, I don't say that I am a woman but with a female care, always with such a care, such an attention, believe me, I got such attention. I have no complaints of my partners, never. I had a husband who would take the cherry stone from my mouth. So, let him be happy believe, so happy. He might have married and started a family now. The previ-

ous husband of mine used to wash my back in the bathroom. Look, I'm saying that he used to give me a bath. So, there are also peoples who like us. There are peoples who treat us like a human too. My first lover was married. I was not able to do it with a married man, to be honest. We have a certain pride and the passion. Us, I underline it and please write that, we are more proud and honorable than a female-born one. Look, write this, I'm not telling this for I treat women like dirt, how great are our mothers but women are not a patch on us I mean.

On customer violence...

Here comes another issue. Let me tell about a recent thing. I have the complaint petition of this; this also has the police station. I mean, I have the document received from the station. A customer of mine who had earlier came again. Listen to this carefully, this one is quite interesting. Coming home and at the point I say I was not a female, he is leaving with his friends saying they were there for female and insulting me. After five, six months I guess, look how interesting, I just noticed a click on the window and I had a guest, a customer then, talking frankly here. In our words, we have koli. I told myself to mind out. Who's there? I opened the window, that boy. Here I came to you; you're stuck in my mind. Look the man who uncovered me near my friends, who spurned me near my friends because I don't have a vagina has come. So

called the man, 25 something, yet a boy but mind-blowing, stature. So I said, I had a transvestite friend near me, I said I would not get in but I had the guest but if you want I have a friend, the friend could get in. And he said why not. Okay I said, you two may go I said. He came, said a nice hello, and washed his hands and face. They went there inside, made the deal on the price. Something we live with the customer. I thought my transvestite friend; my dear friend is probably enjoying it that's why they are not back for an hour. It turns that he received 50 TL, underlining it, 50 TL received, the man is not able to ejaculate and taking revenge on the transvestite. And they got out all of a sudden, I asked her what happened. She said look he is yelling at me, trying to hold my neck. The situation here changes directly. We are friends, dears. What's up I said. She was not able to ejaculate me, pay me back. How much you received girl? 50 TL. I am not despising 50 TL. Sometimes we are in need of even 1 lira. People have such periods. This one, acting weird, changing etc... Either you pay me back or I don't leave the place. By golly! I am not using this life and this ass pointless. We got our ears left which is not done in yet. So I said if I pay you back, I will definitely become ashamed of myself as a transvestite. And immediately I took the decision and locked the door. Come and get if you can. But the boy is a macho action man, a type that can do anything anytime. He goes to the kitchen, holds a cup. I mean drinks water in his way, smokes

our cigarettes. I said I'd call the police and did it there. But the one did not think that I could do that and I don't know how but the police show up soon. There are our musses. Pushing each other. He is pushing me. Pulling me and I am pulling him back. I mean, we are having a fight at home. Because he will take the money back from me. But I wouldn't give it. No matter what they say, we may be making easy money but how do we make it. How do we make it. We've been to the police station and so on... This is the biggest problem. Biggest one I live with a customer, I couldn't ejaculate, give my money back. You are not female, pay me back. You already know to whom you came man alive! You read our texts; it is obvious from which web site you get. We are not claiming to be escorts. You see the huge transvestite text. You know to whom you come. So these are the biggest problems. Honestly, the customers are more depressed than us.

Ever exposed to the police violence?

Yes, I was.

What sort of violence?

Working at the road. I was literally taken by three policemen. I was taken into a park, there is a well known park here, I was left all naked and got beaten with police baton. Just because I was working on the road. As if I was the pollution, an eyesore.

I have been tying up the traffic for them. This is only one-tenth of. Tithe. I was dragged. Held by the hairs and dragged. May be 5 meters. Which of them should I tell? You are taken to the station and after then son of who knows what, thingy... So, the swearing I heard, the insults are innumerable. Forget about the beatings, believe me the words are heavier than the beating. As if you are a creature, a sickness, a bug. Bug is a living thing o! You don't have the hearth to step on t when you see the bug, you don't hurt the ant. You just take back your step not to spoil the ground, not to cause it to loose the way. I could not work for 20 days. 20 days. I was all black and blue.

I mean, so... Why they exist? To protect us. Why they exist? To protect the society, to bring the society in line. But why do our police exist? To realize the tyranny. To oppress the oppressed, to tear the weak apart, this is all. Come then, they are mulcting Turkey with tones, billions things... Go then flick them. Go then remove them from where they are. You are removed from where you live, get beaten, sworn at your mother and father and sister and the whole family. Come on flick them, remove them. What the hell is protecting the society, protecting what? I sometimes say, I think about, only if I had an offence and went on trial and I'd puke there. Who are you defending against whom? Who are you defending against whom? Us to be beaten, it is us to be sworn at, it is again us

who is victimized in case of even a little reaction. He is right coz you reacted. You, I will say, mister judge, step down, what about that. Let him stop a police at where he stands and let him slap him just because he was standing where he stood. Let him flick once. What will you say then? Believe I'd say. I give no shit about the penalty. I repeat, I'd stay in jail for a life time. Come on, step down. Go out and stand normal on the way once. Let the police ask your ID. And get slapped because of your ID, let us see what would your response will e to the man. You would say I am the judge, who the hell are you. We are not even able to say that, believe I'd say. The perfect answer. I'd say in truth. You are the judge of the state but why did I get that slap? You perceive him right. Many of my friends are in jail for resisting a police officer. I ask again you to, to rewrite this in the book. Many of my friends are in jail for resisting, for months, how many years I'd not know. Because of the reason they resisted. But he is hitting you o! That strike may hit your hearth or may injure you anywhere, may be you will die. How can not you protect yourself? I mean al the living have this self protection mechanism. Who are you protecting against whom? Many friends, all in jail. You know how many? All due to resisting the police. The actual victim of resisting the police is us again. Have I not got tear gas on my face? How many. I've the facial palsy and on my left eye I have problems. So may times I was exposed to tear gas. How many... Not only the gas. I found myself in between 5 men

and could not work for days..

Bursa has the story of Öykü Evren, many people we talk with tell about this. O heard and saw people escaping from her, they were crying before me. What have you lived? Do you have any experiences?

Now, that is so... I would call that the file. In truth. That is a file of law. A sole one, only one, an only body is struggling to get everybody under her thumb. I got no trouble with her at the moment. No troubles at all. But she exploited financially a lot. A lot. The only truth in the world was the money and she did everything for that. What all my friends have told, these are all for real. I confirm. I I see her passing by now I'd say a hello may be. Because we all live everything. We do forgive so many people. You can not guess whom we forgive. But she sponged on us a lot, taken a lot, eaten a lot. If I own nothing now it is because of her. I say that. Would I say bad or good, it is weird. I mean the circle of that is weird. She is one that can oppress anyone in accordance with her interests. But when it's friendship she is an excellent one. I'd never talk to her now. I've my own word, no one, except my God and mother, I'd not give into. I mean to no one, I repeat, I've been through so many yet I don't give into. But I'd say it this way, well done to woman, I say sometimes. She did, she really did and no one did anything. Not the state, not the police, not our friend did that. Our friend wow our friend could not protect us from

our friend. A very different friend of mine. A very dangerous friend of mine. I repeat, there is the exploitation, corruption, violence, insult. We are talking about a woman who has taken the state on, look; we are talking about a transvestite woman. We are speaking of a woman who has rebelled the huge Republic of Turkey, I repeat, we are talking about a woman. You only needed to be there to see how many of my friends were doing that. How many of our friends she betrayed. How many people were forced to work. How many people got beaten. It's 9 o'clock everybody out to work. It's 9 o'clock and people are out. No one shall be at home. Everybody has to get that money home. Everybody! Not even one. You are the enemy at the point you start the quarrel with her. She'd never accept you never see you. She'd do anything to offend you, to divulge you. But she has spread fear I guess, I speak for her I say. She has spread a certain fear. I mean, would anyone who doesn't give a shit about the state give a shit about you? Think about the state that we are not able to cope with the police and she is able, would she give a shit about us? She has given me a house, I stay there, even a dog would not stay there, I pay 700 TL rent. I haven't seen the landlord, I pay 300 for the bills, my friends witnessed that, she takes that 300 from me again. She is taking the money of the bill I already pay. Why is that? For I stay with my friend. So, now, what to tell, which to tell? Which of my friends have protected me? Which of my friends were there for me when I lived

these? Which? Everybody Öykü, Öykü... What have you been telling from her back, and yet nothing but fear before her o!

And, is there justice in this country?

There isn't. No justice at all. No. There is justice for those who have money, that's for real. You have justice if you have money. The state never accepts you. You are never right, never. The state listens to you, look; it pretends to be listening to you. I say that for justice. Listens to you for the law and only listens, no practice. I mean we live in a country where there is no right for the normal males and females. Will the state take us in consideration? Man alive, you see my shape, you are before the justice, you see how I dress and still call me sir o! The ID you gave me does not matter, my soul is what matters. I repeat, the soul I live matters. Me, man alive, am I there in suits? I am before you with a skirt on me, a bustier on me, how dare you calling me sir? What an insult is that? What an offense and a motive is that? Yet I am before the justice. I mean everyone is equal. How dare you break my hearth? No justice. I don't also think there will be.

What do you think about in general the attitude of the state towards whoredom, I'm telling the fines, house raids, closures of the brothels by force?

They actually are trying to satisfy their ego somehow. We have an egoistic country. I mean, the soils are perfect but the peoples living there are all rotten, dissolute. I mean you are already fornicate yourself as the state. You never visit a woman, a transvestite, I can tell about so many. No never, excuse me, taking the woman you se on the road and do your thing? Member of the parliaments to the ministers, from the ministers to the business men... I mean, the fornication is fornication everywhere. This has no end. This is only the blackout. So , let them know it so, let them know us such a state. I mean let them know as we are against the fornication but man alive, so many things of many has been revealed on the news. So many tapes so on. O, bull shit. A man can not make it without a woman, forget about the one, can not make it even with ten woman, he would ask for the eleventh, the twelfth... This is the desire, amour propre. How dare you calling it fornication. The word whoredom is quite wrong among us. When you respond someone... I mean, I say that for transvestites. The man comes to you, gives his money, and does the thing, leaves; man tries to kiss me in the lips, what whoredom is that? You would get very well what I say, this is not whoredom. You are doing it yourself to o! How many

slaves does the one leading have, who knows. Look, I repeat and I'm not afraid of that, how many sweeties, to visit in secret, who knows? Couple of them might have already been done. May be he is with transvestites. You wouldn't know. I know so many celebrities, visiting the same transvestite in secret in İstanbul. So which whoredom? Whoredom. Wow the state itself is the whoredom. Itself the state is the whoredom. The whoredom is in it. The word whoredom, look, it is something more hidden. I mean is sex a machine, a tool, a stone? No. You merge your body with the one other you want. You either pay for it or do not. The one with the money visits you since he likes you, he visits wishfully to you for relaxing purposes. Sex and the whoredom is relaxing I mean. Underneath their tables, closing up in the chambers what thy have been doing. I am the witness. They literally oppress their secretaries and get them in their chambers! One of our friends in Ankara passed away; do you know what lies in there in the diary? So many, so many things. I mean, excuse me but you govern the state and come visit us for the bed. So, the things experienced, believe, once it is all revealed... Wish it all was revealed, I swear to God I am ready to tell. People all have the feelings inside which are not touched at all. The man has the power, the money, and the potency. Me, I do it how I am, with this condition of mine, I do sleep with anyone I want. Would not he do that? Oh so many, what he should be doing! I swear to God, Russians, Kirgiz, English transvestites, Swiss

transvestites, look i mean I speak of the transvestites. Shit we do have even members of the parliament and the ministers doing the gays. I mean, no matter how much it is of a crime to speak of this but if I a not accepted in this society I do not accept this government, this state.

You think sex works should be recognized as a profession? Should the appropriate and safe conditions be provided?

Yes. Actually, how to say, not to be mentioned as the sex work but it may be mentioned as the relaxing centers. Because the mas is not living with you as if you were his wife. Not the way to have a long relationship with you. Five minutes, ten minutes or the night at the most. Look, I repeat, one night. Relaxing center might be a safe and a comfortable one. Because this could not ever be denied, this is a need to be fulfilled. Look, a need. As the bread and the water. The man desires a woman, visits a woman, desires a transvestite and visits a transvestite. Matter of desire. Under the name of the relaxing center or it may be under the name of the massage hall, as for me it has to be certainly in a safe way.

What do you think about the closure of the brothels?

I'd say so, the closure of the brothels served our purpose in some way. We are honest. I speak for my behalf. Because there is a fixed center and they know where this center is and

the community which knows what kind of people work at this center mobilize that way. But now the men, there is no center, no place, whoever they find it is that. I mean, whom they are able to find on the street, outside, at the bar, friends circle, internet or anywhere else. But this also is a tack. You know why? Closing the brothels and gives of many prostitutes, many gay friends of ours, many transvestite friends of ours and caused the internal disorder. This is a threat actually. This is done consciously. You both wish to set an order and set a different order by subverting the order. They are after bringing a disorder. In all matters. They are after taking the bed freedom, bedroom freedom of people. Okay, there are no brothels. It's very good for me I mean. More man would visit me. If there was one man coming then, five would come now. I mean we are hones, I repeat, and I will always be honest. I mean we are strong ones. Yet there is a problem. You close the brothel but raise the whoredom on the street. Let me not say whoredom, you know I do not accept whoredom, yet this is how they call it, you increase the sex on the street. It's in the houses then, underneath the trucks, Lorries, inside the buildings, the gardens, behind the trees, gardens, fields, cars. So, what happens then, illegal to whore inside the car, pollution, disturbing thingy, thingy decision. You already have closed the brothels. Where are these people supposed to do? Under the lamp? So let us bend over underneath the street lamps. Gosh!

Would you like to pension right and your insurances to be paid?

Oh so many I'd... But I don't want any of my friends to pass their life on this way. I'd like them to have a job, a profession. I do have for example many well-educated friends. Let them do their jobs. I don't like them to use this as a way of trade, a tool. I mean, remember that: live by the sword die by the sword. I saw no friend who had retired and had sex and is at the age of something, never saw. Underneath the cars, inside the garbage containers, all dead, all death. Always the death. Saw no happy one. I'd actually wish they lived the sex with the special one, they do it just because they wanted, not for money. Yet they'd to have a profession, to get a job, I'd like to be helpful with that a lot. I mean, before anything else, look, before all, I'd wish them to protect them in various aspects.

If you had one wish right from the politicians, I mean the one with the highest priority, what'd you ask concretely?

For our behalf, this interview is made, it is made for sex workers, you know there are both females, gays, lesbians and males too amongst the sex workers. Let them save us for real. In truth, let them save us.

In what sense?

A friend of mine lately was stabbed 57 times. Her place was all in blood. At her place. A friend like a mountain, literally I mean the stature, a very beautiful one, found death in her bedroom for example. What for? For she did the sex for trade. She was usurped. Robbed. Killed. What else could that be, she dies I mean. The end of this one is the death; I say it all the time. If you are doing this job, you need to keep the death under your right arm and the order under the left one, you have to. Let us save us. Is that the life? Someone please tell me is that the life for God sake. You wake up in four walls, wash up, make up, so someone is to screw you and you will get the chickenfeed to pay the rent and the bills. Is that the life? Nobody shall dare saying me that this is the life. So what price even if you own ten houses on this way? Twenty houses, so what price? With the fact that you have no rest.

Which friend you were mentioning? İrem?

Yes. Deceased İrem. May she rest in peace, in heaven. So many friends of mine were killed on the road. They all are in the grave now. What for? For money. Can anyone sell her own body in exchange with money? I mean that now. Is that a proper issue? Is that a humanistic thought? No. The human body has no value. Holy God spares your body, gives you such a nose, such a lip, such feet and hands. Yet thousands of hands

do touch you. What for? Making money. They buy you as their money. Five minutes, ten minutes, a day, a night. For real, let them save us. Let them take our lives under protection. Both in terms of health, look both health and in every terms. Because our health is under danger. There is AIDS, there is pox, there is I don't know what. Not only the effects to be observed externally, I mean we have diseases. I do sex work, I have the man with condom to be protective, and how do I know that the condom does not tear inside me. Who could guarantee me about that? Death again. How many friends of us have died of AIDS. How many of us by AIDS... Do they ever check on these?

Would not that be a better world if the safe conditions were given, as it is in the other countries where there is no rape, no violence, no stabbing, no sexually transmitted infections where the state treats you as a human, if you were perceived as a professional, if your insurances were paid, if you were given your right of pension also at the age of 45 at the most, if you were not to sleep with anyone you don't want, if you were to go to the police in case anything happens to you and you were cherished, if you were perceived as a normal citizen, if you were distributed free condoms, if they distributed free lubricants each month for the sex workers, if they provided free tests services for the sexually transmitted diseases – I mean for those who want that, there are so many queers

who don't want to do this, who want to do their own thing?

Absolutely never, ay this all the time, I stand by my own word, I'd pull no punch. I say that for those who do it willingly, I mean, yes for those who do this willingly, that is a very nice thing. Yet I know not many who do this with joy and good. My body may belong to one. To ten, to twenty for they are handsome, not for they have the money. How do we know now? The conditions are very good yes. I made a lot of money. Yet the thing experienced is disgusting. I feel the regret now. I made a lot of money. I consumed a lot. I am a pleasure-seeking transvestite. I do believe that you can't take it with you when you die, I'd make no savings. I do make that so clear. Because the life is short. I'll have ten houses yet they will stay in the world. To the brothers of mine who did not take care of me? To my father who did not take care of me? To whom? I am a pleasure-seeking transvestite. I consumed and I do consume. I repeat. Never and never have I taken no offence of my life. I spend both for my lover and for myself. I do have personal working with me too. I provide a living. Anything else more beautiful than this? Yet I do never confirm. This is bull shit. Totally. Those who do this, I repeat, do this only for money. Easy money, everybody is provoked by the comfort, you know that. Easy money, soft money. Instead of being inside a narrow place for two billion, where the machine sounds off where the machine talks, one would enjoy

herself at her place sitting with the cigarette in the hand any anything else, five-six hundred per day. What is it that I want, condom. Condom is 4 millions I mean. We do gain so many, my friends, so many we do gain. You witness that, you do see that. I mean, people live with 780 million income. 780 million I mean. Three children and a wife. I mean, I do never believe in that for those who make it with joy, there is no such thing. I'd never do this, neither with joy nor with anything.

I will reask you something because you are making it clearer as you tell more and tell it better, to be honest. But I want you to be honest. This is because of my personal curiosity. Let's imagine that two options were provided for the one who really does not do that willingly and with joy: first option, you would have one and half billion income, insurance –you may anyway not be able to live with this money, not be able to rent a place everywhere- you would live somewhere but you will not do sex work and do your own thing, the thing you want. Second option: you'd do sex work 6000 TL, 10000 TL, whatever, you will make but you won't be subject to any violence, you won't have diseases or at least when you have..

Will it support me?

Yes, support you. What would the first response you'd imagine. I am also a queer, I also do that, yet I do have such a chance, I am able to make my money out of something else. But I know that very well that there are so many queers who do not want to do this. I know, they all are my dear friends. Anybody who doesn't want to do that, will not do it. That is the biggest shame of the state, to make people not to do their own job. Which one you'd choose? For the short term I mean. There are three years ahead of us. Which one you'd choose in this three years. Be honest. Because it is not easy to reply this.

I mean, now, I'd like to say something before I reply this. Given the financial conditions we experience, for the first problem, I mean, the first option, to live with one and half billion, it is just a story. On top of it, I'd be bull shit to get the first option for anyone who had a comfortable life, had gained billions, had eaten whatever she desired, had played around. I mean you say me to reply honestly. I mean, the second option is a favorite option. But I really do say that for someone who has really experienced the life. Look I say the financial conditions because living in Turkey is difficult, no one is able to live on. Even the rich is not able to live on, not able to. Because they all are after working. Because you cant live on with what you already have. So what if the man has tones of bank notes? The life may blow. Destiny. But the first option was better I guess. I mean if there was a possibility, if our financial con-

ditions were normal, believe me no one would choose the second options. Now, both of it is nice, I say on our behalf, for the sex workers. But those who really despise this life, those who witnessed the life of course will live on with one and half billions. But the financial conditions are not suitable for that. One and half billion would not save you, impossible.

And if you are a transvestite you have expenses, the rents decrease for transvestites...

Yes. Leave that aside, you can't buy a place in everywhere. You can't even rent that. We talked about something yesterday, you know we had a struggle, along with many of our friends. The t-shirt of five TL cost ten when you are a transvestite. You buy a flat, costs 30 billion for a normal lady, man, couples and 50 billions for a transvestite. And for example, you go sit somewhere, you dine for example, the situation of the neighborhood matters too. I mean, you may have the chance to live in an expensive place but not in a economically low place, in a suburb for example. I mean you can not go and have a soup of 5 millions, you have to eat the thirty million costing meat. You have to, because. Because the place of the 5 million would not let you in. You have to have yourself high. I mean the system directs you automatically in the expensive. I mean 200 million rent is 500 million for you. That is the truth.

[LOVE]

“I had been exposed to violence by lover’s father. He took me in his car, even tried to stab me, I held his hand, and I was stabbed on my nape.”

GAZIANTEP

Could you please briefly talk about yourself first?

I was born in 1979, in Gaziantep. I'm currently living there as well. I used to live in Ankara before. I spent around 15 years back there. I came back to Gaziantep since the life in Ankara became harder. That's all. I'm currently working.

Have you ever lived in another city than those?

No, I haven't. I just worked in Ankara. And right now I'm working in Gaziantep.

When did you start doing sex work first?

Around 10 years ago.

How did you start? How did it occur to you, for example with whom you talked about it and then started doing it?

Well, I was living in Gaziantep. I have an entourage, I have gay friends. I was also gay back then. And we had people we knew in Ankara, our elders. There were ones that went there before us. One of my friends was living there. Told me to go, and that she could find a place for me. And I just went. I went, however I didn't start as a sex worker from the day 1. I stayed with my friend for a while. I started to see and learn about the environment, started my epilation sessions. Of course, I started the sex work after I stopped living with that girl.

What you were doing there? Were you a skivvy?

Yes, I was a skivvy. I mean, we call that skivvy in our community. Like, I wasn't going out. I was gay, queer with male appearance. So, I was waking up in the morning, sweeping and cleaning the house. Preparing the breakfast. Then the girl was waking up, we were having breakfast together. Again cleaning. The friend I was living together back then was working at a bar. There was a club called Feyman. Those days were good. I loved it. I loved it even though I was a skivvy, it was lovely. We were getting along very well with my friend. She never hurt me. It was nice. Then, I have another friend, I moved into her apartment. I started working there for a while. Then I realized that this wasn't working...

Did you start sex work?

Yes. I mean, she was letting me take care of her clients. We are three friends, we were friends since childhood in Gaziantep, we started working since we rented and shared the same apartment. And, I started working at Feyman, then it didn't work and I went back on the streets. I was working in Hoşdere back then. Then I continued like that.

Why did you become a sex worker?

When I was gay, my purpose of going to Ankara was to become a woman. You know, I didn't even know there was such

an environment. I was involved in that environment. And then you are kind of forced to become one. When I was living with that girl, I wasn't paying anything for rent, electricity, water and etc. I wasn't paying anything, those were the days. Until I rented my own apartment... You have to become one eventually. You have to pay rent, electricity, water, your living. You are in an environment and you can't go back from that point anymore. Let's say it's a lifestyle. To survive. Many queers are migrating to bigger cities from smaller ones to become women. They want to become women, have tits, put make up and go around relaxed, like a woman. They are going to bigger cities with these intentions but when they face the challenges of life, economical problems, and when they see their friends who are sex workers, they are also starting to do that.

Were there any times you didn't want to do it at first?

Of course. I mean, you are disconnected with your family, away from them, can't see them at all. And you are changing. You can't go see them as well. I went to see them once, I had taken hormone injection. My skin color was lighter. I had become prettier. And when I went, my father, mother and my sisters told me that I changed a lot. You know, that's why of course you are missing them. That's why I had such regrets.

Did you have hard times because you missed your family?

Yes.

When did you see your family for the first time after moving to Ankara? How much later was that?

It was around 2 years later. Yeah, 2 years. And actually I told it to my friend that I lived with and then went there for around a week, maybe ten days. My family actually didn't want to let me go back, they wanted me to stay and work in Gaziantep.

Did tell you to continue being a sex worker there? Did they want you to be there?

No. My family didn't know... I mean, they didn't even know that I was homosexual.

How could you visit your family then? You said you had changed?

I mean... Not that much though.

So you weren't like a queer with male appearance?

Nope, I wasn't a queer with male appearance yet. I hadn't changed a lot. Although there was still a difference between the old and new me. That's why actually my family didn't let me go back, I pushed the limits and went back to where I was living.

It's been more or less 10 years since you started as a sex worker for the first time, right?

Yup.

How was your life since then?

How was it? I mean, how I can put it... I had good days. And I had bad days as well. But still I had a good life. I don't regret. What's done, is done.

So, can we put it this way? You took off from Antep, tried to have some sort of a living in Ankara. You tried to maintain your life through sex work. Are you happy even though you had challenges during those 10 years?

Of course I'm happy. Everything's fine.

If you didn't have such a life, if you had another chance, what kind of a life would you like to have? What type of a relationship would you like to have with your family? What job would you like to have? You may want to be a sex worker anyway, but what kind of a life you would like to have?

Of course, I would like to be a homosexual again. It's a nice feeling. But I would like to live with my family. I would like my family to know about it. I would like them to stand behind me even if I was transvestite. I wish they called me "my daughter". I wouldn't want to prostitute. I wouldn't want to

be a sex worker. I mean, I could work somewhere else. I could go to work in the morning and come back my home in the evening. I would like to live with my family. I wouldn't want it to be this way.

What job you would like to have? Did you have any childhood dreams?

Any dreams... I mean of course, I didn't have one.

But you wouldn't want to do this?

No. Well, sex work is sometimes too hard.

What do you mean?

I mean... The way people look at you... Even though your family knows about it, they are still judging you.

If you weren't a sex worker in this environment, in this society, let's say you had proper conditions, sex work was a known, insured profession that ends up with retirement... Would you like to be a sex worker then?

Of course I would want it then. But still, sex work is a really challenging thing. Sometimes you have to have an intercourse with a person you would never want. The client is, I don't know, well, is really ugly sometimes. Or tattered. And you have to sleep with him.

Being unhygienic...

Exactly. I mean, I'm a sex worker but I would like to sleep only with the ones that I really want.

How was your relationship with your family when you were a child?

It was really good.

You being a queer... Because some of them really express it when they are children.

It wasn't so obvious with me but I can tell you about my childhood. I was like a little girl. I mean, I would go to wedding ceremonies, and I would always dance. Then it wasn't that weird for my family. I mean, I was a boy dancing like a little girl but they liked it, they laughed away. But now for example, I'm telling them, my mom that I was like this when I was a little kid and they didn't have any problem with that. And they are just telling me that I was just a kid back then. They thought that it wouldn't be different when I grew up. I mean, I'm trying to explain the situation about my childhood, but then when I grew up, I tried to hide it from everyone. For example, I used to wear fabric pants and shirts. I worked out for a year for example. I went to a gym for body building. I was thin back then, I wanted to gain some weight. None of my friends knew about the truth. They could never understand that I was ho-

mosexual. Then I met a few other homosexuals...

Queers are not good for other queers my dear. (Giggles)

Yeah. I had withdrawn into myself too much. I was about to explode. I mean, when I saw them, it was very nice to talk, chat, joke, laugh with them. And I came out very nicely.

Eventually you were feeling a psychological pressure since you were hidden, right?

Of course... From my brothers, my dad... Especially my dad was reacting a lot. He was messing up with my clothes a lot. I was trying so hard not to show the real me to my friends at the gym, for example. But also I was kind of attracted to the guys at the gym. There were many handsome guys. I was talking to them a lot, but just talking doesn't mean anything, right?

Definitely. You can't imagine what stories the others told. You'll see when you read the book. How is your relationship with your family now?

My relationship with them now... Now my family knows that I'm a transvestite. I mean, not only my parents and siblings, the whole family knows about it. I've even met my mom. She asked me whether I was a doing bad things. I mean, she didn't say prostitution, but she said it in another way. Not to

make her even sadder, since I'm seeing my older brother and my sister-in-law, I convinced them that I'm not a sex worker. That's why now I can see them. I said that I'm working at a bar as a bartender. And that I'm preparing, wearing a woman's dress, and so people are buying more drinks from us than they do from the waiters, this is how I comforted them.

Do they know you live here?

They don't know I'm living here in Gaziantep right now. They think I'm still living in Ankara. But I'm seeing them. I'm not seeing my mom so often though. I'm seeing my sisters, my nephews and nieces and so on.

Do you have any brothers?

Yes, I have brothers.

How is it between you and them?

We are not seeing each other. Only one of my brothers that I visit knows about me. He's even letting me in his house. But he says that he doesn't want to see his brother like this. I can't precise the reaction, and my reaction as well, he is older than me eventually. That's why we haven't seen each other yet. But I'm seeing my nephews and nieces, my sister-in-law, my sisters and so on. My sisters are even married and their husbands are totally ok with me. They tell them that I'm their

sister eventually and they can see me anytime.

Would you like to marry someone? If you had the chance.

I would.

**Are you considering to have gender reassignment surgery?
Operation maybe?**

As I have mentioned before, I went to Ankara first with the intention of getting the surgery. And I was thinking to have it then. But then of course, I started the sex work. After having this active / passive thing, I mean, now I'm not considering it at all.

But maybe in the future, right?

I don't think so.

Really?

Yes, really.

Why not?

I don't know. I think I'm...

Happy?

Yes. And I love sex. You can't ejaculate when you are a woman, when you have the surgery. Even animals can ejaculate

and have that pleasure. If there was such a chance let's say, that you could ejaculate well after having the surgery, like a woman, of course I would consider about that.

Are the people who got the surgery saying they can't ejaculate?

I mean, I talked to most of them. And almost all of them say they can't. Some say they do but I don't believe it. Because the ones who say they do are mostly lying according to me. Because you are having a surgery. You don't have the part producing sperms already. So, I guess it's a lie. That's bullshit.

How is your entourage now? Are you happy with them?

Of course I am. Of course I'm not happy with some of them but in general, I'm happy with my entourage.

Why aren't you happy with some of them? From what for example? Would you like to specify it?

I mean, my friends don't call me that often. They are calling when they need something. When you go somewhere, they are being upset saying "you are going, but you are not suggesting to go together". I mean, why would I? You are not even calling me. You are calling just when you need something. Do I have to invite you to everywhere I go? I haven't seen this much in Ankara. I don't like the fact that they care

about every single detail here.

Why do you think they do?

I have no idea. Maybe they like money so much? Or maybe they don't like to spend too much of it? I mean, they need to pay of course when we go to some place. But all they need to pay is an amount like 5 – 10 TL at most. And they show it like they are giving all their assets away. Some say they don't have money or they have so little when we go somewhere together. This didn't happen in Ankara. When we went to some place, everyone would pay as much as they could. That's not the case here.

Do you feel alone? I mean, from time to time, are you thinking about some stuff like this before going to sleep?

Of course I do. I mean, besides my entourage, I want to have my family with me sometimes. I want to be with my family. But that's not happening.

Do you think it will be better in the future?

In the future... It's going better and better slowly. I wasn't seeing any of them before. Now I'm seeing them from time to time. For example, my mom is just 10 minutes away from me. Because she has some medical conditions, I can't go see her all the time. Because when she sees me, this me, she feels

worse. She saw me, I don't know how many times, maybe 5 - 6 times like this. She says that she gets worse when she sees me.

What is she saying exactly?

Like, she is telling me to look like I used to, to go back home.

She is still saying that, right?

Yes. I mean, all the mothers are like that when it comes to their children. We were never good with my father anyways. My mom still asks me to go back, and I'm trying to explain the situation to her. That I became a woman, my face, my outlook changed, and it will be obvious even if I got a haircut and let my eyebrows grow again. They won't be able to say that I'm a man. They will be calling me a fag. I mean, I will be a baby boy. And I don't even think about going back, of course.

What kind of a working environment do you have? How are your working conditions? In terms of sex work.

Right now it's fine.

Are you working at home?

Yes, I'm working at home. I'm online. Working at home. Right now everything's ok. I don't have any problems. There are no problems when you know what to do anyway. I mean, if

you know how to get in to and take off from home, when you don't do anything that disturbs others, and when you have good relations with your neighbors, nobody says anything, no one does anything. Physical, psychological violence... I got used to it, they rarely understand the fact that I'm a transvestite as long as I don't talk. Even though they understand and laugh at me, I just walk away. For me, there's no need to ask them why they are looking or laughing at me. Some people react because they have never seen an actual transvestite before. For example, sometimes I'm going to a mall or some place else, and some people poke the one next to them and showing me calling "transvestite". And the other one is looking for a transvestite around. One of my friends experienced this in Ankara. The man poked the woman next to him showing us three, calling "transvestites", and the woman was checking all around to see transvestites. Then finally one of my friends turned to her, shook hand and said "we are here". (Giggles) It's annoying, but when they show us, when they laugh at us, you just need to walk away. I mean, when you react, you are actually giving the leverage to others. When you walk away, even though they laugh at you, the moment just ends immediately. But when you say something, they start to exaggerate things saying "see, this is how transvestites act, jerks, they did this, they did that, they yelled at us", and so on.

Basically you are giving them an excuse. By whom you were exposed to violence so far?

Almost any people around me. Police, clients. I was exposed to violence by my older brother a lot when I was little.

Could you please tell about your experiences in detail?

I'm the youngest son in my home. I was the youngest son in my family My brothers were older. Since I was younger, I actually don't want to tell about everything, but since I was the youngest, one of my older brothers used to beat me all the time. He could only beat me.

Was there any reason for him to beat you?

Reason... My dad had an office. They used to tell me to wait there, and I did. When I didn't, once I had run away for example, I was bored, I was a little child. My friends were all out playing games, and I left the office and ran away, went home. He used to interfere everything. The way I sit, this and that. For example he would order me to bring him water. If I brought it little bit late, he would slap me. I mean, what the hell?. Why would you beat me just because I brought your water little bit later? Or for instance when I answered him, he would do the same. And now I'm taking care of my older brother that used to beat me. Imagine.

Are you sending him money?

I'm sending money, supporting him. He is using glasses with high diopters, for example. It was quite an expensive one, something organic or whatever, I said "what the hell, I will buy it". He is my brother after all. I might have been exposed to violence when I was little, but I'm still supporting him.

Were you exposed to violence by someone else in the family?

Only from one of my brothers. And I had a lover when I first went to Ankara. At first, there wasn't anything wrong. Of course back then I was still so young, I was around 18 - 19 years old. We were together for around 3 - 4 years. He used to beat me a lot. He used to beat me, and then we used to make love.

Did you like it?

I mean, whether I liked it... Let's be honest. I liked that. Because I loved him a lot. I mean, I was in love, I loved him, I couldn't sleep without him. Why was I beaten or exposed to violence? I guess because of jealousy.

Was he jealous of you?

He was, sometimes I was as well. Then the fight would start. And, I wasn't... he was a man after all. I wasn't that strong. I

wouldn't be able to beat him even if I tried to hit. Because I was never involved in a fight in my life. That's why I was exposed to violence by him.

Was it ever severe?

There were a few times, I guess twice. Once he beat me with a belt.

How did you feel about it?

How did I feel? You feel bad. I mean, you are beaten eventually. I was going away, breaking up with him and not seeing him for half an hour, maybe one. Or he was going out. We were living together. Then he was coming back and apologizing, doing some stuff to make it up to me. Kissing my cheeks, deceiving me somehow, and then I was finding myself in the bed with him. I had housemates, I used to tell them, we were out, had fight, he beat me, we came back home, made love.

How did it end? And why?

He had to do his military service. I wanted him to go for it. He was saying that I would forget him when he went, be together with someone else. I was telling him: "I love you so much, how could I forget about you?". He went. He was a rookie. Escaped and came to me. Then his family found out. After that they came to talk to me. They told me that we could

be together after he finished his military service. I couldn't convince him. He escaped from barracks 3 or 4 times. And then he was imprisoned in stockade. And his father... Yes, he also beat me. I was exposed to violence by my boyfriend's father. He took me in the car and even tried to stab me, I held his hand, I was stabbed on my nape. Not that much though. He even took me to his home. His father took me to their home. He made his wife clean me. They changed my clothes. I couldn't stand that anymore, I told them I wanted to go, leave me to the coach station and I would go to my family. Imagine, I came to my family's house, to Gaziantep. I went to my home, my parents' home, my phone rang in the morning, it was my boyfriend, told me he was in Antep. He told me that he came to Antep and I should go see him. I did, of course. He stayed in Antep for a couple of days, even slept at a park. Then I couldn't stand and I brought him to my parents' house. The next morning, police came and took him. And that was it...

Did it end?

No. He went back to army, I couldn't hear anything from him for 5 - 6 months. I lost a lot of weight. A lot. I had barber's itch on 7 - 8 spots. I loved him so much that I couldn't think about anything else. I was just thinking about him. I didn't care about work or any other stuff. Finally, since I lived in Ankara alone before, I couldn't stand living with my family any-

more. I mean, I was a sex worker there, I was earning money. I couldn't do anything else there. Even if I could, it was obvious that I was homosexual. I couldn't do it. Eventually, my older brother who beat me, had taken my ID, so I wouldn't be able to leave, and I still ran away. I went to live with a friend again. I was a skeevy again for one year after all those things.

Did he ever get in touch with you after that?

Of course, he called me, told me to go to Ankara, move in with someone, that we would rent a home and be together again when he came back. Of course I went to Ankara, and he was in the army. He came again, he actually came to my friend's place, it was my friend's birthday. He came, and the moment he did, the door bell rang. It was his father again. And he knew because of one of my friends. His father called my friend to learn the place I stayed. And my friend told it. Then his father started to threaten me. And I turned his father to prosecution. I was living alone, then one other friend came to my place with her lover. We were three of us at home. Another friend came, too. I told my friend not to open the door if my boyfriend comes. Because I knew him. Like I didn't say that, the door bell rings, my friend opens the door and lets my boyfriend in. I heard the voices from my room. I was about to go to my friend, pissed off since she opened the door, but before that, the boy comes in, held my hair and brought me to the living room. There was a coffee

table, and its legs were like sticks. He turned it upside down, broke one of the legs, and started hitting my legs like hell. My legs were swollen like balloons. We talked, he told me to withdraw the charges, asked me why I did that. I went to prosecution together with his father, withdrew the charges. We talked with his father. They came to my place. We were in front of the police station. I had just had a breast surgery for silicones. Whatever state of mind was that I don't know, but my boyfriend told me to show him my breasts. I said no. Then he ordered me to show them. And I did. He got engaged after a while. We met couple of times after he did so. Then he started not calling an so on. But still he calls sometimes, asks me how I'm doing. Once he called me to ask for my blessing because of all he did to me. I told him that we were just kids back then, and I gave my blessing. But still we are in touch. He is calling me and asking me how I am.

Were you exposed to violence by the police? In the street looking for clients, in your home, or somewhere else?

No, I wasn't. You could ask why. It's because I'm not that vixenish. When police came and asked for my license or registration, I would directly show them. I wouldn't react as "Who the hell are you?", or something. I have such a personality. Police came many times to take me to the station for example, I always went without resisting. I never told them that they can't take me, or something else like that. If I have to be

honest, I was never exposed to violence by the police.

Did police ever come to your place while working at home?

Did they ever bust your place?

Nope, it didn't happen as well. But I forgot to mention that I was exposed to violence by the police verbally.

Like what?

Like, "Is this supposed to be a man? These are a disgrace for manhood. They are fags and etc. I was exposed to that kind of stuff but never to a physical one.

Did you ever experience sexual violence? Were you raped?

I experienced that in Kuşadası. It was twice, I was raped once and in the second time, I could escape from the rapists.

By whom?

I met this guy in Kuşadası...

Was it during a vacation or something similar?

Not a vacation, I just went to Kuşadası. I both wanted to have some rest, and to work. There were two guys around ages of 24 - 25. When they told me that their place was in the center, I trusted them. I went with them, and saw that there was another guy as well. He was lying on a couch. I told them

that I'm going since there was another person as well. They convinced me not to. I sat down. I sat down and saw ajar, and I saw two more people. Before I said that they were too crowded and I was going away – I was carrying spray in my bag back then – they took my bag and spray. We were into a fight. And then one of them said that they would let me go if I slept with him only. I didn't want to do that. I did that, but it was kind of a rape for me.

And the second time?

It was the same again. I went with middle-aged people. They were two people again. I would be in the car. I knew a place to have sex in the car. And they told me that they knew a better place, and they were old guys and they were scared to be caught and get in trouble. And then I thought about it, they were old, had beards, and one of them was really drunk. I went with them, they took me to a deserted place. I asked for my money. They answered me saying that they would pay after it's done. One of them held my arm, and when he tried to force me, I pushed him, and I was carrying a snap off knife back then, I took it out. When I told them not to approach or I would stab them, they stayed away from me. And the drunk guy had thought that I was a woman. He said that I was a man after all and I was a (f word). I used the spray and ran away.

Did this happen in Ankara?

No, in Kuşadası.

Did you ever had such an experience with clients? Except the one you told me.

I mean, of course I did. Now, I didn't have any problems like that in Antep. As I said before, I'm a person who kind of tries to meet the halfway. It was in Ankara. I can tell one of them. The guy who thought he owned you just because he paid... They guy was drunk and asked me if I kiss on the lips or not, and I said no. I repeated this again, and again, and again. During the sex, my legs were on his shoulders, and he locked me at that moment, kissed me on the lips, and when he held my hands I felt like I was being raped. I pushed him with my feet, kicked him, my housemate was around and intervened. We had some fight, I was about to beat him. If my housemate wasn't around...

It could have been worse.

That's how it was. So much violence and fights I have seen, but you know what, I'm not even thinking about them anymore.

Do you think you live in a country with justice?

I don't know, there are many stuff that are not fair. There are

many friends of us who were imprisoned even though they were innocent.

Can you give an example?

One of my friends for example. Because of something she didn't do, she was sentenced to 11 or 12 years of prison. She spent almost 10 years there. Just because she was a transgender. Similarity of photos made her guilty and so on.

What do you think the government is trying to do about prostitution? Why do you think they are putting this much pressure? Why do you think they are busting this many houses? What's the point in your opinion?

Maybe they want to intimidate us and put an end to this. I still believe they can't end prostitution. I mean, they can't end the existence of sex workers. They are trying to intimidate us little bit, but I don't think it will be possible anyway. For example, I was also against closing of brothels. Besides, what's the fault of the woman on the streets? Many bars were closed for example. There were women working there secretly. There were women who were sex workers. And what did they do? Most of them are on the streets right now. This is also not good. I mean, they are at least working for something... they also want to earn money, have some stuff... If they were little bit conscious, if they changed their clothing style little bit. We are already excluded by the society. For example, while

going on the streets, ok, wear a mini skirt, or a mini dress, but you can still be a decent lady. If you only wear a bra and a mini skirt, of course the perspective of the society would change, you would be charged a fee, your house would be busted. For example, I was living in that house in Ankara for 10 years, I never experienced something like that. Because I, as I said, would talk to my neighbors, meet them, say them hi... If you know common courtesy, I don't think there would be any problems.

Would you like to work at a place like brothel?

I would, for sure.

What do you think about their closing? For example, what would happen if the one in Gaziantep was closed?

I don't want them to be closed. You could ask why. I mean, it's there anyway. Brothels are already away from the city center most of the time. And eventually, this is sex we are talking about. For example, men are mostly polygamist, not monogamist. They like change. They are sleeping with their wives as well, but sometimes they want to have a girlfriend, they are sleeping with other women in the brothel in addition to their girlfriends and then they are satisfied.

What would happen if they were closed?

If they were closed, I don't know, probably worse actions... For example rapes... this kind of things would occur more in my opinion.

Do you think there is violence among queers themselves?

Violence? Of course there is. You know why? They just can't stand each other. If they were united instead... Let me tell you the case in Ankara for example. In Ankara, Hoşdere, girls go on the streets, and just because they want to earn more, they are sleeping with scumbags and making them use violence on transvestites. This is also a violence in my opinion. And if you are going on that street, if you are a sex worker there, you will be ok with whatever you have coming. Let the others work as well, while you are also doing so. But when you sleep with a scumbag, and then sending him to be a jerk against specific others... I mean, sometimes there are girls who are transphobic among us I believe.

Is money the only reason?

I think it is. The desire to earn more...

Are you happy with the organizations caring about your problems?

To be honest, I don't have anything to do with them. I mean,

I don't visit them. For example, I was visiting Pembe Hayat when it was first established, and we were getting courses and so on. But it was the first times, that's it. I'm kind of staying away from them.

Why is that?

I can't go for a walk, relax for example, I don't like to be in crowd. That's my thing. For example, if I go to someone's place, and if it's crowded there, I can't stand it that much, I'm just leaving the place most of the time.

Are you happy with the ways these organizations are working?

Even though I don't really care, there must be some benefits of them. I believe that. For example, you are interviewing, another person is doing something else, and another, I don't know, goes to this and that place. Before these organizations, we didn't know anything about our rights. With their help, their lawyers and everything, they taught us everything. Before they were taking us, keeping under custody for 24 hours, and then releasing. However, there wasn't anything like that possible in theory. They were keeping us just because we didn't know anything about the laws. But now we know thanks to these organizations.

If you could wish one thing from politicians, what would you wish for your life?

I would like our status to be covered by a law as well. I mean, ok I'm a queer, but I would like to have hormone treatment and be a teacher, a police, a lawyer if I could. I mean, I could work even in a construction if it was my job. I would like to have a status like that. Sex work shouldn't be the only alternative. Not the only option. I mean, the ones who want could still do that, too. Maybe I want to become a nurse, a police, a lawyer or maybe a doctor even though I'm a transvestite. I would wish for this.

[LIFE]

“After I was diagnosed, for three, four years, all the sex workers started to spread the news that I was HIV positive to my clients. They took my bread out of my mouth. While they were earning more and more, I started to fight for my life in my house. I could only afford eating onion and bread for my meals.”

ISTANBUL

Could you please talk about yourself a bit?

I'm living in Istanbul. I'm a transsexual sex worker. It's been almost twenty years since I have started.

You say it's been twenty years, when did you start first? I mean, what made you become a sex worker?

What made me become a sex worker... Actually, I didn't mean to start doing sex work. The house I left was in a big city. But my goal was to move to a bigger city, earn money, have a boyfriend in my life and pursue my life that way. I got into this without knowing it would be like this in the end.

Did you start doing it back there?

No, I wasn't a sex worker when I was living with my family.

Well, how did you stop living with them?

When I was living with my family, I had a normal job. I was receiving my weekly or monthly salary. This was I was continuing my life. But when a friend moved to Istanbul from the city I was living, there was like a connection after all our phone calls, and I found myself coming to Istanbul.

Did you run away? Or move?

I had to run away. Not run away per se, I kissed my mom's hand before leaving, although she didn't really let me... That's

another issue. That's how I left my hometown.

And of course they knew about your identity...

They didn't. Before twenty years, when everyone had horse glasses about some issues, because of the rumors of other people, my dear dad said something like this to me: "It's enough you let me down." After this sentence, I told him, "Dad, don't interfere me. Let me go, good and bad, have my life." Some months passed after this and I decided to come to Istanbul, and I did. But as I said, I didn't really want to become a sex worker. I wanted to have a normal job, get my hormones to transform into my transsexual identity (but without being a sex worker) and to have a normal life. But things may not go as planned.

But you knew that the rate of becoming a sex worker among transsexual women is quite high, right?

No, I didn't know it was this much. I didn't, I really didn't.

Were you exposed to violence by your family before?

If you compare the life and living conditions before twenty years with now, I was exposed to psychological violence for sure, but not to a physical one. Because you are in a narrow circle; mother – father, family, entourage, friends, relatives... Because of the idea that the other can make rumors behind

you all the time let me be exposed to psychological violence. It was the same violence that almost everyone in this country was exposed to, frankly.

I'm coming to the point directly, are you happy with your life at the moment?

No, I'm not happy with my life.

Why is that?

I will never be happy to be working as a sex worker.

Are there any other things in your life that are making you unhappy? It might be about the sex work as well. The environment, your friends and so on...

Yes, I'm not happy at all to be a sex worker. About the environment, I can't really meet with lesbians, gays, bisexuals all the time even though I want to. We, as transsexuals are seeing each other and I'm not happy with this situation as well. Because if they could – I'm saying this honestly – they would have sex 24/7. This community is disturbing me. I can't see anything close to improvement in anyone. All they think is to have sex, earn money and to gossip; how I can pit a dig for someone; let's take drugs, let's consume alcohol, let's find the weak points of each other and humiliate each other, this is what they want. That's why, I'm not happy with this com-

munity, too. I'm very happy with my social environment. I'm seeing the people in my block, I'm friends with the people living on the same street as me. The butcher, greengrocer, grocer, and the market knows me. I'm happy with them. I have no problems. But I hate my own community to death.

Is that creating a psychological violence on you?

Definitely it is. Because I'm a transsexual, I belong to LGBTQ group. I can't share my problems with other friends of mine. Because they can't understand me.

Do you trust them?

Never, I would never trust another transsexual. There might be some that I could, but probably I don't know them yet. Among the ones I know, there are 3-5 transsexuals that I can maybe trust. But except them, I trust no one. No one! About anything!

Was it the course of your life that made you like this? About less trust...

I never trusted people. It was what my family taught me. If you want to become friends with someone, try that. My experiences taught me the same. It didn't happen after being involved in that environment, and I was never wrong about that. And of course, say it the wisdom of my age. I have

learned not to trust anyone after all the experiences I had in my life so far.

How is it between you and your family right now? You have siblings, right?

My relationship with my family is mostly based on phone calls and our meetings if I'm in the city they are living or when I stay for couple of days at their place. Is it bad? No. Is it good? Not at all. Because I'm used to living alone for all these years, I forgot what it was to have a family. That feels like too much for me. Sound of children, relatives visiting, discussing problems, talking about them is disturbing me a lot. I would like to start a family, to have one of mine. But since I'm annoyed by these talks and fights, family is not my thing. I would like to live alone, have another job with my transsexual identity and have my own ideal life.

So, your dream is to stand on your feet without being a sex worker...

Exactly.

Like the way other people work you mean... Can you talk about this friends, this transsexual community you mentioned? What kind of a pressure you had so far? What made you get away from those people?

What made me get away? At first, the fact that they are using drugs; secondly, their lies, they are telling a lot of lies; third, they gossip; fourth, they dig pits for others; fifth, like they say, you carry a person on your back for forty years, then take that person down for 1 minute and then realize; they never mention the fact that you carried them for forty years on your back, but they mention all the time that you took them down for only one minute. Is it faithlessness? Maybe hypocrisy? Whatever you call it... they are telling lies to each others' clients just to be able to earn hundred or two hundred TL more... These things made me get away from them. The worst ones are lies and drugs. I don't like them.

Well, why do you think these things are common among transsexuals? Or why do we think they are?

Why? We are the smallest minority. It's like the amount of water a rabbit can take at once. We think all of them are like that since we only see each other. For sure there are also people like this in the society. There are, but since the rest of the society is 10 times bigger than our community, it's not felt as much. This is disturbing us, or let's say, me. If I see thousand people and say that nine hundred of them are like, then it means that the community can be generalized like that. Aren't there good ones among them? For sure there are. But they are only forty out of that thousand, and this is bad and I can't select those people within the opposite majority.

And how does the fact that the group which is said to be marginalized by the society is like this affect you? I mean, of course negatively, but how do you feel? Why does the perspective of the society affect transsexuals this much?

I think the society is right, I'll give that to them. Transsexuals are bad. If they go out during the day with clothes that can be worn at night only, if they steal, if they lie to their clients, or let' say, to anyone, if they run a scam, if you deforce, if they try to make everything legitimate, of course the society would have a different perspective, would treat you differently and wouldn't accept you. My motto was always this: "You should adapt the place you are." I'm not any superior than any other individuals in the society just because I'm transsexual. I improved myself. I couldn't go to school, couldn't graduate from university, but I improved myself. Due to my job, I'm one of the persons lowered down to one of the lowest classes by the society already. In order to be respected in it, first I need to respect them. When somebody looks at me while I'm walking on the street, even if I don't say hi, I should just walk away, I should turn back and start cursing. We have the right to stop and say, "Hello, how are you?" to the people we come across in the blocks we live. It doesn't matter if they say hi back or not. They won't say it once, or twice, or thrice, but in the end, you know what will happen? "So, yes, these are the transsexuals." I'm talking on behalf of the society. They will think like,

“they are fags, they are transsexuals but they are still saying hi to us. Let’s say hi back.”, and will say hi to you. The better I am, the better society gets towards me. When I take a step, the society will be one step closer to me.

This is actually applicable for everyone, right?

Of course. But since we are sex workers, we are considered as ‘slandered’ in the society. In order to get rid of this, we need to create a good image in the eyes of the public. What does this mean? We need to hold a candle to the devil. First you make them accept you, your neighbor accept you, then everyone will do the same already.

So you say that you should be pragmatic, you should know what to do depending on the place you are...

In order to get yourself accepted, you need to respect them first. When you respect them, they respect you! Everyone needs to learn that, whether LGBTQ or others, doesn’t matter.

What kind of a working environment do you have? How is your place, environment, client profile?

I’m kind of a picky person. I don’t accept any clients that call me. There are many clients that I refuse even though they pay the price I demand. Because I can’t meet their require-

ments. Since I can't, I can't risk to have any fights or quarrels. And since I can't risk it, I'm not accepting them. I'm working in my house, not on the streets.

You used to be on the streets before, right?

I worked on the streets around 8 months. Then I had a club life. And then internet was common, I wish it didn't though. Technology wasn't good for us at all. Now online...

In which cities you worked before?

Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir.

Now, I will ask a question regarding the persons you were exposed to violence. Clients, police, family members, neighbors... But while thinking about violence, think about both sexual and physical violence. And also threats, pressures, emotional violence and so on.

So we are talking about any type of violence. Of course when I was with my family, I was exposed to psychological violence. Then after I left, I was kidnapped and raped. Of course this kind of affected me really bad for a while. Then, during the time I worked at the club or on the streets, I have been exposed to police violence for sure. During ID or blood controls, they took me and kept me for little times in the police station... Actually it was really good times. I want them to hap-

pen again, I want the clubs to be back, open. Right now, 98% of the transsexuals are not getting a blood test at all. They don't want to spend money or time on it. But when there were clubs, police was coming and checking your blood cards. If it was expired, they were taking you to control. You were giving blood and then they were sending you back to your club. This was obligatory and it was really good. Right now no one knows what and STI⁴ is. Was I exposed to violence by my neighbors? Not really. I mean, as I said, when I good to them, they were good to me as well. But it would be a lie if I said there was no one I had quarrels. Then I got through with it. They shut up and walked away.

Were you exposed to violence by your boyfriend?

Never. No way. It would be a lie if I said I had. But I beat him of course. (Giggles)

By your clients?

It wasn't that much. Just during that time on the street... Thank God, as I said I was always cautious, I didn't sleep with anyone just for money. I didn't sleep with them people whose requirements I wouldn't be able to meet just for ten, thousand TL more. And I never lied to my clients.

4 Sexually transmitted infections.

If something happens to you, do you believe that the justice will be served?

I never believed that there was any justice in this country.

Why not?

Because there isn't. There is no reason for that. You are both a sex worker and a transsexual. You already have a downside because of being a transsexual, actually you have two; you are also a sex worker, and it gives you three more. In total it gives you five downsides. While the part of society called heterosexuals can hardly get justice, who will give a damn about me? But you know what? If something happens, with all my power, I would try to get something done in 15 days id the normal period is one month. Except that, it's impossible.

Do you think if they free sex work, it would lower the level of violence? Would it make sex work any safer?

No, it never would. Do you know what would lower? People would know where, when and how they would have sex and they would have safer sex. If you have the instinct to be violent, nothing can stop that. While even people who are married or heterosexual are being exposed to violence, it's quite normal that sex workers are exposed to violence as well.

But consider it this way, sex work is a bargain, marriage is private life. Nobody knows what's happening in their own house. But we know that there is no violence in brothels. You know why? Because they are searching you at the entrance, and at least you have to show your ID, and you are being searched with a detector...

Sorry. I wasn't talking about brothels.

When I was talking about legalization, I was talking about safe – this could be specific streets, or candy shops as well as brothels – working areas.

Yeah, brothels should definitely be open, they shouldn't be closed. There wouldn't be any violence like this. But we can never prevent the violence against the ones working on the streets or in their homes. Brothels should be open because anyone – whether conscious or unconscious – started to become sex workers. This leads to increase in the rate of STIs, and children to become sex workers. I'm against all these.

Is there violence among the transsexuals themselves?

More than you could imagine.

What kind? Or why?

Because they want to hire the ones who want to become transsexuals, they pretend like that city or street belongs to

them saying “No, you can’t work at this street or city” or “You can’t rent an apartment in this city” when someone comes from another city and wants to work there. They bust each others’ houses or send their boyfriends to another transsexual’s house and get them beaten. The reason they do this is to prevent the new ones’ clients from going there. At least the beaten one wouldn’t work for ten days, and the client will go for others, and the others will get the money. This is happening. Because of jealousy, being uneducated.

What do you think about getting ganged?

Transsexuals getting ganged is something that I hate and will never approve. Everyone gets what they deserve. Everyone can work wherever they want. This is something stated by the law. Who the hell are you to prevent it? You are just a fag after all!

Do you think this can be prevented?

Yes, actually. Do you know how? Whoever starts to do that should be sued with their names, surnames and addresses, and they will be sent to jail. This can be prevented by legal ways. Otherwise, it wouldn’t be possible saying, “This used violence on me, I have to do the same”.

You are a sex workers with HIV. What kind of problems you had because of this? Could you give examples?

I had some problems after the diagnosis.

When was it?

It's been 10 years. After I was diagnosed, for three, four years, all the sex workers started to spread the news that I was HIV positive to my clients. They took my bread out of my mouth. While they were earning more and more, I started to fight for my life in my house. I could only afford eating onion and bread for my meals. I hated them already, but it became more after that. While they were asking if I needed any help to my face, behind my back, many of them said "She has HIV Positive. Don't talk to her or see her!". Is this still happening? Hell yes it is. If it was 100 people back then, now it's 50. There are activists, sex workers and other among these people.

Do you think the other with HIV in your social environment are having the same problems as you do? Why is it like this?

The fags here can keep gallons of food inside, but they can't keep any secrets. It feels like they will be rewarded when they expose someone. You are exposing them, but who knows if you won't have the same later as well? No one. I'm praying God – not for all of them, of course – so that the persons who were telling me lies, or aspersing me would have the same.

Because I had this pain, I'm still living it, and I will continue until I die. They are taking my bread, they are affecting my work. They are not letting me earn any money, I hope they won't be able to earn as well.

You would consider this as a psychological violence, right?

Yes, this is definitely a type of psychological violence. When a client that came before wants to come for second time, they are waiting for another three months and I'm doing nothing during that time. Then it turns out that the client went to someone else. They are calling me and saying, "They say you have HIV. Why didn't you tell me?" And this is shagging me out psychologically.

You don't have to tell about it after all...

No, I'm not. Of course I know about it. But those people I call fags, those inglorious ones... Being fag doesn't mean selling your body, it means selling your mind. 98% of our community sells their minds. In order to earn hundred TL more, they are messing with my life. Can't you really think that the guy might actually be a potential murderer when telling that to him? The guy can actually mind about it, he may come and shoot me. What will they get out of it then? They think that hundred TL will save them. And I will never give my blessing to most of those fags. I have had enough of this! I was literally hungry because of them. They stole all my clients. I

have nothing to tell really, just for money see what they are doing... Transsexuals, honestly, they are sleeping with each other for money right now. And they call this professionalism. I won't accept this. They are trying to legitimize their own heresy. This makes me sick. This is something that won't be accepted anywhere in the world. This can't be accepted in terms of neither Christianity, nor Budism or Judaism. Any religions wouldn't accept this. I'm not being a discriminating person as a Turkish and a Muslim person. We say that 99% of turkey is Muslim, but they can't even have the "M" of being a real Muslim. I'm a Muslim, thank God. But am I fulfilling the five pillars of Islam? No. They call Queer or whatever to their heresy. And they are calling this professionalism. They say that the client wanted and they did it. I won't accept this. You can't do anything just for money. Have some pride, some dignity. But in this community of transsexuals, there is neither pride, not dignity. There is no love, morals or respect left. I can't accept any of these. I like to live as a traditionalist. I like to respect the old values. In other words, yes, I'm a conservatist, I'd like to conserve. Not in the religion wise though. Lt's put it this way, otherwise they will call me religious. I could actually be, kind of.

Do you trust politicians?

No, never.

About transsexuals or sex workers?

No. Right now I only trust Tsipras, the Prime Minister of Greece. I want him in turkey. (she laughs)

Is there anything else you want to add?

Yes there is. Here me fags: Don't ever look for each others' frauds, stay away from drugs. Don't steal. Don't lie to others. Don't do anything a client wants just for hundred TL more. Have some respect to yourselves. You will be respected as well.

Is there anything you want to tell about government?

Of course, there is one thing I can say. I always wanted to tell that. There were times I said this. First of all, we are also human beings. Like you, we were also born from a mother. You are parents, you have kids. Don't ignore us and consider that your kids might also come out as homosexuals as well one day. Provide right to work, get education, have a job for us. And I want to finish my words by stating a saying: Never be cursed by a woman. Politicians are being cursed a lot. One day, maybe their grandchildren, maybe someone close to them will come out as homosexuals. It's a really high possibility since our prophet says: A man will never die before experiencing the same thing as he condemned. Policies and politicians are always ignoring us. This is called condemning

and for sure a person from their families will have the same destiny as we had, and then they will lose their lives. Since they say they are so religious, they should take this into account, remember this all the time and grant us the rights we deserve to have as human beings.

[COMPASSION]

“I applied to a women’s association saying I don’t want to be a sex worker – and that association was operating under the municipality – nobody even cared about my application. And then I said: I don’t want to be raped everyday, I want to have a proper job. And they didn’t even accept my application. I will never forget that.”

DIYARBAKIR

Could you please introduce yourself?

I'm 29. I was born and raised in Diyarbakır, I'm still living in Diyarbakır.

When did you first start the sex work?

I did it couple of times while living with my family. When I was involved in the LGBTQ environment, I thought I wouldn't be able to do it first. I was a little bit scared. Then, after seeing that everyone in that environment was doing it... And I had never slept with someone before, and I really wanted that, plus I would get paid... Here, in Diyarbakır it's like that. Nobody does that for free. Rarely maybe. That's why it was kind of tempting. I was a student, had no money, I was living with the money my parents gave me. It was tempting to both sleep with someone and get paid for that in that time. That was the starting point, and then with the stipulation of my friends, I found myself in an environment full of sex workers and I started doing it as well.

But you started when you were living with your parents, right?

No, we were doing it outside. Back then, sex work at home wasn't so common. I mean, internet was just becoming a

common thing through internet cafes and stuff. We were going to internet cafes, there were chat channels like MIRC, Butterfly etc. We were logging up to those channels and finding clients in the gay, passion channels.

Was your femininity obvious?

Extremely.

Was that a problem?

Of course, we had a lot of problems on the streets. But I wasn't kicked out of any places, for example. We were sitting decently, we weren't going crazy, that's why we never had problems in any places, but of course on the streets they were making comments about us, harassing us, we were even exposed to violence. But that was where we were finding our clients. It was generally the clients' places in those years or their homes or cars. We were going out of city and then having sex there.

How would you define your life since you are a sex worker?

I was 18 when I first started. Back then, it was all like a game to me. I wasn't aware of the seriousness of the situations and also what I was doing actually. Yes, it was called prostitution

and I knew it but it didn't feel like that to me, that wasn't the state of my mind. What I wanted was to find a partner and sleep with him. Back then, you couldn't be together with anyone since the society was a very reserved one. I felt like that but in time – especially after I stopped living with my family – I have seen how horrible the situation was. Yes, I did it willingly that time, when I was still living with my family. But when I stopped living with them – actually let's say when I was all alone in life – you are thinking more thoroughly. And especially when you get older... It seems so exhausting and unbearable to me that you are sharing all your privacy with someone you don't know for money and you are taking that person into your bedroom, and you are offering your body. This is something very serious... this is your body, it shouldn't be worth chicken feed. It's my opinion of course, I respect the ones who do it and it's the hardest job in the world, I know it because I was there. I was doing it clumsily then. After I stopped living with my family, I started doing it professionally. I stayed in Istanbul for while and did it. Then I couldn't stand and turned back to Diyarbakır. Rented a house and did it again. But it's really horrible... It was all like a game, like playing house to me. But now I realized the seriousness of it. The client might be a psycho, might hurt you or I don't know, might have a gun and attack you, you might actually die doing it. I mean, you are working with the existence of many dangers for a little amount of money. I think it's ridiculous, it

shouldn't be like that. I believe nothing should be that cheap.

Aren't you working anymore?

No, I'm not.

Since when?

It's been a year and a half, maybe two.

But eventually you wanted to have a sexual life at the beginning, right? You had the problem of not reaching people or not having fun with other due to your identity.

Or we couldn't find any partners. That's why we were having one night stands.

But then, during the period when you have to stand on your feet, you have to work more and do it full time I guess.

You are realizing how serious it is.

So, you realized that you didn't want to do it anymore after understanding the seriousness of the situation?

You understand the situation better when you do it profes-

sionally. When you do it for fun, then it seems like a fun game to you. But when you really have the burden on your shoulders, when you need to feed yourself while living alone, then you understand how serious it is and when you are alone... Back then I was with my family, I was thinking that nothing would happen, at worst I would go close myself in my family's home, I wouldn't go out and so on. But here there is no guarantee for that as well. Who can protect me? No one. Who could help, open their house and take care of me? One day, maybe two or three... On the fourth day, this person would have enough and send me out. That person also has a point.

Are you happy with your life right now?

Nope.

Why not?

First of all, I can't find any job since I'm a transsexual. And the most important is, I can't find a proper shelter. I won't be able to find any places to live if I decided to move out for example. And we already had problems while looking for a place for the association, we had a fight with real estate agencies. There was a huge fuss. So if I move out of this place now, I will probably be a homeless in Diyarbakir. I can't find a house to rent. No one would accept me as a lessee. I can't find a job as

well. What am I going to do?

How do you make a living?

We took a bank loan eventually. My brother did that, may the God bless him. Now we have one – two projects we wrote, and we will apply with them... I hope they will be approved so we can relax little bit.

Are you living with your boyfriend?

Sort of. He is staying with me couple of days, and during the rest with his mother.

How would you define your relationship? How is it going?

It's just like a heterosexual relationship. I mean, it's just like a relationship between a heterosexual man and woman, like husband and wife. We only don't have a kid.

Are you happy?

I am but sometimes I'm not.

Why not?

I don't know. We humans are very greedy.

Isn't it enough for you?

It is, but sometimes I'm affected very negatively due to social pressure. There is a social pressure on him, and also on me. Sometimes I want to go out with him or go and have some drinks as just two of us, but we can't do these things here. We used to. But since we had problems couple of times, now we are little bit afraid of it. We can't go out together that often. And this is making me sad. It feels like, you see me as a woman but when there is a social pressure on the table, you are acting as they want you to.

Were you exposed to violence by him?

No, I wasn't. We still have a mutual respect. We didn't even say anything bad to each other yet. We are keeping our mutual respect.

Can you talk about your relationship with your family?

Actually, my family was also aware of the fact that I was a transsexual when I was a child.

How old were you?

The oldest times I remember is when I was 5 or 6 years old, I can't remember them very clearly. But there are also memories that I remember very clearly. For example, my mom used to sew dresses for my sisters. Garment industry wasn't that common back then. We had sewing machines, they use to buy fabric and sew dresses. I used to cry and my mom used to sew dresses for me as well. I remember, there was a fabric with mickey mouse pictures on it, and my mother sewed a skirt for me with that. It was white, I remember. And I used to wear that all the time. I used to wear that and go around. I even used to get lost, then they would find me at the police station. I wasn't getting a haircut as well. I had this long hair (shows with hands). Everyone was thinking that I was a little girl. We used to go for shopping with my mom for example. Nylon dolls were common back then, they were without hair or anything. I wanted and she didn't buy it at first; and she bought it when I cried. I could make her do anything I wanted by crying actually.

But this is your relationship only with your mother?

Yes, with my mother. I only remember those. I don't remember about my memories with my father. Just this, I used to wake up before my dad went to work, take him to the market,

take what I wanted, and then he would leave. I also made him do what I wanted but this continued only until primary school. My mom enrolled me to the primary school one year earlier, I was 6. On the first day of the school – I always remember that day, I guess I will never forget about it – I wanted to wear a skirt, I wore it by crying again. She took me to school. She cut my hair, but I still wore that skirt. She took me to school, and the principle didn't let me in. First the teacher was against it. I was crying. My mom said, "he is crying so much, I couldn't make him wear trousers, please take him like this today, we will make him get used to trousers later.." And the principle said that it would never happen. Then my mother took me back home. I will never forget how they beat me today.

Your mom?

She made me wear trousers hitting my head on the couch and took me back. That's why I never liked school. But still I continued. Even though I went forcefully. All my friends at the school used to mock with me in the primary school, they used to call me a girl, they used to match me with other boys and so on. And I was so... So weepy. So much. I was talking so politely, like a girl. I had such a fine ear for music, I used to memorize all the songs that I liked quickly, I had such a fine ear. I used to sing and dance for my friends in the school yard during recess. They used to make a circle and applause me. I

had such a thing, such a childhood, such a school, that's how I finished. You realize some things are wrong during childhood, but you can't really know what. You can't understand why. Yes, your mom is angry with you because of some things. I was doing something wrong. Actually, I was doing something wrong according to them. I was doing it wrong in terms of what was taught. But I couldn't understand what I was doing wrong.

Because you didn't feel that way.

Yes, exactly. I was just myself, I was acting normal. But they didn't approve it. They were telling me not to do some things, and I was refusing it, saying I would do it anyway. And they were saying that boys wouldn't do that kind of things. They were saying boy, but I was feeling like a girl. I was saying that I wasn't a boy. There was a girl called Derya in our neighborhood, daughter of our neighbor. I was always jealous of her. She was a beautiful girl. I was always competing with her. So ridiculous, I know, but it was like that. I was always jealous of her, when she bought something, I also wanted the same thing from my mom. One day – actually kids always do it, I think they all do – she showed me her genital. I was so sad. I said no, mine wasn't like that. But why wasn't it? I was thinking if everyone had different ones. Then I cried. I ran to my mom. It was shocking for me. I ran to my mom. I asked her

why I didn't have a genital like hers. But you can't imagine how much I was crying. And my mom said that she had hidden mine so that it wouldn't get old and that she would give it back later. And I believed that, I was showing off to Derya, I was telling her that mine wouldn't get old, but hers would (laughing). It was such a ridiculous childhood.

She handled the situation all the time.

She thought that I was just a kid and it would go away when I grew up. But actually she made a mistake, she had to realize it and do something about it. Anyway, then I finished school. You start realizing things better as you grow older. Then we moved to Mersin for a while, some stuff happened, there was almost a feud.

About what? Something else?

There was an issue about my older sister. I entered puberty when we were in Mersin. Everything in my inner world started there actually. I had accepted myself as a girl until that day, but when I entered puberty, knew my body better and had an erection, I was shocked. What was I? I wasn't the person I thought I was until that day. What am I? I started thinking about some things, thinking thoroughly. I couldn't talk with anyone about it, I knew it was wrong, shame for

the society. I could understand everything afterwards. I entered puberty and for a year – I remember I was 13 – I had a huge depression. But it was a really serious one. I used to lock myself in my room, I still had barbie dolls, used to cuddle them and cry my heart out. I got stuck in that situation. My body and my soul were totally different. I defined myself as a woman, but my body wasn't a woman's body. I was stuck in a man's body. I couldn't talk about it with my mom, and also with my friends since they could exclude me. It was like that for a year... I also had faith during that period. I questioned myself and my character constantly during one year and some things seemed very odd to me religion wise. That's why I started denying the religion. Then I accepted myself as I was in the end of one year. I was like this and I wouldn't be able to change that fact. I even prayed within that one year. I thought I wouldn't be able to change it, and I accepted myself as I was. Yes, I was into men, I couldn't help myself when I saw a man, sweat, my heart was pounding, I couldn't know what to do, I couldn't know where to put my hands and feet. Well, how much better I could get if I was experiencing that? I wouldn't be able to change. I wouldn't be able to control my feelings. That's why I accepted myself as I was. According to my family, I chose the easiest path. But for me, I had chosen the hardest one. I realized this after I was all alone. I understood that when I started fighting against the life all alone. I had chosen the hardest path indeed. It seemed easy

for them. I had given up without fighting for it, I had chosen heresy and sleeping with everyone, but it wasn't like that. Actually, my family never had a proper dialogue with me. If they could, they would understand that I didn't want to sleep with just anyone, that I could actually fall in love, and that I could be a polygamist, but they didn't give me any chances to explain those to them. Because I came out to my family when I was 16, after I finished high school. I had awful moments for 3 years because of my brother. Yes, all of my family didn't accept that. My mom accepted that after a while but my second big brother gave me the worst times.

How many siblings do you have by the way?

We are 8 siblings. I am the 7th one. I was even hospitalized. I committed suicide. I ran away from home. They said they would take me somewhere for treatment. They took me to hodjas. I have been through a lot. To make me turn to normal, then my brother started to use violence on me.

With the consent of your family? Didn't they say anything about it?

Majority of my family didn't. My mom couldn't stand it, she was interfering a lot, but she was also getting her share, my brother was hitting her as well trying to protect me. I ran away

from home, they brought me back from Istanbul after ten days. I was locked into the home for eight and half months.

So they found and brought you back?

They found me.

Where were you, how did they find you?

We were 4 of us running away from our homes. We went to Istanbul by bus. Two of us had been in Istanbul before. They knew the city. We went to Gülçin Otel. I guess it's the hotel where almost every queer goes by. We went there. We had nothing. Everything was like a game, a dream for me. I would go there and become a woman. Ridiculous. I would become a woman when I grew my hair or wear a wig wearing those dresses. But turns out that I was already a woman. I didn't need them. But I realized this much later of course. We checked in at the hotel. There were other transsexuals. We met them. They were all around us on the first night, they prepared us. One was removing our eye leashes, one was preparing our dresses, they all helped a lot. We had mini skirts, clothes, thin socks, make up... I saw myself on the mirror for the first time and I couldn't recognize myself, I asked myself who was this beautiful girl. And then I realized that it was me. I have seen how much I had changed. And I went out

like that for the first time. I can never explain that excitement. No words could explain that I guess. We stayed there for ten days but I couldn't get used to the idea of prostitution. That's another topic. And the friends helped me.

But people were also working at the same time, right? They prepared you for work, right?

Yes, they prepared us for sex work and I couldn't do it. I couldn't.

How was your relationship with the queers who prepared you?

It was really, really good. Yes, I couldn't make it on the first night. They took me to Sahra. They didn't let me out on the streets on the first night since it could be dangerous, they told me to try to pick up a client in the bar. There was a house for sex work right next to the bar, you were getting paid 5 TL for each sex work.

What ear was that?

Was it 2003, or 2004? Can't remember very well. I was in a bar looking like a woman, would I care about sex work?

How old were you when you went to Istanbul?

I was just 18. How was I supposed to think about sex work? I mean I didn't care about it. I was at a bar for the first time in my life and I went as a woman. Imagine, I was experiencing both of them at the same time. I didn't care about anything at that moment. It was just me and the bar. I mean I was imagining it that way. It was a dream. Such a beautiful one. But when it was morning, it ended up as a nightmare. Because I had to earn my hotel money, I didn't have it. And I had forgotten about that. There, I was a woman, went to a bar; I was dancing, having fun; all the guys were around me, they were buying me drinks, and I was drinking. I was the happiest that night. Anyway, it was almost morning. I started getting excited and nervous. What was I supposed to do? I would go to the hotel, but I had to pay in order to stay there. I didn't even know how to find a client. Ok, there were many guys, but which one would I go with? I mean, would I go and ask to do that? I didn't know anything, I didn't even know how to talk for that. I didn't know how to pick up a guy. Anyway, the queer I ran away from home together came. They were out on the street with the other slutty queer. They said, they had couple of guys. Thank God, they paid for my hotel that night. But I was nervous, would it be like that all the time? Actually I regretted to run away from home after two days. What had I done? I was thinking only about that. Because after starting

to stay at Gülçin Hotel, something started to get my interest. Girls were saying goodbye to each other every night before going out as if they wouldn't be able to see each other again. That was kind of weird. I asked them why they were saying goodbye like that, all in all we were all staying there together and we would see each other again... And everyday someone was dying. Girls were going on the streets as if they wouldn't see each other again. That affected me a lot. What a horrible thing it was... You were saying goodbye to your friend since you might not see her again in the morning. Can you imagine? Actually it's the same for everyone, but since sex work was more open to everything, and there were a lot of people who hated you, the risk was more. There were many people who hated you so much that they could kill you, imagine having that state of mind. I'm getting chills and feel like I can cry any moment even while I'm saying that now. After hearing that, I already cried there for a while. I was asking myself, "what have I done?". I thought I would die there, too. I was thinking that I would pass without being able to live properly as a woman. Everything I have taken a risk for couldn't be for this. I had a friend called Nilay, she is in Istanbul right now. We ran away together with her, she was my friend from school. She was my first friend within this environment. I had sold my phone while running away and broke my SIM card. I was so determined to become a woman that I didn't want to go back again. Nilay had also told me that she had broken hers as well.

She said she threw it away. Turns out that she hadn't and she was talking to her sister on the phone while I wasn't in the room; she had been telling everything about the fact that we were in Istanbul and we were fine. And the girl told this to our families. And the chief prosecutor of Beyoğlu was a classmate of my brother-in-law, and he contacted with his friend, gave him the phone number of Nilay, and then they found us very easily at Gülçin Hotel tracking Nilay's phone signals. And I was so sorry about running away... No, I was hoping – but I was really praying and obviously I was truehearted – that a miracle would occur and I could back... I would even be ok with my brother beating me, imagine. Then the receptionist came, so did the police, and he said that they were asking for us. I thought that my family had found me and they would kill me. I was knocking on the doors telling people to hide me since my brother would kill me. You know how I was feeling? I was unconscious. I even thought about jumping from window for a while. I didn't know how he could kill me. I was wondering how he would kill me, and if I should jump out the window if it would be so bad. We were on the fourth floor. Then I said, ok, I would face it, there was no escape, and I told myself to go down. I went down. My brother-in-law was there, thank God my brother wasn't there. He saw me and called my mom directly. He gave the phone to me to talk to my mom, and she was crying on the phone. I couldn't stand and I also started crying. I was saying that I was ok. Then they took us from

there. They kept us under custody for one night so that we could learn our lesson. Next day, they took us to a home. The owner was a relative of my brother-in-law or something, we took shower and changed clothes there. Then we went back to Diyarbakır by plane. Then my brother took my ID, enchained me to the heater's pipe with a length of chain that I could only go until the toilet. My eight and half months of house arrest started. Eight and half months. And then he was engaged to a woman in Germany and got married. I could relax after he moved to Germany. And then I started being involved in LGBTQ community again.

Can you please talk about your current relationship with your family? I guess there isn't much to talk about. You are sort of running away from them. You are trying not to be seen.

Actually, I'm not running away but I don't want to be seen as well.

Are they in the centrum of Diyarbakır?

Yes. It's five, ten minutes away with a minibus.

Are you scared to come across, or you already did?

I did. With my older brother.

The one who beat you?

No, the oldest one. He saw me on the street but I guess he couldn't recognize me. We were on the same pedestrian road, he couldn't recognize me and just passed.

Do you have any concerns about coming across?

Little bit, yes. But it's not such a big deal anymore. I sometimes think, what could be worse? Everyone in the family is married with kids. What will they do to me? Probably they would think that I wouldn't be worth leaving their families alone just in order to kill me or something.

Didn't you try to get in touch with anyone?

I didn't because no one in the family accepted me as I am. I heard they asked some people about me. Again my brother-in-law.

To whom, what did they ask?

There is someone in STGM. My brother-in-law is an agricul-

ture engineer, and I guess there was a dinner night of Agriculture Engineers Chamber, and that person was also there and he asked this person about me.

What did he say?

I guess he knows I'm here. I guess he heard from someone or read it somewhere. And he asked this person at STGM if he knows about me. Turns out that he asked with my real name. And this person told him that I wasn't here thank God. But he heard that I'm here. Because he knows many people here. Probably he is in connection with them. And there is this famous lawyer, I heard he is also going there from time to time. Actually we might come across anytime. But sometimes I think: What could happen? I have already gone through everything I could, I have seen the worst in life. What could happen? There is nothing they can call me to account for. Instead, I have. Eventually, they are the ones who led me to this way. We see how LISTAG in Istanbul works, most of them are studying so well when you stand for them and having good lives. There are no obstacles. Then why would I be afraid, they should be. Because there's so much I can say. There are so many things I was keeping inside and waiting to tell my family. Eventually I didn't want to do this, I did this because they didn't stand behind me. No offence.

Do you have a social environment? Or entourage?

No. Not much left. Because it's such an imbalanced community...

Queers, right?

Mhm. They busted my place, brought clients to my place, reported me. Because of them, there is a camera at my door now. They sent four guys. What if I opened that door? What would happen? My boyfriend was just out before 15 minutes. They stalked my place the whole time. I wasn't alone the whole day. My boyfriend went out, 15 minutes passed, and the door bell rang. I could have opened the door thinking that probably my boyfriend forgot something at home and came back. But thank God I checked and didn't open the door when I saw strangers. What if I opened that door? Maybe I wouldn't be here. Two guys were punching the door, and the other two were checking around outside. Then my boyfriend called. I answered the phone and he asked me what I was doing. I told him that there were two guys at the door and two other outside. I was talking on the phone and checking the windows at the same time... When the ones outside saw the phone in my hand, I guess they called the others at the door. I guess they thought I was calling the police. They ran away. What if I opened that door and four guys came in? God

knows what they could do to me. I still have this kind of a psychology. That's why we put a camera. In order to see who is at the door. Here, the queer community went totally nuts. There is nothing left as friendship and so on. I only have two friends left. Except that, I'm not seeing anyone as long as I don't have to, and I'm trying not to go out that often. But still when they need me, they are calling and I'm doing all I can. Of course I'm not able to do much, but sometimes even supporting someone is really nice. Because I was there as well.

By whom you were exposed to violence?

The first one was by my family. I wasn't exposed to violence that much on the streets. I was harassed. But of course, we had it coming twice. Cairds attacked us while walking on the road. Except that, actually I wasn't exposed to violence that much by heterosexuals. My friends within LGBTQ community always used violence against me. They either sold me without telling me anything, or used my place, or used me, or attacked me with the simplest reasons, or they set my friends against me. Mostly this kind of stuff.

Didn't you have any problems due to clients?

Thank God no. I had no problems with my clients so far, I was already too picky about them. Since I was living in Di-

yarbakır, since my family and my relatives were living here as well, I wasn't accepting any clients calling from Diyarbakır. I was accepting clients when they called me from surrounding cities. That's why I couldn't earn that much. I could just survive. Because client could be someone from my family. I couldn't take that risk to be honest. Batman, Mardin, Urfa, Elazığ, Gaziantep... My clients were coming from those cities. I was accepting them.

Did police ever bust your house?

Twice. During that time actually police didn't know much about sex work here, or the sex workers from LGBTQ community. This is also on queers. Since they reported each other to the police so much, police could know about us. They called the police or reported others and me. Or if they had any cairds they knew, they sent them to other girls to get them beaten. They raped, used violence on other girls and damaged their houses and sent them away from here. Again it's us who is doing the bad to each other. This is the worst thing about our community that I hate about. As long as we are like this, of course the government would always sauce us and do whatever they want to us.

How was their attitude though? How was their attitude when you had those things twice?

Smart asses. Insults all the time. And I have this characteristic that I can never remain silent against insults, I also have to answer. They were saying that a transvestite was living and prostitution was going on with a really loud voice on my door. And I told them that they can't expose me in my block with loud voice. That they were doing it on purpose. Secondly, how did they know every transvestite is a sex worker? I asked him who the hell did he think he was? What did he think he was doing? Thank God I was working at KAMER that time. I said I was working at KAMER. I asked them if they knew who they were dealing with. I almost jumped on them. They told me that they knew my kind very well. And I asked him how many people he knew similar with me. We had a quarrel like this for a while with lots of insult. He said he would make me upside down, he insulted me this way. And I said, "bring it on!". I told him that he wouldn't be able to do that. I told him that I memorised his face so well and that I would mess with him. I told him not to piss me off. He saw that he wouldn't be able to handle me, the other one suggested to go. They went away like that and never came back. I couldn't stand anymore because this was the second time, and if I didn't do anything they would come again and again, and I wasn't doing the sex work even that much during that time. They would become

even worse. Thank God we did this and they left. And never came back.

What do you think about the government's attitude towards sex work?

Of course ridiculous. I don't approve it at all. The government is at first responsible for protecting the rights of its citizens. But unfortunately, in our country, there's not any conscious like that. They are the first ones to despise you. They are taking all your rights away from you. You do whatever they say, you don't have any other rights. There's no right to live which is the most important one. It's every living creature's right to live, not only humans'. We don't even have that. When an LGBTQ individual dies, the perpetrators are getting away with it. Have you seen something this ridiculous anywhere else? When it's someone from LGBTQ community, the sentences are reduced, they are getting away with ridiculously less sentences than they ever do. This is unacceptable. First of all, there should be rights of LGBTQ individuals, they should be recognized in the constitution and protected areas should be formed for sex workers. This is what I think.

What's the government's aim? Do you think they are doing all these pressure, penalties to finish prostitution for real? Or do you think they have another agenda?

In my opinion, the government is trying to turn the society into robots, they want stereotypes. They don't have any tolerance towards variety since they don't accept who don't support them. I mean ok, we are Muslims, we accept that, we never denied it. And we respect the people who have faith, but everyone doesn't have to be the same or do the same. Then let's all of us do the same job. I don't know, we can all be government officers, but who will do the other stuff then? If you want one type of person in the country... What will happen if we stop the sex work and being from the LGBTQ community (which is actually not possible)? Won't there be more rapes than ever in your country? Won't the murders increase? Do they really think they will end? No, they won't, they will increase even more. When people can't make their fantasies real in return for money, they won't be able to suppress them in their subconscious and they will start raping others in the deserted places, they will make their fantasies real on those people and kill them eventually, God knows how. Do they really want these things to happen? At least people can go and have their fantasies with sex workers for some amount of money. And sometimes even the sex workers are killed. I mean, at least if they could realize that sex workers are car-

rying a huge burden in the society, if they couldn't understand that most of the women can go freely around thanks to sex workers, they would stop acting this way.

If you had better conditions for sex work (maybe again in your own place but with a security at the door, where your insurance was covered, you had right to retire and etc.), would you be able to work more relaxed, would you want to continue doing it, of course provided that you earned good amount of money?

Sleeping with different people is fraying me a lot, physically, and I can't take it psychologically. As I said, at first it was nice but then after a while you get sick of it. I still respect the ones who do it though. I would really envy. I mean, it's not easy at all, it's not something that everyone can do. I wouldn't be honest, I want to have other employment opportunities. I mean, I don't want to have the only alternative of sex work, I would like to have other occupational groups that I could choose. For example, I would be happy to work with a normal shift from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., to have my weekends free. I would like to have that kind of a job or to have a job at an office, to have colleagues. I would like to have that kind of a life, nothing much. Actually, I want what most of the people have. But of course, this is a must. But in terms of sex workers, of course there should be a security at the door, sex workers

should have insurance and right to retirement.

I guess it's not easy to live in Diyarbakır, but what makes Diyarbakır different than other cities, what makes it more difficult to live here?

It's political stance. First of all, it's like that here for the last hundred or let's say thousand years. Diyarbakır is already the cradle of civilizations. This place hosted many civilizations, saw many wars and was doomed eventually. I always say to my friends that this city will never belong to someone. Because there is a doom, all that blood spilled here, we are walking in the city but who knows who are buried under the place we walk on. This place is so doomed that it can never be in peace. The fact that BDP (Peace and Democracy Party) and its Headquarters are here, Kurdish movement, many policies imposed on this area and all the political games are making it much harder to live here. Many grouping occurs here. There is Kurdish movement on the one side, on the other side there is Hizbullah, another side there is Nurcu Sect, and another side there is the religious ones. I mean, it's so much to take... They are constantly fighting with each other. Imagine, in a place like this, LGBTQ community is right in the middle. What can you do? There is always a conflict in the city. WE have seen one just yesterday. Shops always close up... Although these days due to this resolution process and peace process

the shops are not closing up that much, but I'm sure it won't last so much. I don't believe that at all, I never did. Imagine how hard it is to even exist here. Who would you support? They all have the same perspective against you. Even when we go to have a meeting with BDP, they say that their ground is based on Islamic ones and thus they wouldn't be able to help us in any matters. What can you expect, really?

How do you see it really? There is a party that considers itself progressive here. When you go to the Western parts of Turkey, they can easily say that they support LGBTQ movement but when you come around here, it's not the same case...

They can't say it very easily. I haven't seen so much support actually so far. I applied to a women's association saying I don't want to be a sex worker – and that association was operating under the municipality – nobody even cared about my application. And then I said: I don't want to be raped everyday, I want to have a proper job. And they didn't even accept my application. I will never forget that.

Could you please mention the name again?

Selis Women's Association. I mean, how much can a party like this could help? Most importantly, politics means hypoc-

risy. How much could you trust them? None of them would help you as long as they also don't have any interests. They would first look after their own interests. You mean nothing to them. This was always the same in Turkey. I'm not saying this just for BDP, it's the same with all of them. They are not sincere at all... Besides, almost all the organizations working for LGBTQ are not sincere at all. They are all incorporated, their activities are based on projects, they are like incorporated companies. What can you say in that case? And they never accept the ones who are not on the same page with them. How much can you stand for yourself in this kind of an environment? We can't even save our own lives, not to mention our friends within LGBTQ community or the LGBTQ individuals in Diyarbakır. The only alternative provided to you is sex work. You will die starving if you don't do that. You have to do that. And when you do that, you can't do anything else like being an activist or being involved in social life and so on. You are becoming something waiting for clients at home all the time. Is this what you call life? Is this what we are offered in the world? No. I want to travel and see the world. I want to fight for my rights. I want to be involved in all the platforms. I also want to improve myself. I want to be able to deal with some authorities when needed, I want to say what I need to say. I want to do many things. I don't want my friends to sit in their homes and go into hysterics and therefore, I don't want them to cry. I want them to have the opportunity to find a job

easily. Are there any political parties that could provide that? Hell no. This is just a utopia. It's just a dream and it will never come true under these circumstances.

Some organizations working in the field of LGBTQ rights are saying the opposite though. They say BDP is a progressive one, that it's the only party defending LGBTQ rights etc. Do you think these are just empty words?

Consider me for example. If they were such a party, why didn't they accept my application? Why do I still have many problems in my life? I had to withdraw a credit from a bank to be able to survive.

Do you think BDP is doing anything about transsexuals in terms of Diyarbakır?

They had a march here against prostitution. We are talking about this kind of a political party. Yeah, so progressive! (laughs) They are marching against prostitution! There was a march against prostitution, drugs, colonialism, assimilation here. And we went to talk with them personally. We asked them if their method was just marching or violence, or providing employment and taking care of the psychological status of these people by providing psychologists and creating new areas of employment for them. No, they don't have

any infrastructure. They don't have any plans about LGBTQ. I don't believe that. They can't even talk about it yet. When we first went to talk to them, they asked us the meaning of LGBTQ. Ok, they may not know that, I could understand, they could learn it. We also didn't know about it at first, we learned in time, but if say "they are saying that it's their body and their decision, this is not our thing" behind us, then there's no need to talk about it anymore. Since when my body was someone else's decision?

What do you think about this dilemma? I'm coming from the western part of Turkey. There is a real discourse union in the West, most of the LGBTQ groups or organizations are in favor of BDP. There aren't actually many people who support them, it's mostly here. When you consider it that way, is it easy for them to talk in the West, and hard in the East? Are they afraid you think?

Yes.

So they don't want to?

No, they are afraid here. It's easy to defend anything in the West. There are big cities, metropolitans. You can get lost there easily, there are many different opinions, everyone has their own. It's possible to do anything there. But here, there

is a particular stance... The city has a stance, majority has a stance. First of all, Islamism is far beyond than you can imagine here. Maybe you came here before couple of years. It must have felt different compared to those times. You saw it yesterday, people weren't looking at you like this before. We went to BDP to ask for help, and they told us that since they are based on Islamic grounds, they wouldn't be able to help us. Why are you talking differently in the West then? You can't even help the people in the city where your Headquarters is, how are you planning to act there? First they should help us. How many people like me applied to the municipality you think? No one. Just me. While you can't even employ one person, or help that person, how can you talk like that in the West? I don't understand this.

So there is not municipality working in favor of LGBTQ group...

No there isn't, I don't believe it. If there was, we wouldn't have this much problems here. I talked about this regarding Syrian refugees at HDK (People's Democratic Congress). It was winter, we were going to the meeting of HDK. I was a family on the street. I was also on the streets in the past. That's why I know how it feels. And I really couldn't stand seeing that woman and those children in that condition. I don't want to see things like this in my city. I made a suggestion there. I said

that there are many Syrian refugees in Diyarbakır and they are living on the streets during these cold winter days. Let's arrange a guest house as HDP and with the support of BDP. Or I don't know, it could be an old apartment, we could get its windows fixed. I was ready to do everything voluntarily. We could get their windows fixed, clean, everybody could bring their spare furnitures. We didn't need a huge support from BDP, we were already crowded enough. We could do it. And what was needed from BDP was just a meal twice a day. This was the answer I got: We settled our Syrian refugees already, they should be the ones supporting AKP (Justice and Development Party).

Our?

Kurdish.

From Syria?

Yes. Kurdish people from Syria. They settled them and left others out to their own destiny. Ok, this might be AKP's fault in general, but aren't you a human being after all? Don't you have a heart, don't you have any mercy really? Do you like seeing people in that condition every single day? Are you enjoying that? What kind of a person you are, aren't you human at all? You see all these little children. They aren't aware of

anything, they just came escaping from war. Where is our humanity if we can't even help those people? I have no trust in humanity anymore really.

When politics is involved in helping, solidarity, I guess things are going little bit weird...

Yes. You see what they say: We settled our people, they are the supporters of AKP. So they should die since they are supporters of AKP. What is your difference compared to AKP then? What makes us different from them? Nothing. We are all the same then. Doesn't matter if you are a supporter of AKP or BDP. None of us are actually humans then. I swear, if I wasn't afraid (I have a big house, I have an empty room), if there was someone staying with me all the time, I would give this empty room to a family. You can't even dare. You know what might happen. I even thought about that. But I can't do it unfortunately. Your hands are tied, you are already a transsexual, the society doesn't want you anyway. You can't do that as well.

[JUSTICE]

“I went to a guy once, I was on my knees, about to make oral sex, then I felt something cold on my neck, I can never forget that. I looked and saw a huge knife. He put that on my neck and he was asking me if he should kill me or not.”

ISTANBUL

Could you briefly tell us about yourself?

I was born in Sakarya. I came to Istanbul in 1996. I'm 40. I'm in Istanbul for the last 16 - 17 years. I'm a sex worker. But I wasn't one when I first came, then I had to. So, I'm a sex worker since 12 - 14 years. And I'm living in Beşiktaş for the last 16 years. Before that, I was living with other girls somewhere. When I first came I mean. Now I'm living in Istanbul on my own.

How did you start? Did you get any help from someone? Let's talk about those times a little.

It was around 1997. When I stopped living with my family, I wasn't thinking about becoming a sex worker. I wasn't thinking anything like going to Istanbul and being a prostitute. But at first I was living with other friends. After a while... You can't be dependent on them all the time, how long could it be that way? They were working after all. After a while, you see that there aren't any other ways to stand on your own feet, it was harder especially during those years. They didn't take us into restaurants. When we went to a restaurant, they weren't serving us. Those days were harder. After a while you suddenly find yourself on the streets. I mean, you can't even understand how you even start. Then after a while you say, "Why am I here? Why am I seeing and sleeping with these people?"

You are thinking about that. Since you have to earn money, make a living, you are prostituting eventually. Because there aren't any other alternatives.

Why did you come to Istanbul from Sakarya? Was your relationship with your family bad?

No. It wasn't because of that. It's a smaller place, I have many sibling, there were challenges. You go somewhere, they look at you like wondering what kind of a person you are, if you are a woman or man etc. Then your siblings hear about it. And when they do, of course you don't have any problems in the family, but you say to yourself, "I have siblings, if they had a problem one day, they would tell them that their older brother is a fag." I had to come to Istanbul to avoid that, I had to leave. My family didn't tell me to go or something. I never had any problems. But still I had to. I had to think about my siblings.

What did you tell them?

I told them that I was going and I had to. I mean, why I was going? Because my siblings were older then, and I didn't want them to have any problems because of me. Therefore it was good that I came. I came and stood on my own feet. Thank God I still can. I had to come in a way not to let my family deal

with that kind of problems. But when you come, you stay on your own, and when you do, you have to fight against the life by yourself. And then, since you have no other alternatives, you are choosing this one.

But you were a queer with male appearance when you were living with your family, right?

Yes, of course.

But you were feminine?

Yes, I was feminine. I had long hair. I didn't have any problems. But then the desire... I mean, you want this, you want to be like this. You even see the difficulties. I wasn't criticized that seriously, but I saw some reactions. I could overcome some of them, and for some I couldn't. I was hearing things around, I was annoyed, it was a small place, things were spreading fast. You are a child of a well-known family, and then you become a well-known person. I experienced these obstacles.

You said you weren't exposed to violence by your family. Is that correct?

No, I wasn't. I mean, I wasn't due to my homosexuality. Definitely.

How was your relationship with them?

Because I was the same since childhood, it wasn't so weird, my mom used to tell me that I would be a child bound to his home and family. As I grew older, things started to change. Since they couldn't stop it anymore... I mean, my family is not so well-educated, but they still love their children. That's why they always accepted me as I was. So I didn't have any problems with my family about my homosexuality.

How old were you when you left Sakarya?

I was 19.

You were 19. Were there any difference in terms of their attitudes as you grew older? You know they say, it will probably go away in the future, now he might want to wear a skirt, be feminine, but after puberty, they might want you to be more masculine. So, were there any differences?

They were saying those kind of things when I was a child. But after I started growing older, they started telling me not to do things and that they weren't appropriate and so on. My dad told me to stop or otherwise he would beat me. He saw that it didn't have any effects on me. And he let it go. They were telling me that my favourite was on TV when Bülent Ersoy

was on.

How many children are you?

Six.

How many girls, how many boys or other genders?

Three girls, three boys. Sorry, two girls, three boys and one gay (Giggles).

Are there any differences between the attitude of your brother and your sisters towards you?

Never, no difference at all. They are all married with kids. They would never do anything bad to me.

Do you see them now?

Of course. They can't do anything without me.

Are your parents alive?

Thank God, both are.

Are they coming here?

They are. All my siblings did as well. They always do.

Can you go there as well?

Of course I am. I can stay one months, 10 days, 5 days, it's up to me. I don't have any problems with my parents or siblings, even with my whole family.

Do they know you are working?

No. They know I'm working at a club. And that's it. So yes, I'm working at a club but I'm serving drinks. But nothing about...

What would they do if they knew?

Well, it would be harsh. Because sometimes my mom shows me the girls on the highways, that how bad it is. She say May the God protect you to me all the time. I mean, this kind of bad things... I can understand she doesn't have a clue seeing that. She knows me as working at a club. She doesn't have to know everything. It's better to keep some things secret.

You don't want to make them sad neither.

Well, I don't. I would never want to make my mom sad.

How was your life since your first time with sex work? How would you define it? Was it good, bad, in the middle?

I have never seen something good since I started. I mean, I would never have psychological problems. Now I do. I'm going to therapy. I'm doing this due to police. Since I'm doing something I don't want to, it's getting worse and worse for me. I have serious problems. I was much healthier, much better before. But since I started sex work, things aren't good at all.

So you are not happy...

I'm not happy with the sex work. But I'm happy with my gender. I have no problems about that. I'm happy with my life as well, but not with the sex work. I can go around, buy whatever I want, go wherever I want and so on, but when it becomes 20:30 – 21:00, I feel really bad since it's the time to be on the streets for sex work. It's the hardest job in the world. Only that's bad. It's the same till 2 a.m. When I come back home and clean my make-up, I feel like the happiest person on earth. Because sex work is definitely not my thing. It never was. You can understand it from my neighbors. They never consider me as a sex worker. When they think even slightly about it, they deny it at that very second. Sometimes when they see me at night with make-up, "Is that you on the

streets, you are so different this way,” they say. So, I also have this kind of thing in my life.

Did you try to find another job at first?

I didn't have to. They weren't even letting me in the restaurants, how was I supposed to ask for a job? That doesn't happen. It was like that in those years. It still is. Go and ask. Some friends of mine tried. At least we had examples. Nothing changed. I was with them as well. I may not have asked for a job, but I was next to them. We got the same answer all the time, "Come again some time later." We don't need any employees and so on so on... How can you ask for a job from these people? Can you do when you have this kind of examples? I'm having some rich clients. They are asking me why I'm doing this. And I ask them about their jobs. They say, "I do this, I do that," and then I ask them if they would hire me. Of course they say no. Then why would you ask me that kind of a question? Pay my money and get the hell out of here. Don't pretend like you might think about it.

So, if you could have another job, what would you like to do? Are there any jobs you would always want to have?

Actually I wanted to be a cook. But right now I would like to be a fashion designer. I like that kind of stuff. I mean, that's

what I would enjoy. I'm thinking this way for the last couple of years. I wish I had so much money so I wouldn't have to do anything for money and I could be a designer then.

**What kind of a life and environment you'd like to have?
Would you like to get married for example?**

No, I wouldn't. But I like my environment already. I'm living exactly where I'd like to be. It's a very relaxed and a nice place, people around me are really nice, the neighborhood is totally fine. I'm spending time with those people. They can't do without me. They even leave their kids to me when they need to go somewhere. This is a nice place. This is where I want to be. Except the sex work... But of course, if I had a regular life, it would be so much better. At least I wouldn't have psychological problems even though I had economic ones. This is eventually affecting everything in my life. Makes me unwilling to do other things in life. Because I don't like sex work.

Would you like to have the operation? Sex-reassignment surgery?

No, I wouldn't.

Because of your work?

Not because of that. Yeah, I can't say I like having a penis, but I don't need the surgery.

Why not?

Why would I? Why do I need that? At least I can still get pleasure. At least I have this. Yes, I would like to have a real vagina. Not a fake one. A real one. I don't want to look at the sky and count the stars without enjoying anything. I would want to ejaculate if I had a vagina. But since it wouldn't be possible, why would I bother myself? Ok, I might be turning my back, but at least I have something to play with in the front. (Giggles)

I will write all of these, just so you know. (Giggles)

Of course you can honey. It would be fun for readers. (Giggles)

Can you talk about your friends a bit? How is your entourage? Is it just queers?

I have many family friends as well. I have family friends, and families that I see. There are heterosexual guys as well. I have

queers around me too but it's not as much as others. Because it was better in the past. Now, since I don't like most of them, it's not that many of them.

Why not?

Not because of their personalities. Not because of their jobs as well. Attitudes, drugs. These are not my things. I don't use cigarettes, drink alcohol, nothing. I have 4 – 5 friends that I see often. But also I see them as well, from time to time when they gather and so on. When I can, I'm helping them and seeing them, but am I sharing my things with them? Absolutely not.

So you are not sharing your private life with them?

Never. That won't happen. Yes, I can care about them, but I never talk about my private life, because that's not necessary. When I look at them, I see people who don't know how to talk, get dressed, walk, treat others. These are things they didn't learn from their families. You can't go anywhere and prostitute. You can't just try to pick up every guy. You should be decent... Why would I go around with them? If they get dressed decently, they can be my friends. And if not, I don't want them as my friends. I'm really strict about it. I have zero tolerance. I always treat everyone as a human. I help them

when I see someone in need. But I don't take that person into my home. Because that's not a person you should take into your house. You wouldn't do that neither. Eventually, they get you into trouble. It's really like that. Because I tried, and it's not really working. I took some girl in my home, she went to the store, she bought coffee for 3 TL and took an invoice worth 5 TL and took that from us. What would you do with that kind of person? I'm not an idiot. She can't do that to me, but she did that to my housemate before. Then I went to the store and asked him why he sold that coffee for 5 TL. And he said he was sorry and that the girl had taken that invoice forcefully. Then she came, I hit her head with a bottle, without saying anything, just like that. She deserved it. I took another person in my house as a housemate. She would almost leave no person in Beşiktaş that she didn't have sex with. What the hell, really? I kicked her out as well. I can't stand them, they should be away from me.

Were there any queers that hurt you?

Of course. One cut me with a curved knife years before. You know why? So that I wouldn't be on that street. What is this really? I experienced that kind of a thing as well. I was hurt by queers, too. Was I? Of course I was.

Do you have other stories? About the problems with other queers for example?

There were ones who cut my back with a curved knife so that I wouldn't go on that street while I was thumbing a lift... I still have marks of it. It has been years. When I was going to Elmadağ, again I was beaten by three queers. I fought three of them. Actually I was about to take down the biggest one. Now those queers are still afraid of me. Because I went crazy, really. They were the ones running away, not me, I was still standing there. Then I had other friends that I knew from before, when they started to come as well, the other ones didn't come back again. Then they sent me words. They were apologizing. What would I do with that after I got beaten. Impudents. Who the hell are you? I'm a fag for the last 20 years. Who the hell are you? Did you really think you could kick me out of that place? Assholes. Now they come to me calling me their big sister... But fuck off, who are you to call me your big sister?

Did you have any problems with queers recently?

Well, I didn't have that much problems with queers for the last two years. They know me now. Maybe also because of that, yes. That's why they are little bit more frosty with me. I mean, there are people who say about me that I'm an

old-timer, harmless person that could come in handy when needed. Some queers come now, the old-timers, even stealer ones come and say hi to me now. They ask how I am. They don't I wouldn't do any harm to them. They care about their things, I and care about mine. Even if something happens and I call them, they come immediately. But I don't care about what they do as well. Why would I? That's not my business, it's government's.

Why do you think there is violence among queers?

The first one is the desire to find a husband, and the second one is that they steal clients from each other a lot. Or the queer is probably really beautiful and the other can't earn money because of her, and then they become jealous. These are the reasons for the violence among queers. But mainly the wish to have a husband.

Do you think it can be prevented?

It can't be, no one can do that. No one can prevent the reason about the wish to find a husband. If there weren't other guys in the world, they would come and mess with your husband. (Giggles) This is the thing. But why? She is sleeping with him, so probably he has a big dick. See, this is a reason for curiosity. Nobody can stop that. I mean, queers cut each other

in Elmadağ for husbands. With machetes, for real. And because of a husband. Two queers went on a vacation together. Queer kidnapped other's husband. They called her and she said that she was sorry but she went away with that guy. They gave pills to the guy and took him away. Then queers cut each other. One of them was richer. Actually, they were both the same. I guess the other one was richer. She kidnapped. She kidnapped other queer's husband. (Giggles)

Could you please mention about your working conditions little bit.

I'm going to Elmadağ, Harbiye, Şişli...

On foot?

Yeap... Exactly, feet power.

How do you go?

I'm going by taxi. I2m getting off there. There are usually clients, they have houses, I go there or come back to mine.

There is a house for se work?

Sometimes you go there, sometimes to your place. It doesn't

matter for me. It's not really a sex work house though, it's my friend's, she is not charging any money or something, it's for free. I'm just going, she is my friend. She is little bit dirty, write that as well, a very dirty queer, I clean her house, vacuuming it, and sometimes I'm even washing her. I cleaned fleas from her body once, disinfected the house. Write these down for sure. I disinfected her house, got it cleaned, made it shine, threw away the dirty furniture, now when you go, it's super clean. Now I'm going there sometimes for sex work. I'm forcing her as well, and I'm cleaning her house, making her live in a clean house, also I'm going there for sex work, she also does, the house is available. Don't forget to write this. I mean it. There is only one queer in Istanbul with fleas. She is the only one (She laughs).

Did you have any problems with clients?

I went to a guy once, I was on my knees, about to make oral sex, then I felt something cold on my neck, I can never forget that. I looked and saw a huge knife. He put that on my neck and he was asking me if he should kill me or not. And there was a girl called Yağmur at that time. Yağmur the transvestite. A killer who killed Deniz before also killed Yağmur. Yağmur was also a really nice girl. They hadn't found that guy yet. I thought it was that guy. It was a jagged knife, it was on my neck, he was telling me to give him a head. And I was doing

it. I never panicked, if I did, he might have been scared. He could have killed me even if he wouldn't normally. Because if he moved that knife, I would die. I said, "ok honey, it's no problem", and I wasn't scared at all. I was kind of panicked for a while. But then I stopped, because he could kill me if I wasn't calm. While I was giving a head, when the guys was almost there, I hit his hand. The knife fell down. I opened the door and let him go. When he was almost there, I caught him on the hop. He ran away. I threw a stone to the window so he would go away. But he ran away. I couldn't get over it for one week at least. I was so shocked that you can't imagine. I still hold the guys' hand while doing it. It's still my weak point. When I first get in a car, I pat the guy's waste, and while getting pleasure, I pat his hand, I check the door of the car if there's something. Because he took it from there, he didn't have it in his hand. The guy took it out afterwards. I still remember that. It was one of the first times, it was the first bad thing I experienced. Then they tried to kidnap me, I was raped. When I went to my place, three guys came out of the car. I've been through this kind of things. There are many more stuff I didn't tell my dear. They threw a stone on my head on the street, my head was cracked, they even threw a bottle. I've seen everything.

Are the girls supporting each other when there's something bad on the street?

Rarely, your close friends support you, but the others are mostly getting scared and running away. But I'll see them when something bad happens to them in the future. When something happens to them, I'm saying I don't care now. If they helped me before, I would help them as well. They should stop thinking that it won't happen to them. It always does. If you are on the street, it will. If you support me at that moment... I can handle one or two people, but how am I supposed to handle three people? But if there was someone else helping... You know union means strength after all. But some of them run away, some of them don't even care. That's why I also help only my friends. When I see that I can't handle, I just run away. I also run away of course.

Were there gangs or ones asking for tributes from you?

Of course. There were ones who were asking for 5 TL, 10 TL everyday. But to be honest, I never paid. Never did. They did bad things, threatened and stuff. I said I'm not paying that. Not-pa-ying. Not paying. I said I wouldn't pay that to anyone there. They got those payments from many of them for real, they couldn't from me though. I didn't pay it, what the hell. Then they didn't even come next to me again. They were al-

ways messing with me. I still worked there without hesitation. I'm kind of stubborn. They said they would kill me, I said bite my ass, I don't care. They saw I wasn't paying anyways. There were many stuff like that.

Were there gangs that other girls collaborated? I mean, were there ones sleeping with guys and sending them to other girls to threaten them?

I haven't seen in Elmadağ but I hear about that kind of things from other places.

There were shootings around Kurtuluş, Şişli, Harbiye. Do you know what's the deal?

There is this black car with Kangoo model. Before that one tried to shoot me as well but couldn't hit the target. Like out of nowhere. They also tried to shoot one of my friends and couldn't hit the target again. I guess one of the girls was closer. That girl was a nice one as well, she wasn't a crazy one. See, she is one of the girls I would defend. Her name was İlnur. He shot her, and she was shot on her head. The bullet went through her brains. Of course, the surgeon took that out. If it was closer, she could become blind. He is such a jerk. It's not a real gun. There are taws in it. Like small ones, you know. It's a type of bullet, like plastic ones. It could sort of kill

a person. You could die if you were shot on your heart. Because it goes through. It did. That's how it happened.

Do you know this guy?

No. I've seen couple of times though. After that, I didn't again. Because I guess she turned to prosecution, camera records are being collected.

What kind of a place and street is that location you work?

Ours is an evacuation road. The main street is Harbiye - Elmadağ. Ours is... You go down from Şişli Police Station. Since it's Abide-i Hürriyet Street, it's becoming an evacuation road after a while. Not exactly a main street. Little bit more isolated than the other one.

How many girls work there?

There are 7 or 8 girls on the street I'm working. But when you continue up, there are between 10 and 15 girls, and there are many more afterwards.

Are the groups messing with each other?

Yes. Among each other. They also don't want you when you

go to their area. They say no, don't come here, you go to your own region. These are also happening.

Did you mess with anyone lately? You are going there for many years.

With girls? No, I can go everywhere. But if I went somewhere, nobody would ask me why I went there. And this is because I'm more experienced than most of them, but when others go, they are kicking them out.

Was it last year or in the beginning of this one, policemen attacked one girl with iron sticks. Right?

It was last year. With iron sticks. I guess there was a new policeman that was just assigned there.

Captain?

Right. There was this guy, Aziz Yalçınkaya. He was the captain of that district. He was sending the policemen to do that.

Was it Şişli Police Station?

Yes, Şişli Police Station. I even have a lawsuit with him. Still continues. I was the victim, he beat me... He beat me. Then

open a lawsuit against me, I did the same against him.

Was it in the same period?

Yes. I opened a lawsuit against him. Mine is still pending but I have been to the 7th session of the one he opened against me. Since I had psychological problems, the judge sent me to forensics. Now I will get a report from them

What's the ground of that lawsuit?

They say I insulted him, threatened him and cursed him and stuff. And that's not even true. The guy handcuffed me and closed my mouth. How was I supposed to curse him really?

And they didn't even start an investigation against him, right?

No. İstanbul Mayorship couldn't find any reasons for that. Then we opened another lawsuit. That is also pending. Still will be opened, pending at prosecution. It's been 1,5 years.

Do the other girls have any lawsuits with him?

Some of them do. And me. Theirs still continue. Mine as well.

Could you please talk about the methods of police to mess with the girls on the street?

There were many before, but after the operations against this Gülen sect for the last 7 – 8 months, they were ended. Let's see how it goes. Now it's kind of hands-free. But I don't think it will be the same.

Did you have any lovers so far?

I had. Lovers... There was one, it lasted around 7 months. It was nice. Then there was another one for five or six months. Then there was another one for two – three years. But I didn't have any lovers that I lived together or something. I can't.

Were you ever exposed to violence by them?

No, why would I? Never. Am I crazy? Why would I go that kind of a man? They were all decent guys. I always had affairs with decent guys. That never happened.

Did you always make claims after the incidents you had?

I made quite a lot. All of them were denied either due to lack of proofs, lack of bla bla, this and that... For example, police took me from Elmadağ, beat me on the way, there was some-

thing big there as well. The judge decided that I was going around naked on the 15th of January on the street and found me guilty. I applied to Court of Cassation as well, they also found me guilty. They also decided that I was going around naked, even though there were no proofs. They found a witness, and charged me with it according to the witness' testimony. Still going on. I applied to the Constitutional Court. It's there for the last 1,5 – 2 years. Still no results.

Who is your lawyer?

Eren Keskin. I always worked with her so far. Always. I met with another lawyer twice before, but then Eren wasn't ready enough. But my lawyer is always Eren Keskin. It's like that since many years. And she never asked for a dime from me. She defended me for all my lawsuits, and still does. Sister Eren is a really good lawyer for me. She is always so nice to me. God bless her.

Is there justice in this country?

Justice... There is justice for rich. There is no justice for poor, especially for the queers. There is justice for rich people. If you are rich, there is justice even though you are a queer though. Bülent Ersoy can be judged legally for example, but that's not the case for me.

And what do you think about the government's stance towards prostitution? What are they trying to do?

I could never understand what they were trying to do. I mean, I couldn't. There is nothing. Nowhere. There is no place for sex work. They just charge penalties and get richer and richer. When you see them, give the ticket, ticket for this, ticket for that. But, what am I supposed to do? No answer. What am I supposed to eat? Just tell me, that you showed me a place, tell me to work there, and charge me if I work somewhere else. No. They just charge tickets and send you to court... The government has no other duties than messing with sex workers as you know, everything goes totally perfect in the country.

What happens then?

You know what happens? More prostitution occurs. You know what they are doing? They are going on the streets even though they don't want to in order to pay that ticket. You already have to do that to survive, and they are stipulating you even more. I have to earn the money that they charged from me back. Nobody cares about this fact.

What do you think about the closing of brothels?

Why would they be closed? Eventually the girls are working there with their own will. The ones who want to do sex work are going there to work. What will happen if they close everything down? It would get even worse. Do they want people or children to be raped or something? Then they should just leave them as they are. Why do they let other rape little children= I can never understand this. I'm against it.

Do you trust politicians?

No. I trust none of them. They say yes one day, and no on the other. Which one you could trust anyway? They all care about their own interests. AKP, CHP (Republican People's Party), MHP (Nationalist Movement Party), and HDP all care about their own interests. That's the truth. Which one doesn't? They all talk and talk, and when it's about us, nothing. Nothing. Which one really? I'm asking you. Do they really think they are supporting us by just participating in one or two protests of ours? They don't do anything. They just come say hi and ask how we are, but when it comes to acting for real, nothing happens of course. Go gather all your representatives and make propose new laws. CHP has 150 MPs now, they can do that. But where is it? BDP could do that. Why can't they? But they know how to deal with other problems.

Deal with mine, too. They all care about their own interests. They are just trying to deceive queers. That's another truth. They are using us. We support them. And all they do is saying how good supporters we are. All for votes... There are many homosexuals. Many... They want their votes. After they get the votes, the discourse directly changes. I have never seen a proper one so far. Anyway. They all care about their own interests. Their interests...

During his Presidency Campaign, Selahattin Demirtaş said something like “It’s a risk to defend LGBTQ, but I’m taking this risk. Do you think it was sincere?”

What risk? No. It was just to get votes. If he became the President, he wouldn't care about any of us. I don't trust any of them.

There was a group called Front-Runners Party or something like that, they had lynched a sex worker woman who wasn't a transsexual, they had exposed and beaten her. And they are throwing stones and Molotov cocktails to the beerhouses in Dersim homosexual sex worker women work at for the last 10 – 15 years. Groups who call themselves left-wing – socialist or the ones who are in relation with groups as HDP – BDP. What do you think about them? They never defend the rights of sex workers.

They wouldn't. They could go there and end it. See how people are dying there. Do we really need to see deaths to take action? There must for sure be a death so the government would handle. The important thing is to do it before that... Our nation is already an uneducated one. Someone says something out of nowhere and the rest follows that person. It must be the ones who are actually visiting that place. I don't think it's the other inhabitants. It must be the others. This is the distinction we need to make. They are going there and having fun every night, and then they don't like the amount they spent there. They need to be found actually. They are going as a group of 20 - 30 people, most of them are crazy. Pay 10 TL and anyone would do that.

Do you think the NGOs are working well enough?

No.

Why not?

I don't think so. I was at Lambda when there was nothing... There was Lambda but it wasn't an association. It was a non-governmental initiation. We started going there in the past. It was me, Ece, Ebru etc. at first. Belgin wasn't there yet, she started coming there later. We started going there all together. We worked for them, printed their posters, dis-

tributed a lot of leaflets, we worked everywhere in Kadıköy. We put them in our bags, pockets... We continued even when we were on the street at night. We gathered people. Then it started getting more and more crowded... Our first march had around 10 - 15 people. Then we started becoming a bigger group. Then Belgin came and became a volunteer as one of the founders. Then they established the association. Then it worked for a while... And then, discrimination started. You are on this side, I'm on this one bla bla. They started having problems among each other.

What kind of problems?

One didn't like other's opinion, this didn't like another. I mean, people, unite around one idea, create more of them, so you can help others. I stopped going after these things. I never went back there. They say some are leftist, some are right-wing supporters, bla bla bla... When there is a separation at an association, that would go out of control. That's when I stopped going to Lambda Istanbul. I told you, it's impossible here. Most of them went their way as well, they established Istanbul LGBT, they continue with that. I started to believe that everyone is just trying to earn more and more money. Before everyone was telling this to me and I didn't believe them. Now I also believe it, they are just getting richer. I remember them paying 8 billion TL to an artist. You could pay

it to a good lawyer instead. That's how I stopped going there.

Is there anything else you want to add?

I have this finishing line. Life is really good, but there are many obstacles. We have a lot of them. There are many people who want us dead. I always say this. They are really a lot. They are one who wants us to die this instant moment. Let them die, they say. Really. This is heavy. It might happen to their own kids as well. I won't say hopefully. It might. That's it. I'm done.

[SOLIDARITY]

“The person for whom I was working stole my money and gave me back one third of my earning. Therefore, I had to quit working for that person. I attempted to go with someone else with my own car. The girls over there blocked me in front of my vehicle and attacked at me. They all tried to beat me up.”

ANKARA

Can you briefly talk about yourself?

I am 22 years old. I live by myself in Ankara, Küçükesat. I am a sex worker.

How long has it been since you started as a sex worker?

4 years.

Does your family live in Ankara?

Yes, they live in Ankara, Cebeci. I don't see my father but I see my mother and sisters. I have three sisters. My older sister is a teacher at the day care center.

Were you in contact with your family when you were a sex worker?

I didn't see them for three months when I first left home. After three months, my mother reached me via phone. Then, we started to see each other and we still do. We definitely meet twice a week.

How was your relationship with your family when you were a child?

My family found out that I am gay when I was 13 years old. At first, my father didn't accept for 2 years. I constantly went back and forth to my father's workplace and he always kept his eye on me. He took me out of high school. Then I received

psychological therapy. My family received psychological therapy with me as well. My family accepted in that period, thanks to my psychiatrist. But when I got older, I started to stay outside for 1-2 days every week. I was wearing hair extensions and using make up. My family was very disturbed with my coming to our building with that appearance. My father was very disturbed with that people around us recognized me and my extended family including my uncle and grandmother saw me like that. Therefore, I left my family home when I was 19 years old.

Did they ask you to leave, or was it you who felt the need to leave them?

I felt the need to leave them. I told my family that I wanted to be a transvestite, a woman as my spirit is closer to womanhood. My father didn't accept this. My mother aspired for me to have the operation with a visit to my aunt in Germany, but my father didn't allow me. He said, "God created you with what you have in front of you, you cannot have what the God gave you taken from you." Therefore, my father and aunt got cross with each other and they have been so for a long time now... I didn't go, I am here and I have been living on my own for a very long time.

Do you see your father?

No, I don't see my father.

Does your father know that you are still in touch with your family?

Yes, he knows.

Have you ever tried to see him?

No, I didn't try.

Do you suppose that he won't accept you anyway?

Even if he did, I don't want him to be sad. Honestly, I didn't want to see him because I don't want him to be sad when he sees me like this...

How is your work environment?

I work on the street. Since I work on the street, I work in very harsh conditions. Obviously, I am dreadingly going there everyday. I also admit clients to home dreadingly, too. Some of them batter while others inflict harm. I am particularly scared when I am alone at home. I constantly have house-mates. However, I get along with only some of them. Therefore, I am alone now. I still continue to work.

How many hours do you stay on the street on average?

I get out at 22:30, and come home at 01:00.

What are the biggest problems you face on the street?

Initially, the biggest problem was posed by the gangs. Seyran Gang, Dikmen Gang, etc. I put up a fight against them for so long. Now, I am trying to put up a fight against the police. I am being battered in my car and they are attempting to take by car by force. I paid a tax debt equaling to 21,000 TL. I say this everywhere and I will always say it: Everyday I am being chased by the police for an entire hour. They park the car, so I have to tour around the place I work everyday. I am trying to work in difficult conditions.

Are you able to earn money?

Living conditions are harsher as it is winter now, but honestly, sure I am able to earn in summers.

What is the difference between summer and winter?

The police places more intense pressure the summer and reduces the pressure in winter. But as it is cold in winter, I can't go out everyday. I can go out only 3-4 days a week. I have been going out to the street for 3.4 years. For the first time in 3.5 years, the police don't ease their grip in the winter either. They usually used to leave us alone in winters. But this winter has become much harsher. I can say that the pressure has intensified.

Why do you think like this, why has the pressure intensified in your opinion?

Why? I don't know what exactly happened inside their organization. New police arrive in Esat Police Station all the time. I believe that they have those new police gain experience from us. This must be the reason for the intensified pressure.

You have wheeling experience in other streets as well, don't you?

Yes, but transvestites didn't allow me. I attempted to go to İskitler for 2-3 days. The person for whom I was working stole my money and gave me back one third of my earning. Therefore, I had to quit working for that person. I attempted to go with someone else with my own car. The girls over there blocked me in front of my vehicle and attacked at me. They all tried to beat me up. I am considering to file a complaint against them. They restrict my location. I was born and raised in Ankara; I am from Ankara. The newcomer transvestites don't allow me to work here.

What is this Dikmen Gang?

I believe that this Dikmen Gang has been formed by a few transvestites. As they go to Dikmen for wheeling, they use these gangs to ask for tributes from the newcomer transvestites, to make them sign promissory notes and to take their

money by force.

So, what is your opinion on gangs formed among trans people?

I have always filed a complaint against everyone who harmed me. While even the people who have been in this environment and paying their tributes weren't reporting them, I was the one to file a complaint. So other people followed my lead. A few people who were harmed reported them as well. I hope that they will be sentenced for this reason.

So are you scared of being threatened? Or have you already moved forward?

For sure I am scared. Yes, each and every day I go to the street, I work with the fear of "Will I be harmed by clients or these gangs?" I am trying to text the plate number of any vehicle I get on to my close friends.

How is your relationship with your friends?

I don't have too many trans friends around me. There are a few people. Since I received several blows from the people I worked with, I don't currently see so many people.

What blow? Why is there such a lack of confidence?

I refer with blow that anyone who stays with me either steals

my money or tries to live something with my boyfriend. Honestly I believe that all trans people experienced similar things. Therefore, I scarcely admit people to my life.

What about the wheeling environment? Are you getting along with everyone there?

I get along fine with other girls in the wheeling environment. But recently, I opposed to someone for the first time. She threatened me when I was about to go to Istanbul, saying “I will send my man to you, you cannot come to Istanbul” and stuff like that. I had transferred my website address to Istanbul, therefore she threatened me as I was going to Istanbul. Thereafter, I saw this person a few days later right across the spot I was working. She had arrived in Ankara as a guest and she was wheeling. I stood right in front of her and stated that she couldn’t try wheeling in that place. I had never before objected to the work of another trans until then. This was a first for me. I said, “You had threatened me with disfiguring my face, yet now you are here, working in my spot. But you don’t allow anyone else to work in your place of residence, and you threaten me online. I make my living in this place. You cannot work here.”

What did she do, did she refrain from working there?

Nope, she still works there. Who takes me seriously anyway (Laughs)

Did the police use violence on you?

Yes, I was inflicted violence by the police for 3-4 times. The first one happened while I was talking on the phone in my car. I had two other trans friends with me; I had taken them to my car since they were feeling cold. The police blocked my way by force and tried to get me out from the car, but I resisted. One of them unlocked my car and opened its door. Then, he opened the back door by force and sat on the rear seat. He took me to the police station by force. So I filed a complaint for being forcefully seized.

Do the clients resort to violence like battery and rape?

I have experienced minor issues with clients for 4 years in my life. There were only a few incidents where we yelled at each other in a quarrel. Then they left my home. I have never been harmed or battered by the clients. But this doesn't necessarily mean that nothing will happen in the future.

Would you like to work in another job?

Obviously, I cannot earn to the extent that I earn in sex work. My hair extensions, hormone treatment, house rent and other needs cost much higher as compared to normal people. So are my life standards. If my house normally costs 400-500 TL, the landlord charges me 1000-2000 TL as I am a transvestite. If we order a meal at a restaurant, a dish which would

normally cost 7 TL costs us 10 TL since we are transvestites. Most of the people are aware of this. Normal people have their hair done in a hairdresser for 5-10 TL while they charge us 15-20 TL. If normal people are charged 500-600 TL for hair extensions, we are charged 1000-2000 TL. Therefore, our life is more difficult as compared to normal people. I would have concerns about how to make both ends meet if I worked in a normal job.

Leaving the financial issues aside, would you like to work anyway?

For sure, I would like that as a normal person. But, if you ask my opinion as a travestite, I don't believe that I can do anything else.

What is your educational background?

I am a high school graduate.

Would you like to continue your education?

For sure, I would like to attend to university.

As a sex worker, how would you like your working conditions to be?

Why wouldn't I want to work if I was offered the opportunity to work in a state-controlled place with regular health

checks?

Like a brothel?

Well, yes, somewhere like a transvestite brothel. I would like to work in an indoor place which is safe and has security measures.

Is there justice in this country?

Of course there isn't.

Why?

Let me give a brief example: I have three friends: one trans and two men. None of them had their ID cards with them while they were walking on the road. They took her to the car by force and issued a fine for not having her ID just because she is transvestite. They released other two friends even though they didn't have their ID cards, too. There is a discrimination against trans individuals.

Is there justice in the courts? Are people subjected to fair hearings? Let's assume that you took a legal action...

I was on the court regarding a gang. Even the judge let me speak for a very brief duration while he allowed the others to speak. There is injustice even in that aspect. I encountered a good prosecutor in only one trial. He saw that I was battered

by the police. He wanted to check my bosom, and took records accordingly. I scarcely encounter such good people.

It depends on each person...

Yes, there are also good police. There are police who actually want to help. But let me give another brief example: When I was in my car on Bağdat Street where I work, my purse was stolen. After the robbery, I took a friend along with me and toured around that area to look for my purse for about half an hour. Then my friend got off the car and I headed to the police station in order to file a complaint. When I arrived right in front of the police station, we caught each other's eyes with the robber. I blocked his way with my car and the guy froze with shock. I was shouting at the police, "This man stole my purse. My money, keys, everything was in the purse. For god's sake, seize him!" The police said, "We cannot occupy ourselves with him. Come and give us your statement." I was saying, "Look sir, I won't be able to sleep at my home, I will have to stay in my car I don't have the keys to my home or any money. My credit cards, driver's license, everything was in that purse." He was insisting that I go and give my statement. There were three police in front of the police station, yet they allowed him to escape. The man walked back and went away.

Do you trust in politicians?

Honestly, I am not interested in politics.

I am actually asking your opinion regarding whether there are any parties in Turkey which can give voice to your real problems.

In my opinion, no. There hasn't been any party that gave me support so far.

Is there violence among trans people?

For sure. Too much.

What is the main reason; is it money?

Yes, the main reason is money. And also transvestites with greater knowledge and experience don't allow new people to work as these new people otherwise have to work for them and provide them with profit. Therefore, we lost many friends. Everyone is aware of this. A high number of people are trying to work in desperate conditions. Some of them cannot go on the streets while some of them organize raids on each other's home via internet or have their boyfriend beat up them. These problems still occur today.

What kind of a life would you like to live? Would you like to have a boyfriend? Would you like to see your family?

I already see my family. I am happy. In some aspects, I am broken over my father too. Therefore, I am not quite willing to see him. I already have someone in my life. I am happy.

Are you happy with the approach of men towards transvestites? You don't have to answer considering your current boyfriend.

I was cherished as much as I cherished in my past. I made mistakes and the other party did mistakes, too. You have to live in order to learn. I slowly pulled myself together. I believe that I am currently living the life I wanted in respect to social circle and work opportunity. I am grateful to be comfortable now.

Finally, the gangs had sprayed your home with gunfire early on...

Yes, they shattered all of the windows in my home. My feet were cut with the glasses. My home was sprayed with gunfire. As far as I know, three people are on trial.

Why did they make a raid to your home?

One of them wanted to become my boyfriend. The people who had this done were 2-3 transvestites but I don't want to disclose their names. They wound him up by saying I was very beautiful and made good money. He tried to become my boyfriend by force. I told him that I already had someone in my life and I loved him very much, therefore I wouldn't accept his proposal. He got me onto his car by force and took me to some place I didn't know. He put a gun on my head. He said,

“I will kill you and throw you into the lake if you don’t be with me.” I said, “I have already taken this road knowing that I was going to die. Kill me if you want but I won’t be your lover.” Then he hit my head 3-4 times with the handle of the gun, and left me on the street in that condition. A few days later, they made a raid to my home. I was beaten up with slaps and kicks by these persons in the police station. They plucked all of my hair extensions. My feet were cut with shredded glass; I was covered in blood. Even the police escaped to their rooms, they couldn’t save me. I experienced bad incidents like this.

Do you believe that this gang exists?

Almost half of the transvestites working in Hoşdere came to the police station that day and placed me under pressure to not file a complaint. A few people who know me supported my legal action, hence I filed a complaint.

[DREAM]

“The end of brothels is here. Brothels were nice in the past, in '81. We were so busy that the tea vendor was unable to find a break and bring us tea. We used to get tired in the evenings. We used to put our legs in the air and lay down, unlike now. Now we are cherishing each client that comes in.”

İZMİR

Can you introduce yourself?

I was born in Denizli, Sarayköy on 21 September 1951. I have been working since I was 16 years old.

You are a sex worker, aren't you?

I am a sex worker.

Did you start as a sex worker when you were in Denizli?

Yes, I started in Denizli.

Were you seeing your family in the meantime?

I was seeing my family. Then my parents dies. I still see my family, I have a daughter and two grandchildren. I see them all.

You worked at the brothel for a while, didn't you?

I worked at the brothel and I was a brothel boss.

In Izmir?

In Izmir.

Did you work anywhere else?

I toured 27 cities.

How many?

27. Erzurum, Antep, Diyarbakır, Mersin... I worked at most of the brothels.

How old were you when you first entered in the brothel?

Which brothel was your first?

I was admitted in 1981, in Izmir. I worked without registration in Istanbul. Unregistered admission was possible in the past.

Was that time after your operation?

Yes, it was my post-op period. I worked without registration. I made a fake marriage and stayed married for 8 years. I opened a shop and went bankrupt. Thereafter, I made good money. I made good money but it was worth a house. I also have two houses in Denizli. There is nothing else.

Why? What happened to the money?

I spent it for my family. My family is very bad. My father and mother got ill, so I spent it for them. I had bought a house.

Then my family said, “Let’s sell this house.” My sister said, “Everyone should receive their share.” Even if it is your sibling, nobody offers any benefit to you. I have understood this.

How would you define your life so far since you have first started koli – let’s say since your childhood, youth? How has your life been? Was it good or bad?

My life had its ups and downs, and deep downs as well. Thereafter “Tan Tan”⁵ period started, then it was very bad.

Saadettin Tantan? Why? What happened then?

They didn’t allow us to work during that period. Then, I started to work in pavyons. I couldn’t stand to working in pavyons. I cannot drink liquor. I don’t use drugs, tobacco or anything.

Obviously you couldn’t make it there...

I couldn’t make it. I arrived in Izmir in 1981. I entered into Izmir Brothel. My first admission was in Tire. I was transferred from Tire to here. My life has gone on at brothels ever since.

5 She is referring to the period when Saadettin Tantan was the Minister of the Interior.

What is it like to work at brothels?

Working at brothels means earning money so long as you don't have someone in your life. The business was booming back then. I made loads of money. I had a house in Karşıyaka in addition to two summer houses. I sold one to arrange a marriage for my niece. I am very fond of my family. I dedicated myself to my family. But now, nobody is calling me. There isn't anyone who calls and asks how I am doing. Everyone is after their own interests. Everyone is looking for gaining benefits for themselves. I am grateful for this anyway. I retired from the brothel. I receive 600 TL as my retirement pension and I am living on 1650 TL on my own. I am not dependent on anyone.

I have been touring the brothels one by one for the last two years. I interview most of the bosses and the girls. As you know, now the brothels are being shut down one by one. I mean, there are very scarce brothels left. Why is that so?

There are only a few left. Istanbul and Ankara have been shut down. There are elderly women anyway. The women who work there have been the same since '81. A man goes there before his military duty. Then his son goes there. Then, his grandson goes there. How old is that woman?

Three generations.

Three generations go there. The women there are 70 some-things. There are women who are 75 years old. The women there are very old now. Only those who are secretly admitted to the brothels from outside make good money. There are only a bunch of working women in Izmir. There are five beautiful women.

How many girls were there in Izmir?

Three hundred.

As far as I have seen, Izmir is among the best in terms of making business.

But the price is very low.

The price might be low but it is a clean place that works systematically. Its clinic is in operating condition and condom is used there. It is one of the places least complained about by the girls as well... Obviously I don't have as deep knowledge about there as you have.

Condom is mandatory. Condom isn't used in other small houses; for instance, in Aydın.

Are you referring to the one in city center of Aydın, or the one in Söke?

In the city center. Condom isn't used there. Any woman who works there for 3-4 months come and buy herself a land here.

Client is willing to pay since condom isn't used.

The client prefers there and pays better as there is no condom. Condom is mandatory here.

In your opinion, have the clients decreased here in the recent years?

Dramatically.

Why?

The perfume vendors outside the brothel force clients to buy perfumes. They tell the men "I have a friend in prison, buy please" and oblige the clients to buy their goods.

So they are harassing the clients?

Yes, they are harassing the clients.

Why don't the police do anything about it?

The police aren't there.

I know that there are private security guards instead, but don't the police receive any complaints in this regard as well?

They do. The police come and stay there for about half an hour or an hour. Then they leave.

Don't they take legal action?

If any complaints were filed, they would take legal actions; however, people are scared. Therefore, young people make good money in İzmir Brothel. Anyone who isn't young cannot earn money. Nonetheless, there are some women who have already earned a good sum, yet they are still working. None of them thinks like, "I will withdraw from this life and spend my time with my children."

How many queers work here? Not "civir" women, I mean.

About ten.

Was their number higher early on?

It was much much higher.

Have you ever worked in Ankara?

No, never in Ankara.

Have you worked in the eastern region?

I worked in Diyarbakır. I worked in Erzurum. Erzurum has been shut down; it was really good back then. I have never seen anywhere else with such good earning.

It was the one in the Eastern Region. Only Dşyrbakır and Antep remain in that region now.

Antep is really good. I mean, you earn good money. If you are beautiful and flamboyant, you hit the goldmine.

In your opinion, which brothel is the most difficult to work? In respect to boss and clients...

Diyarbakır.

Why?

You are forbidden from seeing people in Diyarbakır. Telephone is forbidden.

Don't girls see each other either?

Girls don't see each other and telephone is forbidden.

Why?

The boss banned it.

Is there only one boss there?

No, there are a few bosses. On the contrary, Mersin Brothel is very comfortable. So are Adana, Denizli, Ödemiş, Bayındır and Tire brothels. I mean, I worked in most of them.

Why do the bosses exert such strict discipline?

This is because of their principles. Çorlu brothel is very comfortable. The boss of Çorlu is a friend of mine. He is a close friend, a friend from the city.

Are you pleased with your current life?

I am pleased. I am retired now, so I don't do anything. I am at home, and I spend time at home.

This is your own home, isn't it?

Yes, it belongs to me.

**You have briefly mentioned your relationship with your family. Are you currently happy with your relationship now?
Who do you see from your family now?**

I have a daughter and a son-in-law. I have a grandchild and my son-in-law's parents. My uncle's sons. All of them are in Denizli. I have a sister here and two nephews. I don't see them.

Why?

Why? They are after their interests all the time. All they think of is money. I have made enough contribution; I won't do anything else. Which part of 1600 TL should I give them anyway? I can't; I will make my living with that money now.

Does this make you feel sad? All for interests. And after your efforts all through the years...

For sure. I have put effort and spent money for years. But who appreciates this? Nobody, that's who. It is inevitable that you receive a blow from somewhere, even if it is your closest relative. The biggest strike comes from whoever is closest to you anyway.

Your childhood was in an early period. How was it to be a child as a queer back then?

My childhood was full of dreaming womanhood. I wanted to have breasts and long hair. I was riding a motorcycle and touring in Denizli Sarayköy with it. 4-5 motorcycle riders used to come after me. I used to stay with whichever one I liked.

Did you experience any issues in this regard with your family?

My late father wasn't willing at first. My mother said, "No matter what, this is my child. I cannot disown my child." I mean, nobody could disown me. Thereafter, my family behaved really well to me when I had money. But I left home when I was 18 years old. Then I returned to my family and got married. I had children when I was a man. Then I left them

and went to Istanbul.

Does your current social circle generally consist of queers?

No. I see families as well. I have several beloved close friends. I see families in my building, too. Nobody criticizes me for who I am.

Is there violence among queers? Like jealousy...

I don't see queers that much. But sure, there must be jealousy among them. Queers are jealous people. They don't anyone to be in neither better nor worse condition than them. This is how queers are. This is their lifestyle. They are showy as if they are air force officers, yet they have nothing at all, even the home they live is rented. They work for years but don't earn a shit. They act like they are know-it-alls, but they know nothing.

I know that you aren't currently working but what is your opinion on the brothels being shut down one by one by the governorates? Is it good that they are being shut down?

It isn't good. They shouldn't shut down the brothels and allow everyone to make their living. Workers, proxies and bosses earn money there. Girls rent rooms and pay a rent of 160

TL.

For daily rent?

For daily rent. They rent the rooms for themselves. For instance, the elderly ones work part time. Yet they go on their life like that. There are very old women inside, and they are numerous. The youngest one is 50 years old. She is retired, yet she still works.

What happens to the women working there when the brothels are shut down?

They work outside.

With less protection and without knowing what will happen to them?

Sure, it's dangerous.

So, what is the government trying to do? It is shutting down the brothels, organizing raids to those who work at home, ordering home evictions, issuing fines... There are no longer clubs, bars or pavyons...

All of them are gone now. But prostitution won't end. There

are massage parlors and Russian prostitutes. These will never end.

What do you think about police raids? Raids are organized to the homes of several girls, who stay on streets or their friends' homes in turn.

They order a home eviction for one month in the first raid and three months in the next one. I don't know how long the following eviction order lasts.

Do you believe that this policy is correct?

This is an intimidation policy. They are attempting to intimidate people but nobody gives up. When a home is shut down, a second home is opened.

They can work on the streets as a last resort anyway.

They buy their own homes. Buying a home is very easy now. You can buy a home with a monthly payment of 1000-1500 TL. You can buy home as long as you have insurance.

Can you tell of your own experiences regarding home eviction? You don't have to give too much details. What happened, how was the attitude of the police?

For instance, the police capture the client at first. They take the client while he is going out from the building and asking him the apartment number. They are asking him with whom he was staying. Then they take the client to the police station and take his official statement. The report is evaluated by a committee in 2 months. The committee orders a home eviction decision and your home is evicted. My home was evicted for three months.

You also had a prison experience. Can you briefly mention that?

I wasn't at home. I have a friend; we have been friends for thirty five years. She is a post-op queer. She is 54 years old; so she isn't young either. She took a guy home. As Kurds tend to get the civil registry of their newborns several years later, the guy was actually not a minor. He was a student in Hotel Management School. Vice squad captured him outside the building, and asked where he was coming from. When he specified the apartment, I was taken as well since I am the property owner. Both me and my friend were sentenced and imprisoned. Thankfully, we were granted a supervised release.

You sign papers for supervised release.

You sign papers. My friend works at the community health center.

Was it your first time in prison?

Yes, it was my first time.

How were the conditions?

As I am a diabetic patient, I was an inpatient in the infirmary. It was a standard one-room infirmary with a bathroom. I was ordering meal deliveries. I was imprisoned for one month and four days, then I was released.

You had no other troubles, did you?

No. I was walking around at the prison yard. They don't oblige the elderly prisoners to do any work at all. The young ones work for cleaning the garden, kitchen duty and cleaning the cafeteria. There were 450 people in the prison.

In your opinion, is there justice in this country? I am asking this considering your entire life.

There isn't any justice at all. What good is the justice in oth-

er countries for me? I was born here; I was born and raised in Denizli. I will die in Denizli. I will be in Denizli when I pass away. I don't want to be buried here. I will go where my parents are. I will stay in this country, but this is a country where justice doesn't exist.

Do you believe that there will be justice for queers in 50-100 years?

We won't live enough to see that. I don't know. I can't say anything. I can't make a comment. The only thing I can say is that new queers are extremists. They get their boobs done, wear wigs and work in woman appearance. This isn't what being a queer means. Queers should be well-mannered. We were well-mannered back in my time; we were pointed at with fingers. I was a queer, too. But I wasn't extreme to this extent. You shouldn't invite clients by calling at them from windows and doors with tons of make-up. There are families around, yet they call clients out loudly. This is a mistake. There are several mistakes. They get a couple of new breasts and wear wig, then they market themselves as women. That isn't decent. They wear super-short skirts. Their feet are size 45. You should check yourself on the mirror to see if being a woman looks good on you or not. If it doesn't look good, don't change your appearance like that and live as a gay. A person should do what looks good on theö. I wear a clothing

item only if it looks good on me.

Should the prostitution law be amended? Because home raids, fines, closure of brothels and home reports are all conducted pursuant to the prostitution law...

They issue reports to homes, but they do this as they do this as they work without a pimp. These are normal; if someone is found out to carry disease after an examination, a doctor has no other solution than to shut down the home. But they should impose a punishment for the girli not for the home. The home has nothing to be blamed on. What is the mistake of other girls working there? They shut a home for one month. They should instead ban that girl from home for one month while allowing other girls to work. What is the mistake of homes? They issue a few reports, then cancel the signboard. Receiving a new signboard costs extremely high. Governo-rates don't want to deal with these anymore. Nobody wants do deal. The end of brothels is here. Brothels were nice in the past, in '81. We were so busy that the tea vendor was unable to find a break and bring us tea. We used to get tired in the evenings. We used to put our legs in the air and lay down, unlike now. Now we are cherishing each client that comes in.

LUBUNCA GLOSSARY

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Transsexual sex workers use the subcultural language called “Lubunca” that involves some sort of codification and allows them to live a rather safer life to some extent against outsiders.

We have created a brief glossary for our readers to easily understand certain Lubunca words that you may see within the interviews through this book. Please refer to the list below for any word that you cannot understand while reading the interview.

Balamoz: An old man.

Cancan: The abbreviation used by not only transwoman sex workers but also by sex workers in Istanbul as a reference to Venereal Diseases Hospital in Cankurtaran

Cıvır: A woman who is not transgender.

Cici: Sexual intercourse without receiving money in return

Cicilik Yapmak: Engaging in sexual intercourse without receiving money in return

CD: Cross-dresser, a person who wears the clothing of the opposite sex (Not a Lubunca-specific term but rather an acronym of the English term ‘cross-dresser’)

Çark: Outdoor area, street used for sex work

Çark yapmak: Going to outdoor areas and streets for sex work, and looking for and bargaining with clients to this end.

Debel – Deber: Money

Domez: The term used to define sex worker trans women who stay at the houses of other sex worker trans women and help them with cleaning chores. Maid, servant.

Gacı: A woman who is not transgender.

Gacıvari: Trans woman with the looks of a woman

Gullüm: Whoopee, delightful conversation

Gullüm yapmak: Having a delightful conversation, making whoopee, having fun

Kelav: A sex worker woman who isn't transgender

Koli evi: Client

Koli evi: A house used or rented for sex work

Koli yapmak: Engaging in sexual intercourse in return for money

Kür: Lie

Kür Yapmak: To lie

Laço: Man

Laçovari: Trans woman with the looks of a man

Lubunya: Trans woman (It has been recently used to refer to gay men as well)

Madi: Bad

Paparon: Police

Putka: Vagina

Tita: Breasts, boobs

Bol: A small amount of liquor offered to women who work as hostesses in bars (like pavyons) by customers (whiskey, vodka, wine, etc.)