EUI DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Life at the Margins:
Gender Transgression and Sex Work in Contemporary Turkey

Ezgi Güler

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to
obtaining the degree of Doctor of Political and Social Sciences
of the European University Institute

Florence, 07 October 2022

European University Institute
Department of Political and Social Sciences

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Abstract

This research deals with a repertoire of collective practices in a community of transfeminine sex workers in urban Turkey. Some of the practices discussed in this thesis refer to building a community, communal spaces, social codes, and relationships which enable trans sex workers to support and protect one another. Other practices can be read as commitments and expressions that challenge violence and marginalization.

The research has been carried out within the context of the broader debate on urban marginality. While some studies on this topic have focused solely on its constraining effects, others have overemphasized the enabling potential of margins, romanticizing the solidarity and political agency that emerges in these spaces. Building on a middle position between these two perspectives, my research primarily focuses on the possibilities created at the urban margins, together with specific structural factors. Based on participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and online sources, I begin by explaining the socio-political, legal, economic, and spatial context of trans sex workers in contemporary Turkey. I argue that the ambiguous nature of marginality with respect to these aspects facilitates their alignments and informal ways of organizing. I then investigate the shared spaces, relationships, collective subjectivities, social codes, and labor organization of a specific community of trans sex workers. These structures form the basis of their exchanges of support and community mobilization, and help the community to address its common challenges. I go on to analyze how this population generates a range of struggles, namely, collective protests and individual confrontations, to counter violence and marginalization. Finally, I explore the defying and community-building roles of the shared humor, joy, and laughter that permeate everyday social interactions among sex workers.

This thesis makes three original contributions. It shows that urban marginality, albeit less focused, is a critical component in the lives of trans feminine sex workers in Turkey. Secondly, it proposes that gender and sexuality, which are largely overlooked in urban studies, are relevant and significant analytical categories for both urban subordination and politics. Finally, the thesis suggests that urban margins which facilitate alignments and informal means of organizing among people, also constitute the spaces where tensions and ruptures can emerge, and expressions of solidarity and struggle can become fragile. Thus, my research offers a nuanced understanding of urban agency by explaining the material, relational, and discursive opportunities it creates and the complexities and ambivalence that can occur at the margins. Despite their limitations, the collective practices described here support the material and social

persistence of sex workers. This is done by establishing communities and friendships, mutual care, claiming visibility, earning a living, and creating joy in the face of the persistent violence, discrimination, and stigma that encircle their lives.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to my supervisor, Juho Härkönen, for reading every draft of this thesis carefully and providing me with enormous intellectual support over the past years. His sharp and critical feedback taught me to engage with larger theoretical debates while attending the fine ethnographic detail. Without his support, finishing this thesis would not have been possible.

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This thesis has taught me that social support plays a crucial role in our lives especially during challenging times. I feel indebted to some beautiful people in my life: Anca, Henning, and Kamil have continuously inspired me with their curiosity. Natalia has helped me to keep my spirits up with her positivity. Eva and Huda, my intellectual sisters, who are honest, caring, humorous, and reflective, have always been there for guidance. I greatly appreciate the genuine friendships and critical minds of my dear friends, Youssef and Francesco. Metin and Mustafa have been my favorite pizza and birra companions with whom I often whined about Turkish politics. Among other colleagues and friends who led to the improvement of parts of my thesis are Julie, Shumeng, Simone, Şeyda, Marco, and Krzysztof.

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Contents

Introduction

I once got kidnapped by a man, said Beril, while we were sitting next to each other on a couch in the hair salon. She told me the whole story in a low voice so that others in the vicinity could not hear her. She had been locked up in a house where she was sexually assaulted for six months. *I was 17 years old at the time*, she added. Indeed, it was not the only time that she experienced or witnessed violence, but that was the most terrifying. *It isn't a kind of job you do only because you may like it. It is a dangerous business. They kidnap us; they cut our throats! If I had enough money, I'd leave these things behind immediately.*[1]

Many others have also experienced similar life-threatening attacks. During a period of working in another city, Kübra narrates how she was forced into a car and abducted by a group of strangers. In the dead of the night, she was abandoned in a remote rural area, stripped of her clothes and belongings. Sena's flat was robbed by a man who entered it by presenting himself as a client. At the end of the day, her friends found her beaten, tied up, and locked in the storage of her divan. Although the perpetrator was caught and sentenced to an extended prison sentence, Sena continues to suffer from the psychological injury caused by this incident. These are just a few examples of severe physical, psychological, and sexual violence faced by my interlocutors operating in different locations. In fact, there are no end of stories of this kind.

Trans people and trans sex workers in particular face violence, stigma, discrimination, and other rights violations all over the world. In recent years we have witnessed a striking rise in hate speech and anti-trans legislation on the part of politicians and public officials targeting this population (Transgender Europe 2020). At the same time, there has been a significant increase in physical attacks and online hate-speech targeted at trans folks (Ben Chikha 2021; ILGA-Europe 2021). The statistics from Turkey are particularly grim. According to Transgender Europe (2021), after Azerbaijan and Romania, Turkey is the lowest-ranking country in Europe for the protection of trans people in terms of respect for legal gender recognition, non-discrimination and legal protection, health, family, and reproductive rights, and asylum rights (see Figure 1). Transgender Europe also observes that more than one-third of trans murders committed in Europe take place in Turkey and that nearly all victims are sex workers (Transgender Europe 2019).

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[1] Throughout the thesis, conversations are only conveyed in quotation marks if they were recorded; otherwise they are given in italics.
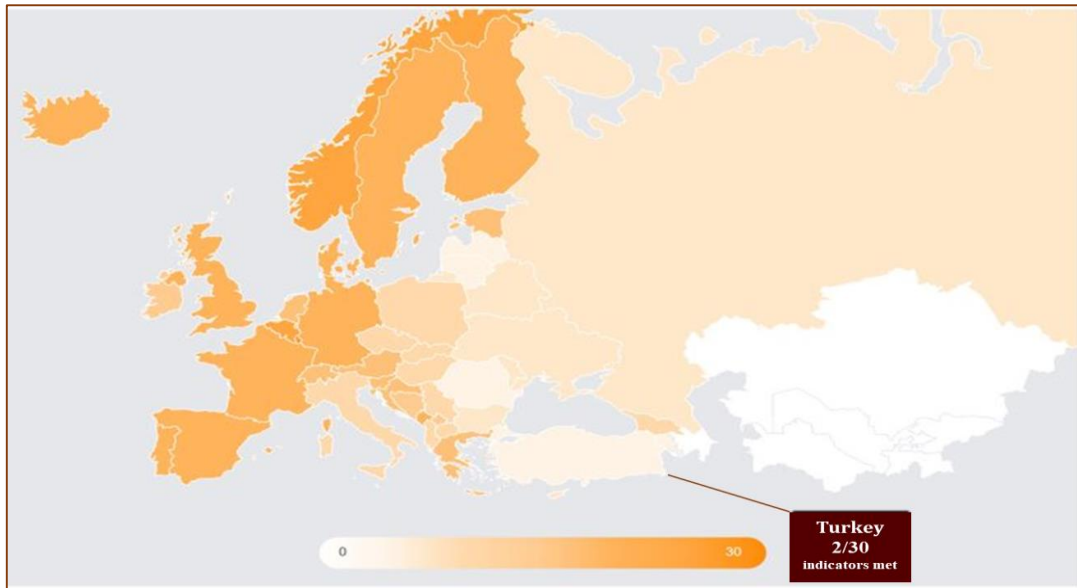
Figure 1: Trans Rights Map of Europe and Central Asia 2021: Protection of trans people across different areas of life. Retrieved October 16, 2021 (transrightsmap.tgeu.org).
Note: The darker the color, the higher the level of protection. The label for Turkey was added by the author.

The existing laws on prostitution differ with regard to legalization, regulation, and prosecution. As Figure 2 demonstrates, in most European countries, some aspects of prostitution, for instance, offering and buying sexual services and advertising and procuring for the purposes of prostitution, are criminalized and those who engage in this activity face fines or imprisonment. Another commonly punished aspect of prostitution is loitering or soliciting in public spaces. Many trans women are marginalized in terms of their socio-economic status, ethnicity, or migration status and rely on sex work for their livelihood. Thus, we can argue that multiple forms of discrimination intersect on the body of a trans sex worker.
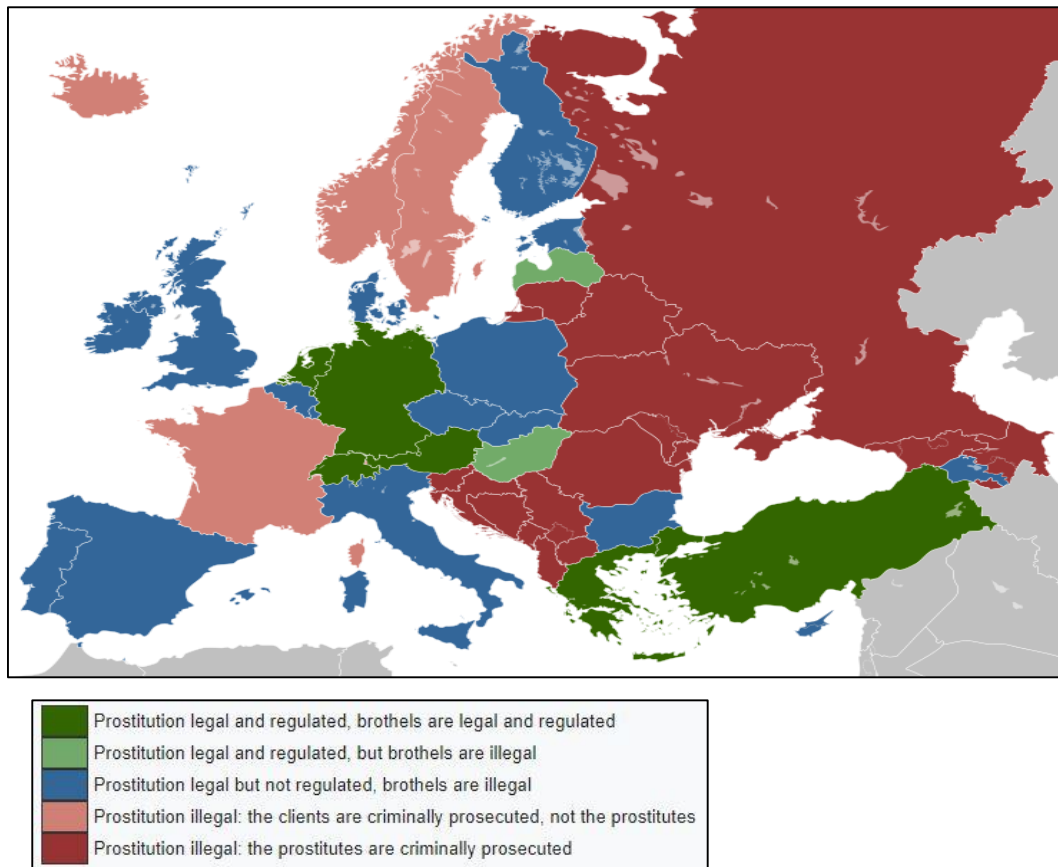
Figure 2: Regulations governing prostitution by country. 2017. Retrieved July 8, 2022.
(commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Prostitution_in_Europe_by_countries.svg)

Against this background, my thesis starts off with a broad question of how transfeminine[2] sex workers in Turkey—a little-researched population—respond to the relentless violence, discrimination, and stigma encircling their lives. During my fieldwork with a community of transfeminine sex workers, I came across a rich repertoire of *collective practices* generated by routine encounters with hostile circumstances. Some of these practices deal with building a community, a communal space, and relationships which allow them to exchange support and to protect one another within that space. Others could be read as struggles and expressions that contest the conditions of violence and marginality. Indeed, these two groups of commitments are not mutually exclusive; establishing communities in the face of extremely negative conditions does entail a defiant meaning, and some acts and discourses of contestation are shared communally, even if not always performed communally. I examine these collective practices through the theoretical lens of urban margins. The observations acquired from this study of the everyday life of a sexual minority link up with the broader

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[2] I use this broad term to refer to transgender people who were assigned male gender at birth but who identify themselves with femininity.

academic debate on alignments and actions emerging at the urban margins. Before I explain my research objectives in more detail, I will introduce the diverse perspectives taken in the study of sex work.

Sex Work and the Question of Agency

Commercial sex work has become a hot topic in public and academic debate especially in recent decades. This largely originates from the different positions taken over whether or not this activity should be legal. Two divergent perspectives dominate the debate on this issue. In the first, "prostitution" is seen as inherently violent, exploitative, and coercive (see Farley 2004), where one group solely focuses on the structural constraints that the sex trade imposes on its participants (Weitzer 2005). According to this perspective, "prostitution" undermines the agency of those engaged in it. In the second perspective by contrast, sex work is seen as a form of free labor, where people choose to enter the sex trade to improve their life chances, which is in turn a manifestation of their agency (see Bernstein 2007). Yet, both of these conflicting assumptions on sex workers' agency, tend to neglect the diversity of the settings in which sex work takes place, hence the different circumstances and experiences of those working in the sex trade (Bungay, Halpin, Atchison, and Johnston 2011).

While I find "labor" as the most appropriate way to describe the economic activity of exchanging sex for money, we need to go beyond the simplistic dichotomy of coercion *vs.* choice. I also agree with Sonja Dolinsek and Siobhán Hearne (2022) who stress not only the need to avoid this dichotomy but to locate the range of sex workers' experiences in this form of labor within a more complex gendered social and economic hierarchies. Indeed, alongside these two perspectives there are a growing number of studies which approach the experiences of people in the sex trade by focusing on specific challenges and practices emerging in different contexts. This body of work has examined sex workers' agency—for instance, to enhance their personal protection and economic advantage or to improve their working conditions—in a way which takes potential structural constraints into account (Agustin 2006; Bungay et al. 2011). For example: in *Global Sex Workers*, Kamala Kempadoo (1998:8-9) describes the vulnerability and marginality of sex workers in many parts of the world, and recognizes their efforts to transform their lives by taking specific decisions and making certain choices. Teela Sanders (2005) discusses the working conditions that expose sex workers in the UK to violations and vulnerabilities, but also focuses on the strategies pursued by sex workers for protection and financial gain. Choi and Holroyd (2007) have also noted that within the constraints created by economic pressures and patriarchal relationships, sex workers in contemporary China employ

specific tactics in their dealings with clients in order to maximize their income and to reduce health risks. Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (2011) shows that Filipina bar hostesses in Japan support themselves and their families in order to escape poverty, whilst struggling with the exploitation and coercion exacerbated by the anti-trafficking and anti-migration laws. These studies reveal a multiplicity of structural challenges that may restrict sex workers' control over their lives and pose a risk. Yet they also acknowledge the varying degrees of agency that individuals in the sex trade may have. In their enquiry, they combine an analysis of social systems with grounded/relational accounts; an approach that is also key to my thesis.

In *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Harold Garfinkel (1967:118-140) offers the first in-depth sociological discussion of transgender identity by focusing on the case of Agnes, a young trans woman who opted for "corrective surgery." This study, and other publications that expand on Garfinkel's writings on Agnes, for example, *Doing Gender* by West and Zimmerman (1987), propose a new understanding of gender as a routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interactions. For this reason, the case of Agnes brought about a radical shift in the sociological imagination of gender. When examining the scholarly debate on Agnes, Rebecca Raby (2000:26-27) contends that the representation of Agnes and other trans women in social science research is caught in a dichotomy between perceiving them either as victims misled by gender norms, and hence lacking agency, or as manipulative agents who reproduce traditional gender norms by means of their investments in stereotypical self-presentation and their goal of surgical intervention, and hence with full agency. This means that, in much the same way as the debate on sex work, different experiences of transgenderism are made invisible by the dominant positions taken on the agency of trans people.

The greater part of the research on *transgender* sex workers takes a legal or health perspective, for instance, documenting human rights violations (see Lyons et al. 2017), mental health (see Operario, Glynn, and Nemoto 2019), the risk of HIV (see Infante, Sosa-Rubi, and Cuadra 2009), and rates of substance (ab)use (see Hoffman 2019). A recent book, *Transgender Sex Work and Society,* edited by Larry Nuttbrock (2019), provides clear evidence of this tendency, with almost all chapters addressing such topics, despite the book's claim to be systematic and global. Aiming to improve the safety, well-being, and welfare of trans populations, these investigations highlight their everyday challenges and address their immediate needs. Thus, when it comes to transgender sex workers, advocacy and harm reduction research is critically important. On the other hand, there has been relatively little effort to understand how these populations attempt to tackle such adversities. In the face of multiple and intersecting forms of violence and marginalization, what types of alliance and

what sort of commitments are materialized, and what forms of practices, norms, and subjectivities emerge? This dissertation is an attempt to expand the literature on these questions. Below, I cite the ethnographic studies dealing with the experiences of trans sex workers in different cultural contexts.

The Ethnography of Transfeminine Experiences in Sex Labor

While some ethnographies with this population have critically examined the factors that contribute to their marginalization (see Howe, Zaraysky, and Lorentzen 2008), others have discussed the collective practices born under such circumstances. For example, Annick Prieur (1998:101) has written that in Mema's house in Mexico City, transvestites, referred to as *jotas*, shared a physical space where they assisted each other with survival needs, protection against physical aggression, and exchanged emotional support in the midst of poverty, violence, and stigma. They also taught each other the skills required in this subculture, including how to dress, use makeup, sell sexual services, and defend themselves verbally (p. 101). Gayatri Reddy (2005) explains how the *hijras* in Hyderabad live in communities, in which fictive kinship relations (p. 260) and cultural codes connect them to one another (p. 261). In his highly influential ethnography, *Travesti: Sex, Gender, and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes*, Don Kulick (1998) has explored the bodily and social practices of *travestis* who routinely face violence and humiliation in the city of Salvador. According to his account, *travestis* live and work together, and their communality is characterized by frequent interaction, cooperation, and conviviality, on the one hand (p. 42), and by competition, suspicion and distrust, on the other (p. 41). Amy Ritterbusch (2016) describes how transgender sex workers in Bogotá construct their own spaces of cohesion and engage in embodied and spatial resistance to exclusionary urban arrangements. These studies examine a range of social, spatial, and corporeal practices of transgender sex working communities in different cultural contexts.

Trans Lives in Turkey

There is now an emerging literature on trans experiences in contemporary Turkey. For instance, Pinar Selek (2007) reported on the violent events which led to the removal of "transvestites" and "transsexuals" from Ülker Street in Istanbul in 1996. Based on her own experience and the testimonies of trans women with whom she had close links, Selek explains the social, political, and historical context in which the violence unfolded and the urban actors or groups involved in the attacks. Her study is one of the earliest examples documenting the experiences of a trans subculture in Turkey. On the basis of life-story interviews Ezgi Taşçıoğlu (2021) argues how the state authorities exclude trans women from public spaces in Turkey, and

do so using legal means. Her analysis is rooted in Agamben's (2005) concept of *homo sacer*, namely, a human life stripped of all political value. This research has significantly shaped my understanding of how legal conditions create vulnerabilities for trans women in Turkey. Moreover, several ethnographic studies have provided critical insights into the experiences of trans refugees/asylum seekers in Turkey; for instance, their in-between zone of recognition (see Shakhsari 2014); the negotiation of deservingness for resettlement (see Koçak 2020); and the use of "transgender" as a humanitarian term (see Saleh 2020).

Selin Berghan (2007) has analyzed a range of social, political, and economic factors that shape the identity building processes of her "transsexual" interviewees. Turning to the everyday lives of the trans community in Istanbul, Aslı Zengin (2014) has conceptualized violence as a force that molds trans community's political and intimate subjectivity. She has gone on to explore the formation of a community, including trans family and trans activism, which provide emotional and financial protection in the face of hate crimes, police violence, and state control. Despite focusing largely on trans activists, her insights have helped guide my thesis. Overall, the research cited in this section informs us about different aspects of trans experiences, including forms of violence and exclusion, but also co-living practices and localized solidarity.

This growing body of literature has enriched our knowledge of trans alignments and politics, and my research has learned from this research and intends to make a contribution to it. On the other hand, these writings have not adequately scrutinized trans experiences in relation to the urban. Trans feminine people come together in particular urban areas of Turkey where they live and work in communities. Their everyday lives and practices occur and are shaped by a variety of dynamics in the city. This is not to say that they are isolated communities whose experiences are shaped exclusively by their local circumstances. As the following chapters will demonstrate, the lives of the trans sex workers I met were heavily affected by broader structural forces, such as legislation and national politics. Moreover, some of my interlocutors have ties to trans communities in other cities and with a dynamic trans activism in Turkey. At the same time, however, the urban environment has historically been a crucial aspect of trans sex workers' community lives, subjectivities, and practices in Turkey. In what follows I review the research at the point where sexuality and the urban environment intersect, and indicate the populations and geographies the urban literature has tended to ignore.

Sex in the City

Historically, cities have been generative of sexual subcultures (D'Emilio 1983; Oswin 2015; Weston 1991). At the same time, these are the sites where people with non-conforming gender identities and sexual practices come under intense surveillance, control, and regulation. Despite these critical links between cities and sexualities, a cursory glance at the literature shows us that the focus on sexuality in urban studies and urban theory has traditionally been limited to red-light districts and gentrified neighborhoods (Brown 2008:1216; Seitz 2015:255). The past decade has, however, seen more encompassing research exploring the relationships between the urban environment and sexual practice, performance, and identity (Hubbard, Gorman-Murray, and Nash 2015). This research analyzes the distinction between urban and suburban in terms of sexual diversity and how this distinction is maintained (see Hubbard 2011); the shifting moralities with regard to intimate and sexual life in specific cities (see Brown 2013; Gorman-Murray and Nash 2014); and how sexual diversity is mobilized as a marketing tool (see Bell and Binnie 2004).

However, the existing research on sexuality in urban studies is limited in that it has only prioritized the experiences of *some* queer subjects in *some* places. Phil Hubbard (2018) observes that most research in this subfield has centered on white, middle-class males, overlooking the intersection of sexuality with class, race, and gender. In so doing, sexuality in urban studies has largely remained within a homo-normative frame, focusing exclusively on the most privileged queers (Puar 2006) and excluding trans people, the lower classes, and people of color (Hubbard 2018:1298). For example, in *Boystown: Sex and Community in Chicago*, Jason Orne (2017) describes how the assimilation taking place in queer spaces, which had once enabled the first political organizing by homosexuals in the United States, is now pushing some queer sexualities out to the peripheries. In *There Goes the Gayborhood?* Amin Ghaziani (2014) reveals the changing dynamics in gay neighborhoods and reveals how, with enhanced cultural tolerance and acceptance of homosexuality, lesbians and gay men no longer limit themselves to living in gay neighborhoods but settle throughout an entire city. While eloquently documenting the radical shift in the well-known queer urban spaces of the United States, these studies do not talk about trans people and sex workers in their narratives on urban queer spaces.

Moreover, the subfield on urbanity/urban life and sexuality has been largely restricted to the metropolitan centers of the Global North (Brown 2008; Hubbard 2018; Hubbard, Gorman-Murray, and Nash 2015; Manalansan 2013), and this has led to a geographical bias in the knowledge produced on urban and sexuality. In their recent article, *Situating Sexuality: An*

Interconnecting Research Agenda in the Urban Global South, Tucker and Hassan (2020) have underscored the potential links that can be forged between sexuality and urban research in cities of the Global South. In particular, the authors argue that the strategies used by local sexuality-based groups in the face of persistent urban challenges in the Global South have received little attention. In *The Trouble with Flag Wars: Rethinking Sexuality in Critical Urban Theory*, David K. Seitz (2015) observes a lack of articulation between research on *urban struggles* and sexuality. In treating sexuality as a personal and private trait, scholars of urban studies have considered sexuality as secondary to, and separate from, the struggle against material deprivation and precarity (Seitz 2015). On the contrary, feminist theory has long demonstrated the intricate connections between cultural domination and economic exploitation, thus refuting the imagined dichotomy between the two (see Spivak 1985). Hence, although sexuality (similarly to and together with the categories of class, race, or gender) is one of the bases on which social and spatial orders are created and (therefore) contested (Hubbard, Gorman-Murray, and Nash 2015), its constitutive links to urban struggle go largely unnoticed.

Seitz (2015:260) maintains that questions of sexuality are dismissed since they are considered as a bourgeois concern of secondary importance. On the contrary, in the lives of urban subjects, sexuality interacts with class, race, and gender in producing different forms of violence and marginalization (Oswin 2015). A close examination of urban struggles would also reveal these entanglements in the city. The mere fact that urban studies usually examine the lives of more advantaged queers does not mean that queers of color, queers from the Global South, and queers from the working class do not exist. Indeed, as my thesis shows, sexuality is far from being a bourgeois concern, and thus deserves to be taken seriously as an analytical category in the study of urban struggle.

The omission of sexuality also characterizes some of the counterhegemonic political discourses in Turkey. Zeynep Kurtuluş Korkman (2016) focuses on the artificial separation of gender and sexuality from the terrain of "real" politics in Turkey—military, legal, and economic issues.[3] Despite the gendered nature of political and economic governance and its dire consequences for the lives of women and sexual minorities, a politics of intimacy is, she argues, interpreted merely as a distraction from "real" issues. This interpretation, at the same time, undermines the oppositional efforts of feminist and queer mobilization against cis-hetero-patriarchal domination (Korkman 2016:117). This understanding is not specific to the Turkish

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[3] Second-wave feminism's critique of the public/private divide directly relates to this argument (see Fraser 1990).

case. For example, the documentary *Indianara* (Barbosa and Chevalier-Beaumel 2019) presents the struggle of transgender people in Brazil, the country with the highest number of trans murders in the world against an increasingly violent right (see TGEU 2020).[4] Yet it also poignantly shows how their struggle is received with apathy by the political opposition. Thus, we see that rights violations against sexual minorities and mobilization around the issue of sexuality are not considered as critical as other political issues in Brazil, Turkey, or elsewhere. This thesis addresses such academic and political shortcomings. Each chapter of the thesis will include its own literature review and theoretical framework corresponding to the specific questions it intends to answer. In what follows, I will outline the overarching framework that ties together and informs different topics addressed in the dissertation.

Urban Marginality

Margins are produced as a result of the expulsion enacted by multiple centers to maintain their own authority (Lancione 2016:3). Rather than seeing urban margins as specific places or locations within the city, this view endorses a broad understanding of the concept. The conditions that lead to marginalization in urban spaces as well as the meaning of urban marginality depend on the context. Yet, different forms of marginality—political, economic, spatial, and social—come together, resulting in multiple and intersectional vulnerabilities for certain populations (Wacquant 1996). In this context trans sex workers are primarily marginalized on the basis of their non-conforming gender identity and sexual practices. Yet, this also brings about their economic and spatial marginalization.

A committed engagement with the everyday life at the margins prevents us from reducing trans people's experiences in these spaces solely to the issues of poverty, violence, and control. Instead, it provides an opportunity to see urban margins as spaces of *ambiguity* (see Achilli and Oesch 2016; Oesch 2017).[5] Ambiguity—between legality and illegality, integration and segregation, and opportunity and deprivation—is a particularly useful framework to understand the trans neighborhoods in urban Turkey. As we will see in Chapter 2, the ambiguous legal status of street-based sex work implies that prostitution is not a criminal act *per se*, and is therefore not specifically prohibited or eliminated. On the other hand, their community is heavily policed, and subject to coercion and arbitrary fines. Moreover, a binary view of integration and segregation does not explain their contemporary social reality. The

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[4] TMM Update Trans Day of Remembrance 2020. Retrieved August 15, 2021. (https://transrespect.org/en/tmm-update-tdor-2020/)
[5] Previous accounts used this framework to theorize the experiences of people in refugee camps (see Oesch 2017; Woroniecka-Krzyzanowska 2019).

neighborhood where I carried out my fieldwork (see Chapter 1), is not located in a remote or isolated zone, but is near the commercial center of the city. It also has fluid boundaries with the rest of the district. Nevertheless, trans sex workers are excluded from most public spaces, institutions, and businesses in the rest of the city through informal mechanisms of refusal, verbal and sexual harassment, and threats of violence. Finally, the economic experiences of people in this space are not uniform. While economic exclusion is one of the most important reasons why they search for livelihood options in the street-based sex trade, sex work has benefited their survival, and the economic mobility of some sex workers. These paradoxes constitute some of the ambiguous characteristics of the trans neighborhood. Within these ambiguities lie complex social dynamics.

My argument goes as follows. In this context, ambiguity implies that margins, where trans sex workers are constrained by intense police surveillance, societal discrimination, and the lack of other employment options, also bring them together and motivate them to self-organize. Self-organization gives rise to new possibilities and a multiplicity of dynamics within the trans community.

Urban Margins: Constraining and Enabling

Urban margins are both lamented and acclaimed. Social scientists have examined them from different perspectives, which have produced invaluable insights into the different aspects of the lives of those living in urban areas. To understand the factors that produce dispossession, exclusion, and exploitation, a great deal of research in this field takes a structural approach (Lancione 2016:4). In analyzing urban margins mainly through the lens of class and race, this perspective has produced critical insights into the macro processes that shape urban dynamics. However, some of this research has overemphasized the constraining force of the urban margins (Aceska, Heer, and Kaiser-Grolimund 2019), leading to the conclusion that structural constraints determine the lives of those living at the margins.

On the other hand, in prioritizing urban agency, a growing body of scholarship has shifted attention to the day-to-day practices and activities of urban dwellers. This examines not only structural factors, such as regulations and policies, but also their 'lived' experiences using a grounded approach. Concentrating primarily on the enabling capacities of margins, agency-oriented approaches have analyzed the potential created by the actors who coincide in urban spaces as a result of the processes of marginalization (Simone 2004). Indeed, the ambiguous conditions at urban margins can facilitate alignments between different actors and lead to informal ways of organizing.

In particular, scholars who have recognized the agency of the marginalized have studied a large number of practices: both small-scale and large-scale, visible or disguised, contentious or non-contentious, and action-based or discourse-based (see Bayat 2010:46-56). In particular, we can identify three predominant perspectives. The first concentrates on individual and collective acts whereby urban dwellers try to cope with their adverse circumstances (see Adler de Lomnitz 1975; Stack 1974). The second group tries to understand how the marginalized subjects organize and become involved in contentious politics in order to create opportunities for themselves (see Castells 1989) and takes both large-scale and localized struggle into account. Finally, the third group consists of small-scale, local, and everyday activities that defy political or economic domination, irrespective of whether they are conceptualized as everyday resistance (see Scott 1986), quiet encroachment (Bayat 2010), or in some other way. Clearly, these three groups of research are not exhaustive. Different academic traditions present alternative interpretations of the commitments appearing at the margins. Moreover, these practices, namely, coping, mobilization, and resistance, are not always distinct or mutually exclusive and can mix and mingle in everyday life. Despite the risk of being over-simplistic, these perspectives provide a rough guide to how I organize this dissertation.

On the other hand, some agency-oriented accounts neglect the overwhelming influence of macro processes. By underestimating just how severely marginality can constrain people's actions, they tend to misinterpret life at the margins (Lancione 2016:5). In particular, some of these studies have romanticized urban life in marginalized territories. Urban poverty research, for instance, falls into this tendency when it describes social relations and solidarity in deprived communities (Bulley 2014; Menjívar 2000). In particular, women's resilience and solidarity has been described in this way (Bähre 2007:36). This tendency has produced an image of marginalized communities as harmonious and cohesive collectivities bound by an uncomplicated sense of solidarity.

We can observe a similar tendency in the literature on the struggle or political action taking place at the urban margins. Some of this work conceptualizes margins as sites of resistance, but reads too much into the political agency of those living in challenging circumstances, and tends to overemphasize their capacity to transform their material and political conditions (Bayat 2010). Another related issue is the exclusion of the inner politics of the dominated from ethnographic narratives (Ortner 1995:179). Anthropologist Sherry Ortner (1995) argues that every subculture constructs its own forms of agency and that this constructedness implies that agency is not free from internal complexities and contradictions (see also Abu-Lughod 1990). However, the narratives of internal politics, rivalry, and conflict

within the dominated groups are still largely absent in the ethnographic accounts (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004). Ortner (1995) refers to this as "ethnographic refusal."

There are also other approaches that focus on urban agency, but these are critically informed by the structural obstacles actually faced by those involved. They take a classical sociological lens that lies in the interplay of agency and structure and that transgresses the macro-micro dichotomy (see Giddens 1979). While exploring the alignments and struggles formed at the margins based on a street-level understanding, this line of research also takes into account the economic, social, and cultural contexts in which people are embedded (see Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Datta 2012; Duck 2015; Lancione 2017). Considering both the enabling and limiting capacities of urban margins, this middle perspective brings us back to conceptualizing urban margins as ambiguous spaces. In a similar vein, while I mainly focus on the possibilities created at the urban margins based on the collective agency of a community, structural factors also occupy a central place in my analysis. In other words, I base this research on the middle position between constraining and enabling margins.

Research Objectives

This thesis has three goals, listed here from specific to general. First, it aims to make a contribution to the growing body of research documenting the life of transfeminine sex workers in Turkey with the links it weaves with urban studies. In Turkey trans sex worker communities live in urban neighborhoods where they are subject to multiple and intersecting forms of marginalization. Moreover, the urban margins are also the spaces where their collective practices and subjectivities take shape. Therefore, integrating the urban in the study of transfeminine experiences allows us to take into account the particular processes and opportunities that unfold in the urban space they occupy.

The second objective is to contribute to the literature that incorporates sexuality into the theories of the urban. As previously stated, existing research in this subfield focused mostly on white middle-class men living in metropolitan cities in the West. The case I look at questions this tendency in urban literature, but it also helps me to build an argument, which is the relevance of sexuality to urban subordination and struggle. Sexuality forms the basis for the marginalization of trans sex workers who live and work in Turkey's urban neighborhoods. They are marginalized primarily due to the stigma associated with their non-conforming gender identity and sexual practices. Yet, the urban order operating based on sexuality also generates material precarity, spatial marginalization, and violence. For this reason, trans sex workers in urban Turkey strive not only for the recognition of and respect for their gender identities and

cultural differences, but also for space, housing, a livelihood, and safety. Understanding how marginality is triggered, lived, contested, and reaffirmed in this context challenges the assumption that sexuality is a separate and less relevant field in urban struggle. This observation reveals the common elements in the struggles of some sexual dissidents and other groups to exist and to access basic resources and facilities in cities.

Finally, my thesis is intended to make a contribution to the broader academic literature on marginalized urban communities in general. Throughout, I cite and build on the research carried out with other groups marginalized with respect to their class, race, and ethnic position in different urban contexts, including undocumented migrants, racial minorities, the homeless, low-income mothers, and so forth. As stated earlier, all this draws disparate conclusions about the relations and struggles materialized on the urban margins.

Throughout the thesis, I examine the articulations of everyday life within an ambiguous space in urban Turkey: the trans neighborhood. I begin by investigating shared spaces, relationships, subjectivities, and the community and the organization of labor. In particular, I explain how the business activities and market and community relations are self-organized in a context where the protection and regulation provided by formal channels is limited. In this sense, I intend to make a contribution to our knowledge of the self-organization of socially-excluded communities and markets operating outside the formal (or legal) economy. Moreover, these community structures provide the ground for a rich repertoire of social and political struggle, namely constructing support networks and exchanging assistance among the trans community. They also encompass practices that challenge stigma, harassment, and violence or that aim to transform those circumstances. Within this group, I study, on the one hand, community mobilization and confrontational resistance; on the other hand, discursive, embodied, and affective practices of humor, joy, and laughter that are defiant in nature. Significantly, I discuss all these commitments in relation to the conditions under which they arise.

While my research is centered on the collective agency of this community, I have tried to avoid producing yet another idealized account of the alignments established at the fringes of society. Indeed, I have observed that workers' efforts actually open up new spaces for violence and marginalization which seep into community life. In this context urban margins also become a space where tensions and ruptures are reinforced and struggle becomes precarious. In this sense, the commitments I analyze in this research deviate from the common depictions of marginalized urban communities as unified collectivities enjoying unequivocal solidarity or political agency. This is not to say that their relationships are corrupt, that their struggles are

futile, or that urban agency is doomed to failure. On the contrary, the trans community engages in a broad spectrum of struggle. Moreover, some of their commitments, however fragile and ambivalent, lead to transformative consequences. Even practices that do not lead to a direct improvement in their conditions manifest the urban agency exercised by the trans community.

Lori Allen (2008) explains that in the conditions of routine violence of the Israeli occupation, *getting by*, managing everyday survival, and adapting to the violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territories entail a kind of agency. The idea of the *politics of presence*, articulated by Angel Aedo (2019) for the residents of an unauthorized camp in Chile, resembles and goes beyond this assertion. Aedo discusses the individual and collective will to persevere in a place denied to its inhabitants—by means of social exclusion, legal exception, and spatial segregation—and to transform that place. In a similar vein, the collective practices discussed in this thesis illustrate the material, relational, and discursive potentials created and the life built in the face of relentless violence and marginalization. The trans community persists in the urban space that they inhabit. They claim visibility despite institutional efforts and societal discrimination that seek to render their bodies invisible from public. They continue to make their living in the street-based sex trade even under strict police surveillance to deter them. Faced with conditions that destabilize their relations and complicate their commitments, they continue to build communities, to protect one another, and to actively challenge the conditions of marginalization. Based on the articulations of urban agency, life persists and becomes enjoyable at the fringes of society.

Mapping the Dissertation

The thesis consists of six empirical chapters. Chapter 1 presents the historical, demographic, and economic context of the research. It starts with a brief overview of the sex trade and non-heteronormative customs of entertainment dating from the late Ottoman period. It goes on to trace the evolution of the co-living spaces and community-building practices of transfeminine sex workers in contemporary Turkey. Moving to the community where I carried out my research with, this chapter describes the physical and socio-economic characteristics of the neighborhood, the actors affiliated with this space, and the organization of sex labor. Chapter 2 discusses the political, legal, and economic environment in which trans sex workers in contemporary Turkey live. Drawing on the lens of structural violence, it explains the processes through which various regulations and institutional practices make the trans community vulnerable to everyday violence, abuse, and discrimination.

The remainder of the dissertation focuses on the diverse responses of the trans community to the violence and marginalization they experience in their day-to-day lives. Chapter 3 examines the social and spatial organization of the community, shared social codes, and work practices. Building on the theories of "street codes" and "connected lives," it argues that the local social order serves to foster solidarity and to address tensions among sex workers. Chapter 4 analyzes the processes of establishing social networks and mobilizing support in the community. Moreover, it explores the roles of shared spaces in community-building and the roles of collectivities in creating supportive patterns among sex workers. Attending to the inner dynamics of social ties, the chapter, also examines the processes whereby structural constraints impede mobilization for reciprocal support and create interpersonal tensions. Together, these two chapters contribute to the theoretical debates on how structural constraints shape community dynamics and solidarity at the urban margins.

The last two chapters delve into a different terrain of struggle, that of acts and expressions of defiance. Chapter 5 combines historical and grounded observation in order to understand the extent to which trans sex workers engage in visible resistance to violence and marginalization. First, it investigates the emergence and evolvement of organizing and politics of trans people and trans sex workers in Turkey in recent decades. Secondly, it discusses the confrontational practices of the sex working community in the face of violence and harassment in their day-to-day lives. Both sections examine the relation between different forms of precarity and the emergence of resistance. Finally, highlighting the prevalence of humor and laughter in everyday interactions, Chapter 6 enquires into the political potential of some uses of humor by the trans community. It argues that humor and joy especially among (queer) sex workers can function as a refusal of the gendered and sexualized social hierarchies and play a community-building role. This chapter also interrogates the conventional understanding of politics.

The Methodological Approach

The research that this thesis is based on largely relies on ethnographic fieldwork. Ethnography produces in-depth knowledge of social phenomenon and dynamics by studying people's actions and narratives in their everyday context. Especially in the early stage of research, ethnography provides the opportunity to use data to think with, to identify patterns, and to determine the direction of research (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:163). These characteristics make ethnographic methods practically and ethically appropriate for investigating the social worlds located at society's margins.

By focusing on a single case and examining various aspects of it, as is common in ethnographic research, I have sought to develop a deeper and more intimate connection to the topic in question. Sehlikoglu and Zengin (2005:23) argue that the relationship between the ethnographer and the field—the access gained, the connections formed, and the knowledge obtained—is in the realm of the "intimate." Indeed, ethnographic fieldwork has enabled me to build up an intimate familiarity with the people and the context studied. This kind of ethnography involves emotions and my research is informed by an ethnographic tradition that contends that emotions are integrated in our reflections and analyses (see Bondi 2005; Brandt and Josefsson 2017; Kulick and Willson 1995). In the end, ethnography is a relational discipline, and emotions are vital in the relations we build in the field. Therefore, it is unlikely that emotions can be detached from the way we interpret the processes of fieldwork (Gune and Manuel 2011). In particular, emotions are not only a means to strengthen our rapport with the respondent, but they are also a vehicle to perceive the social worlds, positions, and experiences of others (Parvez 2018:258). Rather than constituting an obstacle to my research, my embodied experience and emotions have instead helped me to understand and to make sense of the accounts and actions of my interlocutors. McQueeney and Lavelle (2017) describe critical ethnography as, in Hochschild's terms (1979), a form of *emotional labor,* which helps us to "contextualize emotions, use emotions to unmask power in the research process, and link emotions to personal biographies" (p. 83).

Yet, there are various degrees to which ethnographers are physically and emotionally involved in the lives of people they work with. I could define my level of involvement in the field as "intimate distance" (Pile 2010). While I have built up intimate relationships, especially with my key informants, I also had some distance from the field, which allowed me to leave space for my research. For instance, I organized my fieldwork in periodic visits, instead of a one-off and long-term engagement, and this allowed me the time and space to reflect on the conversations and interviews I had recorded. Furthermore, I did not live in the neighborhood, but in another district in the same city, from where I took a one-hour train ride to reach the neighborhood. In fact, not all community members resided in this neighborhood. These journeys were always productive and reflective moments. I used my time on the train to take notes of everything I remembered, to make sense of the day's events, and to plan my next steps.

Ethnography acknowledges the messiness of life; to borrow Donna Haraway's (2016) expression, it chooses to "stay with the trouble." Although my aim with this research is to convey a social world through a coherent account, I respect its complexity, and try to avoid reducing it to oversimplified categories. Then, rather than testing an *a priori* hypothesis, I have

adopted the grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967). This does not mean that my research is not informed by theory, but that my research process resembles a constant back-and-forth journey between data and ideas. Below, I explain the particular research methods employed in this thesis.

Methods of Data Collection

I gathered most of the data during five rounds of fieldwork over a period of eighteen months, from August 2017 to January 2019, through participant-observation and in-depth interviews (the first round being preliminary fieldwork). In addition, I also collected a variety of online sources. In the course of my fieldwork, I spent a total of six months on data collection and an average of six hours a day in the field. During this period, I engaged not only with sex workers, but also with other social actors who frequented the trans neighborhood. The fieldwork took place in an urban neighborhood of Izmir where there is a community of trans women that earns a living on the street-based sex market. I chose this particular neighborhood for reasons of familiarity and relatively easy access. Yet, trans sex workers have also formed communities in other cities where they live and work together.

The analysis followed a grounded approach. An iterative and inductive analysis started in the field with my first observations and preliminary interviews—which also shaped my questions of the subsequent interviews—and continued after leaving the field. At this stage, I first re-read my field and interview data several times, which reacquainted me with the conversations and events that I had recorded during my fieldwork. Next, I started an open coding of the topics that emerged from empirical data. As I progressed, the codes were revised and refined, which resulted in the identification of key themes of this research. These themes constituted the basis of my chapters. Transcription and analysis were facilitated using the MAXQDA software. Coding was conducted manually; the software only assisted me with organizing the codes in a large dataset.

Participant observation

Participant observation is the basic mode of data collection in most ethnographic research, and was also my primary method. This method usually requires the researcher to participate in others' worlds and build relationships with them. I conducted participant observation in various places, including neighborhood cafes, restaurants, beauty salons, and the streets. Most frequently, I spent time at a tea garden, where I met sex workers, regular clients, and neighbors casually; and at a beauty salon, where I socialized and helped out with

odd jobs and engaged in other day-to-day activities. My access to the "field" was also facilitated by these local businesses, where neighborhood actors spend time on a daily basis.

I attended symposiums and conferences held by transgender rights organizations and consulted and interviewed several trans rights activists. While the insights I gained from these actors helped me to understand the legal context and the rights violations faced by this population, the relationships I built with them did not facilitate my access to the field. In fact, there was no one who could grant, control, or block access to the community. What I did was to simply show up and walk around in the neighborhood, hoping to meet people spontaneously. In 2017, my initial attempts to make contact failed, but they were not in vain. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:41) point out, the obstacles we encounter while negotiating access can bring us crucial knowledge about the field. Indeed, over time, I learned the times of the day when sex workers were more available to socialize, the parts of the neighborhood where I had more opportunities to meet them, and ways to approach and communicate with different neighborhood actors. This knowledge not only eased my access, but also helped me to understand the social organization of the community and the routines of the people in that community.

One day, I decided to sit in a tea garden with low tables and colorful tiny chairs placed next to each other on the street. Most of the customers were trans residents from the neighborhood. They all seemed to know each other; there was a conversation that involved people sitting at different tables. As the only cis woman present, I was concerned that I might be invading their space, yet no-one seemed bothered by my presence. In fact, most probably because she noticed my recent yet regular visits to the neighborhood, one of the women called out to me. She drew me into a lighthearted exchange she was having with a regular client. On this occasion, we exchanged playful comments and subdued laughter. The next time I was in the tea garden I disclosed why I was visiting the neighborhood, which led to my getting in touch with a trans woman who was willing to talk to me about my research. With her I conducted my first preliminary interview. Another place where I spent considerable time was a beauty salon that mostly serves the trans sex workers in the neighborhood. Compared to the tea garden, this establishment provided a more intimate setting where we could have private conversations. In short, these local businesses played a critical role on my access to the community.

Interviews

I also conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews in Turkish,[6] using open-ended questions and with considerable probing on my part. I adapted the order of the questions depending on the course of each interview to make it more like a natural interaction. My questions concerned real events rather than abstract or hypothetical situations. During the interviews with sex workers, I collected comprehensive data on the experiences of violence, abuse, and discrimination in different areas of life, relationships, informal support networks, individual and collective protection strategies, community dynamics, and so on. Interviews were embedded in the process of participant observation. The discussions we had during the interviews made my research intentions clearer to my interlocutors. This, in turn, strengthened my rapport with them. In this sense, especially my first interviews prepared the ground for more fruitful participant observation.

Out of the 30 neighborhood actors I interviewed, 18 were transgender sex workers, and my principal interview partners. The ages of the workers ranged from 18 to 45 with an average age of 25. My other interviewees included shopkeepers, hairdressers, activists, a lawyer, and a local civil society member as well as sex workers' friends, neighbors, managers, an ex-partner, and a taxi driver, all of whom were somehow related to neighborhood space. I started with convenience sampling. Next, in order to include the groups not represented in my sample, I continued with targeted sampling. With a better understanding of neighborhood and community characteristics through ethnographic investigation, I identified different groups. For instance, houses had slightly different characteristics in terms of income, mobility rates, and the organization of labor. While several working apartments had stable members who had worked together for years, others had more variable arrangements. Some workers had informal contracts with their madams (referred to as mothers), whereas others rented apartments where they worked alone or with their friends and without a manager. Finally, a part of the community only solicited in the streets of their neighborhood, whilst others also visited peripheral locations, such as major roads. In other words, my goal was to reach sex workers from different working apartments as well as those who also operated in other parts of the city. Spending long hours in a beauty salon—instead of relying solely on street contacts—allowed me to talk to the sex workers who also operated in peripheral zones. In sum, the construction of the interview

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[6] The excerpts of the transcribed interviews and field notes cited in the thesis were translated into English by the author.

sample was a multifaceted and dynamic process. I stopped conducting interviews when they added little new information to the existing data.

Online sources

I also collected online sources, namely, legal codes, NGO reports, newspaper and magazine articles, and oral history documents—mostly written but also in video format. These sources helped me to explore the legal, political, and economic conditions surrounding trans sex workers' lives in Turkey. They also helped me in locating my neighborhood study in the broader history and geography of trans community-building and politics in Turkey. I used the grounded theory approach to make sense of the data from these sources as well. For instance, to analyze my sources on the broader trans resistance, I followed Alice Mattoni (2014) who has provided a detailed account of how to use grounded theory in the study of social movements. I combined data that I collected from different sources, conducted coding, and identified themes, in much the same way as for the analysis of my field data.

Ethics

Ethics is a messy terrain when it comes to conducting fieldwork. Taking place in a context of everyday violence, this project meant being ethically reflexive throughout the research process and making various on-the-spot decisions on unanticipated issues. In what follows I discuss how I engaged with the core ethical principles, namely, informed consent, anonymity, and data storage and security, in the course of this research.

Informed consent

Informed consent is one of the most critical aspects of ethical conduct in field research, and has different dimensions that need to be unpacked. I followed the definition of meaningful and ongoing consent by Virginia Morrow (2009). Correspondingly, before conducting interviews, I introduced myself (who I am and where I work) and discussed my research project (topic, purpose, and interview themes) and other matters related to data storage and confidentiality with potential interview partners. I also made it clear that participation was voluntary and that a respondent was free to skip any question or terminate the interview at any time. In much the same way, after informing my interview partners about the purpose of audio-recordings and reassuring them as regards their confidentiality, I recorded the interviews with those who have given their consent. Throughout the thesis, conversations are only conveyed in quotation marks if they were recorded; otherwise they are given in italics. Furthermore, instead of signed consent, I asked my interviewees for their oral consent. This is a common practice in

fields where the loss of anonymity may constitute a potential safety concern (Ferreira and Serpa 2018:19; see Knott 2019:143).

Establishing trust was a slow and challenging task which was successful with some and failed with others. Some of my interlocutors told me about a journalist who had published a transphobic opinion column about the community after her apparently sympathetic visit to the neighborhood. With this betrayal fresh in their minds, some of my interviewees were vigilant in my presence and wanted to ensure that I was not recording conversations or taking photographs without their permission. Others, on the other hand, were happy to have their full and exact accounts recorded. In short, recording was a delicate matter, for which consent had to be clear and unambiguous.

On the other hand, in the process of the data collection and analysis new research questions and interpretations have evolved and new topics have emerged. Referring to this kind of situation, Eleanor Knott (2019) believes that we should re-seek consent in order to check whether interlocutors are still happy with how their data are being used. However, even though I talked to my key informants about my research throughout the fieldwork process, the outbreak of Covid-19 limited my ability to conduct face-to-face interactions, and hence to discuss my findings with my research participants beyond the field. This was one of the limitations to my research.

Anonymity

Like consent, anonymization is also a multi-layered practice. The most challenging decision I made here was whether or not to anonymize the location of the field site. While this research speaks to the cases of trans sex workers who are subject to the same sort of violence and discrimination in different parts of the world, the community practices I write about in this thesis have been partially shaped by the local history, culture, and the physical environment. Therefore, integrating such contextual characteristics helps me to explain my arguments more clearly. On the other hand, this may entail exposing the community to an additional risk of harm. According to McAreavey and Muir (2011:402-403), some of the existing research ethics practices take "a 'light touch' approach where boxes are ticked but ethical behaviour is not seriously contemplated." Building on this critique, I asked myself who would actually benefit from making the place anonymous. Would this practice merely be another ticked box to make my research sound more ethically compliant? Would a genuine ethical consideration encourage such an anonymization? After some thought, I decided against removing the name of the city where my fieldwork was carried out. Despite the legally ambiguous status of the street-based

sex work, the community that I met is neither hidden nor hard-to-reach. Trans sex workers live predominantly in several urban districts of Izmir, and both the local population and the authorities are fully aware of this. Furthermore, the observations I convey in this thesis would not be surprising to the police who daily patrol the exact streets where I spent most of my fieldwork time. Therefore, I reasoned that naming the city would not increase the risk of harm to my research participants.

As we will see in Chapter 1, the lives of transfeminine people in contemporary Turkey are documented in two works of oral history (Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2012, 2013). Several older trans women who live in Izmir have also contributed to these publications. Given that these individuals wrote openly about their spaces and the lives they built in them, making the place anonymous could be interpreted as a paternalistic act of protection. Their decision to be visible challenged the widespread efforts to erase the history of sexual dissidents in Turkey. Taking this into account I decided to refer openly to the community that had taken the commitments I refer to in this thesis.

On the other hand, I have tried to safeguard the confidentiality and anonymity of the data collected from individuals as far as possible. For reasons of privacy and safety, personal identifiers, such as the names and ages of interlocutors, were not revealed. All the names used here are pseudonyms. For the sake of anonymity, I also changed some defining features of the lives of my interlocutors and omitted certain aspects of individual cases in ways that do not affect the integrity of the data. In fact, changing the characteristics of study participants in order to protect their identities is a common practice when working with "vulnerable" groups (Wiles, Crow, Heath, and Charles 2008). Finally, in line with the EUI's ethical clearance for this research, I stored the field notes and recorded interviews on an encrypted cloud during my fieldwork.

Following the fieldwork

Eleanor Knott (2019) reminds us that ethical questions continue after we leave the geographical site of the field. The most difficult ethical dilemmas I had beyond the field related to what material to include and how to write about people's lives. This has become a concern, especially when writing about physical violence against the community. While the mass media tends to construct transgender sex workers as criminal groups which cause a disturbance to "respectable citizens," it displays almost total apathy in the face of the severe violence this population is subjected to (Tar and Güner 2014:17). Therefore, it was important that my work does not downplay the violence suffered by my interlocutors. At the same time it was important

that I did not sensationalize these experiences. I have tried to maintain a balance between these two goals by conveying the stories of violence only if they were relevant to the questions pursued in my chapters.

Another terrain of ethical doubt and anxiety has emerged while writing about community tensions and ruptures that are relevant to my research questions. As discussed earlier, following in the footsteps of some anthropologists (see Auyero 2000; Bourgois 2001; Ortner 1995, Scheper-Hughes 1992), I wanted to avoid producing a romanticized account of the struggle I observed in this research context. I needed to ensure that my work did not contribute to the stereotypical portrayals of this social group. In this regard, I followed Menjívar (2000) and Lubbers and her colleagues (2020) and, instead of taking these dynamics as stable community characteristics, I tried to understand the processes that produce tension and conflict and that make support networks precarious. This approach differs profoundly from the earlier ethnographies that blame disadvantaged groups for their adverse conditions and that classify them as conflict-ridden or dysfunctional (see Banfield 1958; Lewis 1966). My interpretations have been guided by discussions with several community members. Moreover, in explaining both external violence and internal conflicts, I tried to stay as close as possible to the empirical data, and to give the exact words used by my interlocutors as much as possible.

Going Home to the Field: "Partial insider status"

Panourgiá (1994:46) argues that "simply by being of the country/ culture/ group/ family, one is not automatically guaranteed infinite and non-terminable knowledge of the culture." In the specific field where I worked, I had a partial insider status. I lived in the same city and spoke the same language as my interlocutors. In addition, my socio-economic background is not dissimilar to some of their backgrounds. At the same time, I was an outsider both to the community and to the trans struggle. Instead of being just an insider or an outsider, my multiple and layered position in this research can be defined as "betweenness" (see Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso 2018).

Debate on both ethics and positionality in anthropology and political science predominantly fit the cases in which white researchers work in post-colonial contexts. On the other hand, ethnographers increasingly conduct fieldwork in their own countries of origin and in their own native language. Doing research "at home," as in my case, also raises questions of ethics and power, and necessitates deliberation on researcher's positionality. Myrto Dagkouli-Kyriakoglou (2021) asks whether carrying out research as allies with communities marginalized on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identity is "an imperialistic

project". I agree that a fully ethical conduct may not be possible in a research context where there are large power imbalances. And this kind of research necessitates a deep reflection on our positionalities, and how power imbalances in research process might impact our research partners and knowledge production. I am a cisgender woman who has studied at a European institution of higher education. The differences my interlocutors and I had with respect to gender and educational status entailed large power asymmetries, which were reflected in our relationships. As much as I tried to take a feminist approach in my fieldwork, meaning that I attempted to form reciprocal, equal, and collaborative relationships (see Alcalde 2007), power dynamics persisted. I was transparent about who I was and what the goals of my research were. I did not believe that I could erase the differences, but I tried to create some moments in which the differences were less salient. On some occasions this worked, on others, my attempts to mitigate the distance generated by our positionalities were challenged by my research participants. We were reminded of our differences and boundaries were reinforced. For instance, some people used "softer" language when I was around and invited the others to do the same.

At the same time, considering other identity positions (e.g., race and class) and the vast range of different trans experiences, Raby (2000:31) reminds us of Namaste's (1996) argument that it is ethical self-reflexivity—not insider status—which is more critical for this kind of research, as it helps us to understand the everyday material and discursive conditions of trans individuals. Building on this position, I also want to highlight the ambiguities of my own positioning. While I enjoy enormous privileges in relation to my research participants in a cisnormative society, having spent most of my life in the country where I was born as a woman, I have also been disadvantaged and exploited by the same patriarchal structures and relations. While these are not comparable to trans sex workers' experiences of persistent violence and exclusion deeply embedded in cultural and institutional domains, they do mean we had commonalities besides being allies. Fieldwork has become one process through which these commonalities were explored. I often joined a group of trans women who were watching the evening news in the tea garden, during which we discussed the increasing number of femicides or cost of living in Turkey. These issues concerned all of us.

As discussed in the previous section, in order to mitigate the ethical and methodological limitations of my positionality, I adopted a grounded and relational approach. This allows for the lived experiences and accounts of my interlocutors to guide the research process. Moreover, some of my interlocutors did not only act as sources of data, but also as partners who played a role in interpreting the events, relations, and conversations. These reflections will be returned

to and the impacts of positionality on research findings and conclusions will also be further discussed in the empirical chapters.

Chapter 1: *Lubunyas* — A Historical, Demographic, and Economic Background

The Turkish word, *lubunya* is one of the most common ways in which my interlocutors refer to themselves and to one another and consequently it appears frequently throughout this thesis. This chapter introduces various aspects of the life of *lubunyas*. In particular, it contextualizes the community with whom I carried out my fieldwork within the history that precedes it and the particular space in which it is rooted. This is a background chapter that aims to make the remainder of the dissertation more comprehensible to the reader. It is organized around four major themes: (1) The historical introduction to prostitution in Turkey and non-heteronormative customs of entertainment; (2) demographic information about the neighborhood actors; (3) the physical descriptions of the neighborhood space; and (4) the organization of sex work in the neighborhood. I start with a historical description of the spaces of prostitution, emphasizing their prevalence and diversity, and exploring the state's view of this phenomenon.

Prostitution from the Late Ottoman Empire to the present day

In the nineteenth century a range of entertainment spaces flourished in the Ottoman urban context, including coffeehouses, taverns, *gazinos* (nightclubs), and *hans* (guesthouses) (Kabagöz 2016). The more cosmopolitan cities, such as the port city of Izmir, with inhabitants and visitors—merchants, travelers, and workers—of different ethnic groups and religions, hosted a variety of entertainment venues (Demir 2005). Places of prostitution, such as brothels, taverns, *hamams* (public baths), and *hans* are among the common entertainment locations of the period (Sariyannis 2008). Though fluctuating with respect to the living conditions of the time, prostitution had a considerable presence in Izmir. It appeared in multiple districts, for example, the Kordon area, Alsancak, Mersinli, Bayrakli, and Kemer, some of which are still frequented by sex workers today (Ocak 2016:23-25). Historical information on the spaces of prostitution was recorded in a variety of documents, for example, in the registers of venereal diseases, such as syphilis, which was widespread in Europe and the Middle East in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

These documents recorded that in 1891, most of the brothels in Izmir, located in the business district (Kordon) and in its inner streets, were closed down and relocated to a remote neighborhood, Sakızlar Mahallesi (BOA 1891)[7]. In addition, regular examinations at the

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[7] Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi [BOA], A.MKT.MHM, no. 502/523, (26 Zilhicce 1308 / 2 August 1891).

Syphilis Hospital (Emraz-ı Zühreviye Hastanesi), established in 1908, became compulsory for (female) prostitutes in Izmir (Karayaman 2008:179). In 1915, the Ottoman Empire introduced legislation to regulate (female heterosexual) prostitution, entitled "The Regulation on the Prevention of the Spread of Venereal Disease" (Toprak 1987). The regulation sets out a definition of a *fahişe* (prostitute), who could only be a woman (Toprak 1987). This regulation tried to exercise strict state control over brothels, by registering prostitutes, limiting where and how they could work, and imposing medical examinations and fees on them (Oğuz 2017). Spatial restrictions were also implemented; for instance, "brothels could not be opened next to or opposite *honorable* family households" (Oğuz 2017). In this way, prostitution was treated as both a moral issue and a health risk for society. The regulation of prostitution was also a common development in Europe and in its colonies during the same period (Dolinsek and Hearne 2022:124; see Dunne 1994; Howell 2000). As Sonja Dolinsek and Siobhán Hearne (2022:124) wrote in the case of twentieth century Europe, these institutional efforts labelled women who engaged in prostitution as the sole source of venereal disease, and this in turn legitimized the coercive examinations and treatment of female prostitutes. On the other hand, men who paid for extramarital sex were not subject to any discriminating or penalizing treatment.

These regulations not only revealed the extent of prostitution in Ottoman cities, but also made brothels legally visible (Oğuz 2017). Despite regulatory intervention, unregistered prostitution remained widespread, especially during World War I, and both Muslim and non-Muslim women were extensively involved in it (Toprak 1987). According to the data provided by the Turkish Sanitary Bureau, in 1922 there were around 4,000–4,500 prostitutes in Istanbul, but only 2,171 of them registered. These numbers are striking for a city of 700,000 inhabitants (Riggs 1922:363).

In the early years of the Turkish Republic, prostitution continued to constitute a distinct an area in which conflicting tensions intersected. In the 1950s and 1960s, official brothels and small hotels catering to prostitution were shut down, forcing many sex workers onto the streets (Toprak 1987). A similar intervention has been carried out in modern-day Turkey. After a number of brothels were closed or moved to the urban outskirts (Sussman 2012), approximately 40 legal brothels are currently left in Turkey.[8] On the other hand, according to a report

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[8] In March 2019, the government enacted a temporary shutdown of brothels as part of the COVID-19 precautionary measures. https://www.duvarenglish.com/sex-workers-in-turkey-and-the-pandemic-article-55324

published by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA 2014:14)[9], unregistered sex work is still widespread, with sex workers using a range of different spaces, including massage parlors, beauty parlors, highways, parks, squares, streets, cinemas, *hamams*, saunas, hotels, bars, clubs, and rented apartments to solicit clients or provide sex services. This means that those who are officially registered make up only a small fraction of all sex workers in Turkey.

Overall, prostitution was a significant part of social and economic life, both in the late Ottoman Empire and during the early period of the Republic. In the Ottoman Empire prostitution was perceived as something "unavoidable, yet immoral" (Sariyannis 2008:62). This perspective has largely persisted in later periods, with sometimes the 'immoral', and at other times the 'unavoidable' part predominating. Although the state or local authorities have repeatedly intervened to tackle this 'problem', for instance, by keeping it out of public sight, they rarely intended to eliminate it altogether.[10] Even today, in an increasingly socially conservative country, prostitution is not strictly illegal in Turkey. This ambivalent approach means that registered prostitutes are kept under surveillance and unregistered prostitutes face arbitrary punitive measures.

Non-heteronormative Intimacies and Customs of Entertainment

Paying young men for sex was a form of entertainment for men in the Ottoman Empire, albeit in a different domain to female prostitution (Andrews and Kalpaklı 2005:49). According to Sariyannis (2008:62), male prostitution seems to have been tolerated and accepted, insofar as it followed certain 'institutional' norms. In the eighteenth century intimate and sexual encounters with boys in *hamams* (public baths), even by the cabinet members and the Janissaries of the Ottoman Empire, were not uncommon (Delice 2015). By contrast, same-sex sexual desires were generally stigmatized in the late Ottoman Empire, where homoeroticism was generally associated with backwardness and rural society (Haynes 2014). This was the period when the Ottoman Empire was trying to establish a new social order based on Western models (Avcı 2017:762).

Other key performers in the world of entertainment were the legendary *köçek* dancers (see Figure 2). *Köçeks* were handsome young dancing 'boys' who performed for the Ottoman court and lived in the palace, or who performed in taverns and coffeehouses in urban areas

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[9] UNFPA. 2014. Türkiye'de Seks İşçilerinin Cinsel Sağlık ve Üreme Sağlığı: İhtiyaçlar ve Öneriler. Ankara, Turkey: UNFPA & Kırmızı Şemsiye.
[10] An exceptional decision was implemented in 1930 ordering the closure of all brothels (Toprak 1987). Unfortunately, this legislation provoked 'prostitute hunts' and arbitrary raids on private houses, with an arbitrary violation of individual privacy ("Fuhuşla mücadele", *Cumhuriyet*, 4 March 1930). In 1933, regulated prostitution once more became legal.

(Koçu 2002 [1947]) or for male audiences throughout rural Anatolia until the early nineteenth century (And 1959:25). The attire and general appearance of these young performers had elements of both masculine and feminine, including long skirts or baggy trousers, brightly-colored silks, jewelry, and long hair (Shay 2006:150). The *köçeks* had a multi-faceted gender role and cannot be easily fitted into the male-female duality (Yalur 2013:69). They were the object of adult male desire and their praises were sung in the homo-erotic poetry in the early modern Ottoman Empire (Klebbe 2005:105). However, just like male prostitution, *köçek* dancing was marginalized in the modernizing Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century and later in the young Turkish Republic (Haynes 2014). There is a great deal of evidence that the capitalist modernization of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries based on a process of Europeanization brought a strictly hetero-normative understanding of sexuality on the Ottoman Empire (see Drucker 2012:154). In 1857 the profession of *köçek* was prohibited in Istanbul (see Avcı 2017). Although there is evidence that *köçeks* still performed on stage in the 1950s at *gazinos* (nightclubs) and that they persisted even longer in rural Anatolia (Beşiroğlu 2006), this cultural tradition had become limited, and the way it was perceived gradually changed. Nicholas Kontovas (2013) suggests that when the practice was officially banned in the nineteenth century, some *köçeks* would then go on to earn a living in the sex trade.

Figure 2: Nineteenth-century postcard featuring an Ottoman *köçek* dancer

Yet the widespread presence of diverse genders and sexualities in the histories of the non-Western world have been largely ignored by classical queer studies (Picq and Tikuna 2019). On the other hand, these depictions are also invisible in the national historical narratives. What we observe here is that non-heteronormative behavior and its integration into the entertainment economy have existed for centuries in Turkey, where they played an important

role in social and economic life. The popular political discourse in contemporary Turkey is that 'deviant' genders and sexualities were adopted from 'the West'. Yet, as historians demonstrate, this is inaccurate. The exclusion of sexual minorities and the stigmatization non-normative sexualities have long been a part of the nation-building project that began in the late nineteenth century, in line with the spirit of the time. And this process is still very evident in present-day Turkey, and developed an increasingly aggressive tone during the recent pandemic.

The Lives of *Lubunyas* in Contemporary Turkey

I will attempt to shed light on the lives of *lubunyas* in contemporary Turkey, focusing on where they have taken refuge and how they have supported themselves. The primary objective here is to find out whether and how the experiences of the *lubunya* in recent decades have had an impact on the collective subjectivities and practices of today's trans feminine community. I will draw largely on two oral history projects, entitled *80'lerde Lubunya Olmak* (Being a *Lubunya* in the 1980s) and *90'larda Lubunya Olmak* (Being a *Lubunya* in the 1990s) published by an Izmir-based LGBTT[11] organization, Siyah Pembe Üçgen (Black Pink Triangle). I will also refer to the history referred to above.

Evidence from these two projects indicate that feminine gay men and trans feminine people coexisted socially for a long time (Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2012:12).[12] In fact, these groups did not make a conceptual distinction between these identities until the 1990s. They generally referred to themselves with such terms as *dönme* (convert) or *eşcinsel* (homosexual) (Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2012:133).[13] Esmeray, a trans activist and stage performer, recalls that in the 1990s, as a group of friends they agreed that "We are actually women, we aren't gay, we need to figure out a way to become *gacıvari* (more womanlike)" (Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2013:84). Yet even today, one of the most commonly used terms to self-identify among my research participants is that of *lubunya,*[14] which refers to effeminate gay men, trans women, and all the other identities that exist in between. A well-known trans activist, Demet Demir, explained that transnational terms, such as *travesti* (transvestite) and *transseksüel* (transsexual), have only become entrenched in the language relatively recently. In fact, these terms were originally adopted from modern western medicine and then developed different contextualized meanings.

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[11] LGBTT is the acronym for "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transvestite, Transsexual."
[12] Siyah Pembe Üçgen. 2012. *80'lerde Lubunya Olmak*. Izmir, Turkey: Siyah Pembe Üçgen.
[13] Siyah Pembe Üçgen. 2013. *90'larda Lubunya Olmak*. Izmir, Turkey: Siyah Pembe Üçgen.
[14] Some claim that the shortened form of the word, *lubun*, may derived from the Romani (the language of ethnic Roma) word *lubni*, which means prostitute (see Kontovas 2013).

The term 'transvestite'[15] was coined in 1910 by Magnus Hirschfeld, the Berlin-based sexologist who also arranged the first (documented) male-to-female gender reassignment surgery in 1931 (Stryker 2008:55). The term 'transsexual', also used by Hirschfeld in the early twentieth century, did not appear much in the English language before the 1950s. Other common English terminologies seem to have a shorter history. For instance, the term 'transgender' can be traced back to the mid-1960s, yet it only came into general use in the United States in the early 1990s (Stryker 2008:36). The language of gender and sexuality has rapidly evolved in recent decades with the increasing visibility of trans people, medical developments, and public debate on the topic. This dynamic linguistic landscape reveals the complex interplay between cultural, scientific, medical, and political discourses and local understandings and practices.

Going back to the Turkish context, several trans women in their mid-sixties, for example, Belgin Çelik,[16] explained that they used to perform *köçek* dancing before it was banned in entertainment venues in the 1980s. Thijs Janssen (1992:83-85) has also noted that in the 1990s 'transsexuals' in Turkey referred to themselves as *köçeks* and performed in a similar way and in similar venues as *köçeks*. Although it is hard to infer a direct continuity between these more recent *köçek* performances and the cultural categories and traditions of the past, *köçeks* and the relative respect they enjoyed under the Ottoman Empire, is strikingly present in the collective memory of today's *lubunyas*. By referring to *köçeks* as a historical example, my interlocutors told me that people like them have always existed. As we shall see in the following section, both *köçek* and *lubunya* embodiments violate normative gender presentations. However, this does not mean that *köçek* identity corresponds to, or is a direct predecessor of, today's transgender identities. Indeed, it is hard to obtain a clear understanding of the sexual subjectivity of *köçeks*, as (to my knowledge) there is no written or oral source containing *köçeks*' own voices. More generally, I agree with Bolin's (1996:24) observation that gender reversals, cross-dressing, and gender innovations have existed throughout the history, yet gender variant identities have taken diverse forms and are contextually situated. This resonates with the idea that D'Emilio (1983:3) articulates on the cultural and historical specificity of sexual behavior and desire, "how individual men and women interpret their sexual activity and desires, and the meanings that different societies affix to erotic behavior, vary enormously,

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[15] While the term 'transvestite' is considered pejorative by the contemporary transgender activists, as it is often deployed to invalidate people who self-identify as transsexual or transgender, *travesti* is still widely used (or reclaimed) by trans communities in different contexts (e.g., across Latin America).

[16] Pembe Hayat. 2021. Yıllar Affetmez I Konuk: Belgin Çelik I Biz de Stonewall Yaşadık ama... Retrieved August 18, 2021. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GJD_XDFrjCU&t=2458s&ab_channel=PembeHayat)

from one culture to another and from one historical era to the next." Yet, what is crucial here is the way *lubunyas* perceive and present the history of their community. I argue that a sense of belonging to this history has had an empowering role in the construction of *lubunya* identity.

In particular, before the internet became widely accessible the general public was much less likely to come into contact with scientific or cultural information on transgenderism, unless they lived in a large city with parks, cinemas, or *hamams* where *lubunyas* used to meet or bookstores selling homosexuality-related publications (Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2012:130-131). Here it is worth mentioning Zeki Müren (1931-1996), the much celebrated singer of Turkish classical music and an influential cultural figure. Zeki Müren, whose assigned gender at birth was male, never made a public statement about his/her gender or sexual identity, but had an ambivalent gender presentation on stage wearing glittery, colorful costumes, bracelets, earrings, ostrich feathers, and heavy makeup (Güvendik 2018). Oral histories often reflect that the existence and respectable position of Müren in Turkish society made *lubunyas* living without a community feel that they were not alone.

After the 1950s, with increased rates of domestic migration, the scale of prostitution grew significantly in large Turkish cities. As a response, in Istanbul we observe closure of some licensed brothels in the mid-1950s and police raids on bars and hotels in the 1960s to 'cleanse' the areas of prostitution and re-establish the moral order (Toprak 1987). However, in the late 1960s, the nightclubs that were to become so famous in the 1970s were opening up in Abanoz Street in Istanbul, where *lubunyas* started to gather (Zengin 2014:88). These *lubunyas* were not only from Turkey, but also from other countries, for example, Greece, Italy, France, Yugoslavia and the USSR who arrived in Istanbul to work (Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2012:60–70). In the 1970s, Abanoz Street was famous for its nightclubs and working apartments, and it became a vibrant entertainment and sex work site until their closure in 1978.

In the 1960s and 1970s, there is evidence that a small number of *lubunyas* worked in brothels and small hotels used for prostitution. Others were employed in the nightclubs of large cities as *konsomatris* (bar hostesses), singers, or dancers (Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2012). These occupations provided them with means of subsistence and, in some cases, opportunities for social mobility, enabled them to work in various cities, and acquainted them with people from different walks of life. Overall, *lubunyas* had been well-integrated and esteemed performers in the entertainment sector until 1981 when the military regime forbade their employment in bars, cafes, clubs, and music halls. I will expand on the far-reaching consequences of this repressive period on the lives and struggles of *lubunyas* in Chapters 2 and 5. During this period, *lubunyas*, who were not allowed to work in registered brothels, found themselves in dire financial straits

and started to look for places where they could live and survive financially. According to Demet, the military regime forced those who had been working in entertainment venues to enter the unregistered sex market in order to make a living (Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2012). Due to the imposition of night curfews in Istanbul these *lubunyas* had to work during the day under routine police violence. Some others relocated to smaller cities where they worked as singers or *köçek* dancers in night clubs, albeit illegally (Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2012:116,191). In subsequent years we witness a large-scale process of 'ghettoization', which was a pivotal phenomenon for *lubunyas*. It facilitated the creation of a community that shared a space to live and engaged in the same profession. The shared experiences in these communal living and working spaces have been crucial in the history of *lubunyas* and are explored in the next section.

Ghettoization: The Example of Cihangir

In 1985, a number of *lubunyas* in Istanbul established themselves in Cihangir, and the community gradually grew and spread to five or six streets in the same neighborhood. Demet Demir, a trans activist who used to live in this neighborhood, explained that in 1987 the area had become a well-known (unlicensed) sex work locale, where approximately 100 *lubunyas* were residing and working. Over time, sex work transformed from *camdan çark* ('window work') to *kapıdan çark* (cruising in front of a working apartment); the streets were crowded with clients.[17] In this period *lubunyas* earned relatively good money and this allowed some of them to buy property in the area (Kandiyoti 2002; Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2013:60). In fact, *lubunyas* had also lived together in the other—marginalized and poor—districts of Beyoğlu, such as Tarlabaşı, but the 'ghetto'[18] in Cihangir, referred to as *Lubunistan*, was a very particular community and became home to a large community of trans sex workers. However, this unprecedented space for co-existence did not last long. In the early 1990s, when police started raiding their homes and arresting them, some of them decided to abandon the area. Others concentrated in one of the streets of the quarter, called *Ülker Sokak*, where they lived and worked for several more years until their violent removal from their homes in the mid-1990s (Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2012:143). Several investigations were initiated concerning the torture

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[17] Amnesty International. 2012. A history of trans İstanbul. Retrieved August 19, 2022. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hVezmV6xZCQ&ab_channel=Uluslararas%C4%B1Af%C3%96rg%C3%BCt%C3%BC)

[18] In the oral histories and interviews, trans women commonly refer to these communal residential spaces as 'ghettos'.

and murder of trans women in Cihangir, but charges were never made, and no one was ever convicted (Kaya 2021).

The co-living practices in this space were crucial for several reasons. First, *lubunyas* found it easy to find housing and work in this predominantly queer space—they had been struggling with both after losing their jobs in *gazinos*. Second, within the boundaries of this neighborhood they felt relatively comfortable, largely free of social surveillance and police harassment (Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2013:147). Third, living and working together in the same apartments and on the same streets, flatmates and neighbors accompanied and provided protection for each other. Research from other social contexts also suggests that trans people commonly form communities as a collective response to everyday violence (see Chakrapani, Newman, Noronha 2019; Hwahng and Nuttbrock 2007; Kulick 1998; Reddy 2005). Indeed, communal living seems to have effectively reduced the number of assaults on trans sex workers. A trans woman who used to live in *Lubunistan*, Ebru, wrote, "Back then, we felt protected there" (Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2013:216). Another trans woman, Şevval stated: "Everyone helped each other. We have heard no mention of [individual] assaults, hate crimes or such things happening around Ülker Street" (2013:63). However, in the end, *Lubunistan* also became a space where trans sex workers were collectively targeted by a number of social actors who broke down their doors and moved them out by force (see Chapter 2).

Those who used to be a part of the community in Cihangir dispersed; some moved to other cities, but their life experiences remained with them. The intimate relationships and the strong sense of community that flourished in *Lubunistan* are still remembered and recounted among the trans community in Turkey. Forced displacements also took place in Ankara; for instance, in the nighborhoods of Eryaman and Esat, in 2006 and 2007, respectively. The resistance of the *lubunyas* to police violence and forced displacement in Cihangir and elsewhere, was a significant step in their social and political subjectivities (Zengin 2014:99). Having lived and worked in some of these localities, the older trans women I met described the solidarity and resistance they created with great nostalgia. The struggles of recent decades are the backbone of today's trans mobilization. This point will be reviewed and expanded in the discussion of public resistance in Chapter 5. In the next section, I turn to another, more recent, community space, namely, the trans neighborhood in Izmir.

The Trans Neighborhood in Izmir

At the time of writing, 'the trans neighborhood' where I carried out my fieldwork in Izmir has been in existence for at least 35 years and, in some respects, resembles the 'ghetto'

that thrived in Cihangir in the late 1980s. Currently, some sections of the community, however, do not reside in the neighborhood and, instead, commute there to work and to be part of a community. Before gathering around this space, a small number of *lubunyas* in Izmir were working in brothels; whereas the majority were employed in bars, nightclubs, and music halls or were working as streetwalkers along several major roads. Ilkim, an older trans woman who has lived in the town for several decades, pointed to a decisive event in the 1990s, when a newly appointed police chief in Izmir announced that they could only appear on stage "as men" (Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2013:68). Consequently, their employment in the *gazinos* and bars was interrupted once again and many reverted to street-based sex work. These groups gathered in particular areas of the city that have been historically used to sell sex. As in other cities, these urban spaces where *lubunyas* in Izmir lived and worked together have generated a community, relationships, and support networks, which I will explore in Chapter 4.

Similar to those in other large cities, the trans neighborhood where I carried out my fieldwork in Izmir is also precarious. In recent decades, they have faced intimidation and harassment from neighborhood groups, police, and the media, which have threatened their physical and economic survival. Every time I visited this quarter in 2017 and 2018, I noted a strategic police presence on the streets and patrol vehicles stationed in the neighborhood. And, as I have heard from my interlocutors with whom I have remained in touch, surveillance has intensified recently; the police now patrol the neighborhood more often and for longer periods of time as part of the measures taken against COVID-19. Chapter 2 deals in more detail policing and anti-prostitution protests that have threatened their homes, work, and communal space. To date, a rigorous struggle by trans sex workers to resist such threats has helped the community to survive in this neighborhood. Throughout the dissertation, we will see how the community addresses these issues and what kinds of practices and resistance have emerged in these spaces.

The Neighborhood *Girls* vs. the Broader Trans Scene

In this section I will outline some demographic features of the community, and describe the similar and disparate experiences of my interlocutors prior to and during sex work. I will moreover address the high mobility rates of workers between cities and the potential dynamics this creates. Finally, I will contextualize the trans sex working community in the broader trans scene in Turkey, referring to other transgender populations that may (or may not) be visible or involved in the sex trade.

All my interlocutors were assigned male gender at birth. A few of them have not defined their gender or consider themselves gender-fluid; others self-identify either as a woman and/or

by using various local or transnational gender-variant terms: *travesti*, *lubunya, transseksüel*, *gacı*, trans, or CD (cross-dresser). These categories represent a broad and dynamic range of identities. Indeed, the identity-based vocabulary of Anglophone trans theory is found insufficient when it comes to writing about diverse sexualities, practices, and bodies in the world at large (Aizura 2014:131). These terms are strategically deployed; while some terms are preferred in institutional settings, others tend to be used more colloquially (Zengin 2014:22). Therefore, when I refer to a specific dialogue or anecdote I stick to the terms that my interlocutors or sources use to identify themselves. I use the word *lubunyas* to refer to the community, as this is one of the most inclusive and commonly used terms among my interlocutors. I also use 'trans' or 'trans women' as umbrella terms, since these are the most frequently used terms by the trans community in Turkey, especially in formal, political, and institutional contexts.

To be quite clear, this thesis does not deal with trans men. The main reason for this choice is that in the sex working community that I have worked with, there are no individuals who identify as trans men. Yet, the segregation in this urban micro-space is not coincidental or peculiar to this community. In fact, trans men and trans women have historically not co-existed in Turkey. As Ali Arikan, a renowned trans (man) activist, wrote in *Başkaldıran Bedenler* (2013:55), it was only relatively recently that the identity of trans men had become known or recognized in Turkey. Today, trans men and trans women participate in LGBTI+ organizations, but the emergence of trans men as political actors and the subjects of academic research only began in the late 1990s. Even today, while being subjected to physical, structural, and symbolic violence in various segments of their lives, trans men are much less visible (Berghan 2007). Although there are also trans men who participate in the sex economy, they are harder to reach (UNFPA 2014:9). Nevertheless, I acknowledge that their exclusion in this dissertation reproduces the invisibility of this group. Moreover, none of my interlocutors self-identified as intersex. Intersex activism first emerged in the 1990s. In 1993, an intersex activist, Cheryl Chase, founded the Intersex Society of North America to prevent 'normalization' surgery on new-born babies with ambiguous genitalia (Stryker 2008:138). In 2013, a discussion on intersex conditions during a conference organized by the Turkish LGBT organization, Lambda Istanbul, led to the inclusion of intersex people under the LGBT(I) umbrella.[19]

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[19] Kaos GL. 2018. "LGBTİ'nin İ'si: İnterseksler Vardır!" Retrieved August 3, 2022.
(https://www.stgm.org.tr/sites/default/files/2020-09/lgbtinin-isi_-interseksler-vardir.pdf)

As already stated, not all sex workers who are part of the community reside in the district where I conducted my fieldwork. I met approximately seventy or eighty community members during the entire period of fieldwork. Yet, the neighborhood has high mobility rates; every time I returned to the field after a couple of months' absence, I saw new faces. This also means that the size of the community fluctuates.

The sex workers I spoke to were in the 18-65 age range. They have different educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, political opinions, perceptions about sex work, and future aspirations. The majority of them had only enrolled in primary or high school and dropped out of formal education usually due to financial problems, or the harassment commonly experienced in educational institutions. On the other hand, several trans women from this community have a university degree in subjects such as medicine, political science, teaching, or public administration. Most of my interview partners had work experience in other sectors earlier in their lives, including construction, manufacturing, entertainment, tourism, education, and the food industry. Yet, both those who used to have working-class and middle-class jobs told me that they were either fired or forced to resign by their employers when their trans identity "became apparent." The forms of violence my interlocutors experienced in institutional settings is discussed in Chapter 2 in detail.

My interviewees have diverse perspectives on their involvement in sex work. A few of them see 'prostitution' as a dishonorable, yet imposed, activity. In contrast, Mine, like some others, is content with performing sex work and, therefore, has not looked for another job since she has "become a woman." They are rather dissatisfied with the circumstances that make their labor conditions insecure and unsafe and that stigmatize their profession. But most *lubunyas* that I spoke to explained that they were in sex business because of the lack of other employment options given their '*travesti*' status. At the same time, they see sex work as a more lucrative profession, which also provides them with some degree of independence and flexibility, compared to the very few alternatives open to them.

The vast majority—and the most visible group—of trans women in Turkey chiefly rely on sex work for their livelihoods (Engin 2015:842). Being disowned by family, dismissed from jobs, and harassed at home, school, and in the labor market, many of them, even if not continually, have engaged in sex work at some point in their lives. Those with other jobs may also temporarily resort to sex work to finance their occasionally rising costs, for example, transition-related expenses. Moreover, the sex labor that trans women engage in takes various forms and occurs in different locations. According to a study conducted by the UNFPA (2014:36), most trans sex workers in Turkey solicit clients on the street or along major roads,

whereas a smaller number meet their clients online or at nightclubs. These groups can provide their services in their own apartments, working flats, or hotels. Some of them operate independently, while others work with a madam, known as a 'mother'—more experienced trans women who had once been sex workers themselves—or with a pimp. Finally, a smaller group work in brothels and massage parlors.

In terms of educational and occupational characteristics, the trans scene has diversified in recent years. An increasing number of trans women now attend university; though a much smaller portion of the total population, some are employed outside the sex trade, mostly, in cafes, bars, and LGBTI+ associations (Göktaş 2018:7). In her thesis, Göktaş explores virtual communities of non-sex worker trans women in Turkey. Claiming distinctiveness from trans women sex workers in terms of socio-economic standing, occupational status, passability, and sexual tendency, some of them perceive not being a sex worker as a significant aspect of their identity (p. 33). Finally, there are also many trans identifying persons who choose not to be visible for safety, socioeconomic, or other reasons. In sum, even though the sex working population still constitutes the largest cluster of all trans women, a number of trans women are also employed in other sectors. Many of those who conduct sex work operate in different settings and with different working patterns from the group represented in this research. Therefore, I do not claim that the conclusions reached here reflect the lives of other groups of trans women—sex workers or not—who may maintain different lifestyles from those of my interlocutors, in terms of their degree of visibility and engagement with a trans community.

Of the trans women interviewed in the study carried out by the UNFPA (2014:33) 75% had previously been involved in the sex trade in different cities. This was also the case for my research participants. I met younger workers who had recently joined the community, alongside several older *lubunyas* who had lived in and around the neighborhood for decades. Both younger and older groups had previously lived and worked in other cities. This was especially true for older women, who had often moved because they had found employment in *gazinos* across Turkey or had been forced by the police in the 1980s to abandon the cities where they lived. For instance, one of the mothers had worked in ten different cities in Turkey before moving to Izmir in the 1990s. However, today we can also observe high levels of geographical mobility. A couple of young women regularly traveled to work in seaside holiday destinations to take advantage of the increase in tourism in these localities during summer. Some others said they relocated due to conflicts with their families of origin.

The spatial mobility of sex workers and the contact that they establish with communities in other cities help them to gather information about what is happening to trans women living

in other cities. For example, increasing police raids on working flats of trans sex workers in Ankara, the brutal murder of a trans woman in Antalya, and an unregistered *putka* (vagina) surgery that posed serious health risks to a trans woman in Manisa. Indeed, trans women sex workers are connected via private online communication groups (see Göktaş 2018:31)—to which I have not gained access. Beyond the dissemination of practical knowledge, these links also serve as cultural bridges between trans communities based in different cities. Although there are certainly cultural elements typical to dwellers of the neighborhood in Izmir, the community resembles those in other locations in many respects.

For instance, while each trans community deploys some distinct vocabulary, all trans sex working communities in Turkey speak *Lubunca,* a jargon or slang variety spoken by trans women and some gay men, especially by those engaged in sex work.[20] Nicholas Kontovas (2013), a socio-historical linguist who has researched the origins of *Lubunca*, has found that the words come from a variety of languages, including Turkish, Romani, French, Greek, English, Armenian, Arabic, Italian, Bulgarian, Kurmanji, Russian, and Spanish. *Lubunca* has been in use since at least the late Ottoman era, and today it is spoken mostly by members of these sexual minorities (Kontovas 2013). It is transmitted orally and therefore needs social interaction in order to be preserved and reproduced—either in-person or technologically-mediated—and spaces of interactions among people competent in its use. In recent decades, online spaces and print media, for instance, queer journals and social media platforms, have also played a significant role in the cultural (re)production of *Lubunca*.

Throughout the dissertation, I use a variety of terms taken from *Lubunca*, and discuss the functions that this jargon may have for the sex workers. As we will see in Chapter 4, *Lubunca* facilitates community-building and collaboration among community members. On the other hand, looking into the language varieties used in gender non-conforming or same-sex desiring communities around the world, including Indonesia, the Philippines, South Africa, Russia, Israel, Brazil, Britain, Greece, and Turkey, Rusty Barrett (2018) suggests that, in addition to such purposes as secrecy and inclusion/exclusion, these languages share an important feature: humor. I will focus on the meaning of humor displayed by the trans community in Chapter 6.

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[20] More recently, *Lubunca* has also been adopted in some non-sex working queer communities. Moreover, a part of the slang was also reproduced by some media channels in written form, though there is an ongoing debate about whether making this 'secret' slang publicly available may actually harm communities of sex workers. Available from https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/lubunca-lgbtq-language-slang-turkey

The Neighborhood as a Physical and Social Space

This section sets the scene by describing the neighborhood and its everyday social and economic life. It also suggests what roles space may play in the trans community's struggle against violence and marginalization. The physical and socioeconomic characteristics of the neighborhood and its surroundings affect the everyday life of the community. These characteristics define under what circumstances *lubunyas* live and work and to whom they interact on a regular basis. In this social landscape, aside from sex workers, there are other actors who are socially or economically involved with the neighborhood: non-sex worker residents, business owners, shopkeepers, other workers, clients, and other frequenters of the neighborhood. These actors remain relevant throughout the thesis. We will see that their relationships with sex workers will sometimes be supportive and sometimes abusive and discriminating.

The geography of sex work is produced by an interplay of various dynamics. Past research suggests that street-based sex work, like other types of retail sales, tends to be geographically concentrated in locations that are relatively well-known and stable (Hubbard and Sanders 2003; Levitt and Venkatesh 2007). These facilitate workers' access to customers and vice versa. Restricting street prostitution in a relatively small area also enables the police to effectively monitor this activity (Hubbard and Sanders 2003; Schlör 1998). The sex market in Izmir matches some of these observations made by past research into the spaces of sex work.

As Chapter 3 will detail, being in the vicinity of the most frequented places of the city, the neighborhood where I carried out my fieldwork is not an isolated enclave, though my research participants also visit remote, isolated zones for soliciting. The sex market occupies a group of streets located between the central railway station and the ferry terminal. One of these streets—where some sex workers have their working houses and cruise for clients—is constantly used by the urbanites arriving in the district by train or tram to get to the main business and shopping area and the recreational shoreline. In recent years, a large, successful bar opened up along this busy pathway, which has had mixed consequences. On the one hand, the "dangerous" and "obscene" image of the trans neighborhood did not discourage young people from hanging around this area at night. On the other hand, it meant that the nearby streets were regularly visited in the night by groups of young people not necessarily interested in buying sex. These changes in the surroundings were not desirable by many customers of sex workers who prefer to remain inconspicuous, given the social stigma associated with paying for sex and having intimate/sexual encounters with *travestis*. Police patrols also tend to discourage clients from frequenting the area.

Despite being directly adjacent to the business and the cultural center, the area where sex workers have their working flats and solicit clients is a noticeably neglected part of the neighborhood. It is occupied by small traditional workshops and emerging alternative businesses. For instance, there are *bakkals* (small markets), *tekels* (liquor stores), hairdressers, a tailor's shop, a store selling windows, a courier service, a print shop, a tea garden, and a handyman. Alongside these, we also find hostels, an art school, a vegan restaurant, a pasta restaurant, a small bookstore, a tattoo studio, a dance school, and a vintage store. What these small, yet dissimilar, enterprises and offices have in common is the affordability of the rents. The sex trade in this group of streets has helped to keep real-estate prices relatively low. I often saw *lubunyas* chatting with the owners and employees of these businesses. While some of the, especially recent, businesses are vocal in their support for LGBTI+ rights or are members of LGBTI+ communities themselves, others have operated here for so long that they are also accustomed to and on good terms with the trans residents. This is not necessarily a co-existence based on mutual respect, stripped of all the prejudices. Nevertheless, there is a constant interaction and interdependence; some of the businesses, especially cafes and restaurants, earn most of their income from sex workers and their clients. Moreover, trans sex workers, who are usually refused entrance or service by many businesses in the district, come to these establishments to be served food and drinks, to meet their friends, or just to pass the time of day.

As indicated earlier, this locality has historically accommodated the spaces of prostitution, and the local culture is relatively tolerant of sex outside the bounds of marital heterosexuality. This makes the area relatively safe for trans sex workers. Furthermore, the neighborhood used to be populated by non-Muslim inhabitants of Izmir until most members of these communities emigrated in the 20th century. Even today, along the two sides of the streets stand two-story Greek and Levantine[21] buildings built in the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries (Oban 2006). Whereas a number of these houses have been renovated and are protected, others remain empty and have fallen into decay. Others now function as cafés, restaurants, hotels, shops, and offices. These historical buildings stand next to the taller, yet modest, apartment buildings that have sprung up in recent decades.

Some of the *lubunyas* live and work together within the confines of this neighborhood—in the historical houses or modern apartment buildings, whereas others own or rent places in

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[21] Ottoman *Levantens* (Levantines) refer to the (descendants of) Europeans, such as Italian, British, German, French, and Dutch, who settled in the cities of the Ottoman Empire. http://www.levantineheritage.com/academic-article1.html

other districts of the city where they live alone. In addition to paying for a room in their working flats, those who live alone also pay rent for their private apartments, unless they are property owners. This arrangement is not affordable for most of the sex workers I met. Those who reside in other areas of the city commute daily to this neighborhood to work and to spend time in the company of their friends and acquaintances. I observed that both groups are part of this community in the same way. Whether they are occupied to live in or for work, the apartments are important in creating households, constructing close relationships, and bringing the whole community together in the same space.

There is also a non-trans population that lives the same neighborhood. Some of these long-term residents own properties in the area. Others are low-income families or individuals attracted by the relatively affordable housing. In addition, I also met two cis female sex workers who operate in the streets and houses here. They seem well-integrated into the trans community; for example, they speak *Lubunca* in the same way as other members of the community. One of them, Janset, explained that having remained in this environment for so long, she became good friends with the *travestis*, by whom she feels protected. And then she added: *But they wouldn't want other [cis] women to work here. They'd stir up trouble*. During interviews, several *lubunyas* pointed out that the extent of economic marginalization they experienced was not comparable to that of cis women, who had opportunities for employment in other sectors as well as in legally-registered brothels.

Clients are cis men who come from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds and income and age groups. Some of the regulars are also among the everyday faces of the neighborhood's social landscape. I often encountered them while they were spending long hours in the tea garden with a group of sex workers, with whom they were also social friends. Moreover, despite not being sex workers' clients, several older people struggling with loneliness, poverty, or homelessness also pass some of their time on these streets. For example, there is an elderly waste picker who offers small chores in exchange for a little bit of money, a peddler of second-hand clothes to sex workers, and a loner cis woman in her mid-seventies with severe alcohol dependency. Hence, in the social landscape of these streets, apart from trans sex workers, there are also other marginalized characters. Some carry out small transactions to earn pocket money for subsistence; others may find company and enjoyment in this space. These characters and their relationships with sex workers will be examined in the chapters that follow.

The Organization of Street-based Sex Work

In this final section I explain the professional life of the sex workers involved in this neighborhood in different ways. The specifics of how sex work is performed are not the focal point of this dissertation, yet the social life in this locality is largely organized around a market. Consequently, an understanding of economic life does not just help familiarize us with monetary transactions, but also assists in grasping the economic forces that shape the social dynamics in this space. For instance, this section will present the connections of the previously-introduced actors who frequent this neighborhood to the sex workers and the sex economy. Moreover, a theme dealt with expansively itself in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 is the competition between workers for space and clients, which this section has already touched on. Below, I will start with a brief description of the ways in which the labor is structured and various actors who are involved in and make a living through and around the sex market.

The neighborhood hosts more than a dozen working apartments, which generally provide lodgings for between three and seven sex workers. Most of the houses are managed by mothers. The informal agreements reached with the mothers are based on voluntary and mutual decisions. On occasion, I have seen workers, for instance at hair salons, negotiate with another mother to change the apartment where they operated. In addition to the workspace that they provide to their *'girls'*, the mothers deal with the practical conditions of their houses, such as cleaning, security, paying bills, and so on. In return, they request a fixed daily rent for each room that they offer. Yet, workers navigate their business autonomously and receive payment directly from their clients. Similar managerial arrangements also exist in different sex work contexts (see Heyl 1977; Hoang 2015) and in other underground markets, for example, the drug trade (see Morselli 2009; Pearson and Hobbs 2001). The commercial agreements between these parties are discussed more fully in Chapter 3.

Alternatively, some workers operate without a mother, renting out a flat where they work with friends or on their own. These more recent configurations are preferred by some workers who would like to avoid paying high fees to the managers. In either case, workers first solicit clients on the streets and then walk with them to their rented rooms where they provide sexual services. In this sense, besides the social stigma and the heavy policing it entails, selling sex is not organized very differently from any other freelance work in the service industry, such as care work.[22] The collectivities around the working houses, including mother-daughter and

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[22] Indeed, scholars have established compelling similarities between sex work and other forms of domestic/care work (see Agustín 2007).

co-worker relationships, are vital in explaining the support networks among trans women in Chapter 4.

Another group of sex workers also operates in other sites, such as industrial areas or certain highways, where the service may be provided in the buyer's vehicle. There are expenses and fees paid to the third parties in those places, too. For instance, workers are charged a daily 'protection fee' by organized crime groups, roughly equivalent to the cost of a rented room in the neighborhood. Furthermore, they pay for a regular taxi service which takes them to and from distant work locations. Finally, to gain access to highways, sex workers operating in these areas are also required to pay road tolls. Working in these remote or geographically dispersed locations is hazardous, especially because the formal and peer protection channels are hard to reach. The risks workers are exposed to in these isolated locations are examined in depth in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4. Since they can support each other in the event of violence, working in the neighborhood is relatively safer. This underscores the importance of a shared space, as well as the support networks established in this space.

A group of sex workers finds their clients online via advertising their services on their business websites, social media channels, or other online platforms. In fact, these three groups of workers are not mutually exclusive. Some of the workers who have rented an apartment also work along the highways on a regular or intermittent basis. In much the same way, those who meet their clients through Internet-mediated channels sometimes solicit on the street, especially because they cannot cover costs with their online clients alone. Finally, most workers also have a number of regular customers, who are considered relatively reliable and therefore preferred, but who do not provide an adequate income on their own.

In this marketplace services are available at a wide range of prices, especially during stagnant periods, competition among workers increases substantially, which sometimes causes tension in their relationships. The circumstances that generate competition in this sex market resemble those in other informal street markets. However, there are also peculiar aspects of the competition arising in this sex work environment. For example, operating in a concentrated urban space where the transactions of a worker are observable by others working in the same or nearby apartment makes competition more noticeable. This kind of competition has also been noted in other street-level sex work environments (see Dalla 2002; Hubbard and Sanders 2003). In addition, the increase in police patrols—which led to shorter working hours and falling incomes—on the one hand, and the lack of other means of subsistence, on the other, are among the critical factors that occasionally exacerbate competition among sex workers. Finally, the labor life is so enmeshed in the community life that economic frustrations and

tensions directly penetrate the social life of sex workers. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss the impact of this highly visible form of competition emerging in a very marginalized context on community relationships and support networks.

The income generated by sex work varies greatly. I met well-to-do workers who owned an apartment and a car, but I also met many others who were struggling with acute poverty. In particular, workers with health issues or substance dependency and older workers without property or savings tend to experience severe financial hardship. These groups generally lack social security, and other sources of income and earnings from sex work are highly volatile. Generally speaking, my interlocutors do not all share similar experiences in terms of financial hardship, and this creates some disruption in their support networks, a point which is revisited in Chapter 4.

As explained, sex workers are self-employed, yet there are a number of actors who partner with them or who benefit financially from the sex trade in various ways. Mothers, whose roles have already been discussed, can be considered the chief facilitators of the sex business operating in the neighborhood, which provides them with a substantial income. Moreover, some elderly trans women do housekeeping in the working flats in exchange for small amounts of cash.

Apart from these actors who have explicit verbal and informal agreements with sex workers, several beauty salons in the neighborhood have an almost exclusively trans sex worker clientele and offer services compatible with their specific needs. These salons also adjust their working hours according to sex workers' schedules, meaning that they are open from late afternoon until after midnight. Similarly, the eateries and cafés located in the vicinity of soliciting corners and working houses derive a significant portion of their revenues from sex workers and their clients. Another group that frequents and participates in this street market are the hawkers who sell food or clothing. Regardless of their moral attitudes towards prostitution, all these business owners regulate their working hours, spaces, services, and products on the basis of the profiles and needs of the people who assemble in this locality. Hence, the economy of the neighborhood is significantly and intricately linked to the sex trade. For example, a tea garden where the owner had allegedly been cheating his customers was boycotted by a group of sex workers who solicit nearby. Their collective action financially harmed the tea garden, and the owner had to make his transactions with his customers more transparent. This exemplifies that the continuity of these businesses relies to a great extent on the regular attendance of sex workers. Yet, as stated above, dependencies between sex workers and other

business owners are reciprocal. These neighborhood dwellers interact with each other a great deal in the flow of everyday life.

Chapter 2: Structural Constraints Encircling Trans Feminine Lives

In this chapter I examine the structural processes that shape the everyday experiences of violence, discrimination, and abuse undergone by trans sex workers, but I would like to start with a personal experience. It is a summer night in 2018. At the end of a long day I am leaving the hair salon to catch the last train home. Part of the side street where I am walking is pitch black. As always, I hurry to reach the railway station, which is within a short walking distance. As I arrive at the crossroads, a car unexpectedly stops on my side of the street. The driver wolf-whistles to catch my attention and asks me to get into the car. I notice the gazes of four men in the car looking me over. Terrified, I indicate my refusal with a hand gesture, which vaguely communicates my outrage, and continue walking. I immediately regret the gesture and hope that they will not retaliate. My heart is racing, my palms are sweating, and my knees are shaking. I speed up my step and walk away until I blend in with the crowds at the railway station.

During my train journey I feel angry with myself for being so apprehensive during this encounter and then so relieved when finally leaving the area. Then I recall that for many women around the world, feeling unsafe and the fear of being followed, harassed, or assaulted, whilst walking alone at night are not unfamiliar anxieties. And this one-off experience I just had on the streets frequented by my interlocutors brought me closer to understanding the circumstances in which they work. On the other hand, the groups that are marginalized on multiple intersecting grounds are particularly vulnerable in society (Crenshaw 1989). For trans feminine people who sell sex on the streets of Turkey, violence is not a scary exception, but a commonplace, everyday experience.

The physical and sexual aggression experienced by my interlocutors can be described as everyday violence in the form of interpersonal assaults routinely faced by the socially vulnerable (Nancy Scheper-Hughes 1992, 1996). Almost all the women I interviewed in this research (16 out of 18) said that being attacked, harmed, or killed was one of their greatest concerns. The overwhelming majority (14 out of 18) had experienced severe physical aggression during the course of their work. In these cases, violence was most commonly perpetrated by clients and people posing as potential clients. My interlocutors described physical violence as something that they might face "at any time," so that they often feel "apprehension" and "fear" when on the streets. Previous studies, cited below, exploring trans experiences in Turkey arrived at similar conclusions with respect to violence.

Research conducted by an LGBTI+ organization, Lambda Istanbul (2010), testifies that 79.3% of trans women reported having been victims of physical violence by strangers, 90.5% by members of the police, and 73.3% by clients. Of the respondents 80.2% reported having had to bribe the police, and 89.7% were detained by the police at least once. A similar study carried out by the Red Umbrella Association (Ördek 2014) found that trans women sex workers experienced physical violence most often at the hands of clients (62%), the police (36%), criminal groups (29%), other sex workers (18%), partners (12%), friends (7%), neighbors (5%), boss/pimp (3%), and their family of origin (2%). While there is a large difference between these two studies with regard to the pervasiveness of police violence, this could be related to when and where they were conducted. The former is based on surveys carried out between 2008 and 2010 with 116 trans women residing in Istanbul, while the latter drew on surveys and in-depth interviews with 233 trans women sex workers living in ten different provinces of Turkey. The fact that police misconduct and violence were particularly intense in cities like Istanbul and Izmir during this period (see Amnesty International 2011:12) could be one of the reasons for divergent statistics on police violence. Overall, these studies show that violence, carried out by different actors, is part of the everyday life of trans women sex workers in Turkey. Although difficult to document, physical violence must be understood in connection to the structures in which it takes place.

This chapter explains how the legal, political, and economic organization of society makes this population vulnerable to violence, discrimination, and stigmatization in Turkey. In particular, it examines the institutional and legal practices, but focuses especially on my interlocutors' experiences with them. Furthermore, it tries to understand the logic underlying these regulations and practices that enhance the vulnerability of trans sex workers. In what follows, after discussing the term structural violence, I will draw on data from my interviews and participant observation together with legal codes and newspaper reports to present the empirical links.

Structural Violence

Anthropologists studying the concept of violence have argued that violence cannot be understood simply as direct acts of physical force, assault, or the infliction of pain (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004). To encompass a wide range of acts and relations that cause harm to others, they propose a more comprehensive conceptualization of violence. For instance, Galtung (1990) has examined how social inequality and oppression harm people by depriving them of their fundamental human rights, and introduces the concept of what he describes as

"structural violence". According to this definition, the social arrangements embedded in political, economic, and legal structures generate harm for certain populations in the form of unequal opportunities and disproportionate social suffering (Farmer et al. 2006; Bourgois 2001). Structural violence has been defined in different ways, and here I use the term to distinguish between direct physical violence and the structural factors that cause people harm in both the long and short run.

Furthermore, structural violence is closely associated with marginalization and operates based on the hierarchies of race, class, caste, gender, and sexuality, and the intersections between these axes (Kilanski and Auyero 2015; Scheper-Hughes 2004). In some cases, it reduces the socially vulnerable to "expendable non-persons" (Scheper-Hughes 2004:14). In *Precarious Life,* Judith Butler (2004) discusses a similar phenomenon where certain human lives are considered less valuable, and hence less 'grievable', than others. The differential grievability of lives arises from the perception that dehumanizes some groups, regarding them as disposable (Butler 2004).

In different parts of the world, trans people, and trans sex workers, in particular, are situated at the disposable end of the biopolitical ordering of populations (Aizura 2014; Haritaworn and Snorton 2013). In dominant political and public discourses, these groups are socially constructed not only as deviant and pathological, but also as a danger to public safety and "respectable" gender and sexualities (Aizura 2014:140; Edelman 2014:179; Taşcıoğlu 2021). Punitive measures targeting these populations are justified on such grounds. For instance, in *Walking while Transgender*, Edelman (2014) shows that the visible trans feminine body is criminalized and treated as a threat that must be segregated from the general public by means of spatial policies in Washington, DC. Indeed, across different contexts, this group is portrayed as dangerous or deviant and its disappearance is considered desirable in order to make the streets safer for other people.

Using structural violence as the key analytical tool, I explore how legal, political, and economic conditions create everyday experiences of physical violence, discrimination, and abuse for trans sex workers. In particular, I show that this link operates based on a range of regulations and institutional practices that function to withhold protection from and to enable punitive measures against this population.

Earlier research has defined the social systems that exacerbate trans sex workers' marginalization and the policies or practices that prevent their access to social institutions as structural violence. For instance, this framework has been widely used to understand the experiences of this population as regards access to education, social and health services, and

means of subsistence (Dutta, Khan, and Lorway 2019), police and sex work laws (Lyons et al. 2017), and discriminatory legislation (Kritz 2021). Here, the term 'violence' goes beyond the meaning of direct physical aggression. Individual-level understanding of violence does not address the underlying conditions, and the processes through which violence is recurrently practiced, justified, and normalized. According to scholars of structural violence, what distinguishes this form of violence from direct physical aggression is that it usually operates in invisible and normalized ways as a part of the routine conditions of everyday life (see Rhodes et al. 2012:210). In particular, the institutionalization and everyday internalization of structural violence naturalize the suffering of specific populations (Scheper-Hughes 1996). In this chapter, we see that structural violence has taken increasingly invisible forms in trans sex workers' lives in recent decades, as it operates through the particular ways in which law is instrumentalized in Turkey. Below, I start with the lack of legal protection mechanisms for this population.

The Lack of Antidiscrimination Laws

Turkey lacks antidiscrimination and equality legislation to safeguard the rights of its LGBTI+ populations. Although Article 10 of the Turkish Constitution states that everyone is equal before the law and that discrimination is prohibited on several grounds,[23] the Constitution makes no reference to sexual and gender minorities. In the early 2000s, the Turkish government seemed somewhat willing to cooperate with the human rights movements, including the LGBT movement, which was, in part, provoked by the process of EU accession (Yılmaz 2013:135). During this period a number of LGBT collectives were registered as official associations and annual Pride marches started taking place in Istanbul.

Yet, when the Justice and Development Party (AKP) won the elections for the second time in 2007, this democratic trend started to fade. In 2011, after the AKP won the general election for the third consecutive time, with almost 50% of the vote, the government announced that it would draft a new Constitution. Civil society put pressure on the government to grant explicit recognition to LGBTIs as equal citizens in the new Constitution in order to provide specific legal protection mechanisms for these communities (Atamer 2015:330). However, despite having been included in the draft law, references to sexual orientation and gender identity were dropped in the final version of the newly adopted legislation in 2012 (Yılmaz

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[23] Article 10 of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey states that "All individuals are equal without any discrimination before the law, irrespective of language, race, color, sex, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion and sect, or any such considerations." Retrieved from
https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/mevzuatmetin/1.5.2709.pdf

2013:137). Concerted pressure from the LGBT rights movement and recommendations by EU officials to integrate LGBT demands into the new constitution were disregarded. Today, in 2022, there are still no specific constitutional or legal mechanisms to protect the lives and liberties of LGBTI+ citizens, in spite of the high rates of rights violations based on sexual orientation and gender identity (Engin 2018:201; Yılmaz 2013:134).

The lack of protective laws normalizes the discrimination that typifies trans people's experiences in various areas of life. Most of my research participants discontinued their formal education due to the stigma and harassment they experienced at school. For instance, Yaren, like most other *lubunyas* I talked to, said she dropped out of high school due to her gender identity. Mira, who was often bullied by her schoolmates at high school, once went to the class wearing her sister's school uniform and a wig that she bought herself. The headmistress slapped her in front of the class and expelled her from school. Nazlı successfully finished high school and got into a university in another city. However, she could not find any affordable student housing that was not managed by Islamic sects, which regulated students' lives in line with very conservative rules. She was therefore unable to attend university.

The experiences of trans sex workers in employment settings have also been overwhelmingly shaped by the discriminatory practices of employers and co-workers. Most of my research participants who were formerly working in other sectors were fired or forced to resign once their transgender status became "apparent." Others ended their employment due to sexual or verbal harassment faced in the workplace. Melike, who has a hairdresser's license, was unable to find work in a salon. When I asked her whether she would like to start her own hairdressing business in the future, she insisted that she would not even find a space to rent. Alongside sex work, during the tourist season Mira also works as a waitress, an animator, and a dancer at seaside resorts in the south of Turkey. Even though she enjoys the flexibility of the informal sex business, which allows her to take other temporary jobs and to travel, her dream is to become a dancer. Yet, she explained that she needed to complete her transition before she could apply to dance school, because these institutions normally have a strict male-female binary system where training is gender-specific. Consequently, the lack of other livelihood options force many of them to enter or remain in the sex business.

Discrimination is also a common experience of my interlocutors in other institutional settings. In a study of trans participants carried out by the Red Umbrella Association (2016), 68% reported facing discrimination in their access to health care information and services. They endure transphobic treatment, such as denial of healthcare services, long waiting times, or humiliation, from some healthcare providers (see also Engin 2019). These experiences

concern not only sexual and reproductive health, but also general health problems. HIV treatment, including examinations, tests, and medication, is covered by public insurance.[24] Although some of the transition-related medical interventions (e.g. vaginoplasty, phalloplasty, hysterectomy, and mastectomy) are also covered by public insurance, these forms of surgery are not accessible to all trans people, especially to those with modest financial means (Gazi 2020). A crucial issue is that only a few hospitals (for instance, some teaching and research hospitals) have surgeons and health personnel who are trained to perform gender reassignment surgery.[25]

As Taşcıoğlu (2021) argues, trans women are invisible in Turkish legal texts. The failure to adopt antidiscrimination and equality legislation is an example of how the legal invisibility of trans sex workers is perpetuated. The experiences of my interlocutors demonstrate that the lack of protective laws has major consequences for the lives of trans women. In practice, this means withholding protection from this population. Given the lack of specific legislation to mitigate their exposure to individual, institutional, and structural discrimination, their fundamental rights, including the right to education, work, and healthcare, are violated. This is one of the ways in which structural violence operates in this context. I will now turn to the medico-legal environment for transgender people in contemporary Turkey.

Legal and Medical Regulations

Transgenderism, and LGBTI+ identities in general, has never been articulated as a crime in Turkish legislation, although sexual and gender minorities were not even mentioned in Turkish law until the 1980s (Yılmaz 2013:133; Zengin 2016:233). Despite the absence of this population in the legal texts before then, several articles of the Turkish Penal Code have been used to justify hate crimes targeting sexual minorities. For instance, Article 419 of the old Turkish Penal Code referred to a general, undefined notion of 'shameless act' (*hayasızca hareketler*) which was applied to justify rights violations committed by police against sexual dissidents.[26]

Following the *coup d'état* of 12 September 1980, the military junta prohibited the employment of "men wearing female clothing" in pubs and nightclubs in 1981 (Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2012). The same year, a famous Turkish classical singer, Bülent Ersoy, underwent sex

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[24] Pozitif Yasam. Retrieved August 15, 2022. (https://pozitifyasam.org/en/social-security-and-treatment-fees/)
[25] Tar, Yıldız. (2015). Kaos GL. Retrieved August 17, 2022. (https://kaosgl.org/haber/genc-trans-kadindan-cinsiyet-gecis-masraflari-icin-kampanya)
[26] It provided for up to a year's imprisonment "for anyone who engages in a sexual relationship without (*haya*) shame." (İlkkaracan 2007:7).

reassignment surgery (SRS) in London. Despite this, she was not granted legal recognition as a woman by the Turkish authorities (see Figure 3), and she was not allowed to perform on stage. When the military junta came to an end, she became the first person in Turkey to change her official sex record at the end of a seven-year legal struggle (Zengin 2016:234). In 1988, this event was followed by a revision of the Turkish Civil Code, which allowed the legal status of transgender persons to be recognized after SRS (Kandiyoti 1998:22).
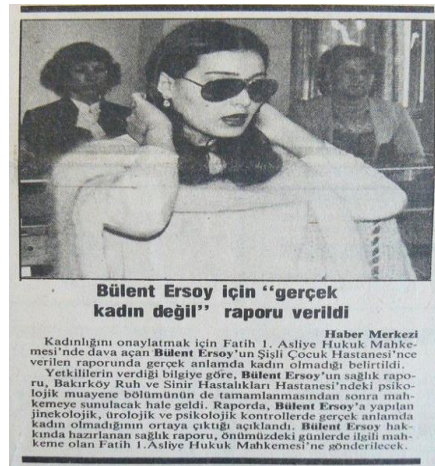
Figure 3: Bülent Ersoy receives a medical report, saying "She is not a real woman" (*Milliyet,* September 7, 1982).

Another major regulatory change took place in 2002 after the AKP won the general elections for the first time and formed a single-party government. This made massive modifications to the legal system, including the Civil Code (Atamer 2015:317). As regards the right of trans people to carry out SRS and change their legal sex status, these new provisions introduced extensive medico-legal requirements, including undergoing psychiatric evaluation, extensive medical test, and permanent sterilization (in addition to being unmarried and 18 years old or more) (Atamer 2015:318).[27] The Turkish court removed sterilization as an obligatory legal condition to change one's sex on official documents only in 2018.[28] However, those seeking legal gender recognition still need to undergo medical surgery, which leads to sterility. Given that the World Health Organization (WHO) and the American Psychiatric Association (APA) only removed transgenderism from the category of mental illnesses in 2018 and 2013, respectively, the existing medical requirements in Turkey are not surprising. In 2017 the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the sterilization requirement in legal gender

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[27] Article 40 of Turkish Civil Code.

[28] ASDI. 2017. Retrieved September 6, 2021. (https://asdi-lgbti.com/2017/12/02/anayasa-mahkemesi-cinsiyet-degistirmede-ureme-yeteneginden-yoksun-olma-sartini-kaldirdi/)

recognition violates human rights, but the requirement is still in place in some EU countries, including, Finland and the Czech Republic.[29]

In Turkey, transgenderism is treated as a "gender identity and behavior disorder," and, in order for SRS to be carried out, it must be prescribed by the medical authorities as a necessary operation for "the patient" (Sert 2015). Furthermore, the courts are the only authority that can authorize SRS or change a person's sex category in the civil status register (Atamer 2015:318). In this medico-legal system where a change in legal sex status is not possible without medical surgery no priority is given to self-identification. These legal and medical procedures remain complex, lengthy, restrictive, and normative; trans women have to endure years of bureaucratic struggles, meet high medical costs, and display stereotypical "femininity" before the authorities to change their sex on official registers.

Examining the strategies a young transgender woman called Agnes employs to pass as a woman, Harold Garfinkel (1967) has been criticized for not taking into consideration the legal and medical structures that are often hostile and discriminatory towards those who are ambiguously gendered (see Raby 2000), hence constraining Agnes' self-presentation. Dean Spade (2000) draws on his own experience to explain that to receive authorization for body alteration, trans people need to demonstrate the repetitive performance of, and embodiment of, normative gender. Borrowing from Foucault's (1978) models of power and governance, Spade's account clearly indicates that the rigidity of medical and legal regulatory instruments of transsexuality governs gender variant bodies in ways that reproduce a dichotomized, naturalized view of gender. Based on this argument, I contend that trans gender performances cannot be understood outside the power structures that exert surveillance and that regulate gender expression and performance.

One evening during my fieldwork, a young woman, Melda, announced that she had finally made an appointment for her *putka*[30] surgery. However, she decided to undergo SRS using the identity card of an undocumented migrant instead of her own. According to my interlocutors' testimonies, some private hospitals perform illegal SRS at lower prices. Melda gave me an ironical smile, and quipped: *What if I don't survive the surgery?* Indeed, the community is well aware that some trans women who underwent these illegal surgeries suffered from serious postoperative complications and health problems. There are even cases in which people died after surgery (Gazi 2020). She added that the formal procedure means

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[29] TGEU. 2017. Human Rights Victory! European Court of Human Rights ends Forced Sterilisation". Retrieved September 2, 2022. (https://tgeu.org/echr_end-sterilisation/)

[30] In Lubunca, *putka* means vagina. "*Putka* surgery" refers to the sex reassignment surgery.

obtaining a "*çürük raporu*" ('illegibility report')[31] which the state has stringent control over. Therefore, Melda was determined, even though unofficial surgery would also not allow her to change her legal sex status. As in this case, the complex, protracted, and exhausting legal and medical procedures encourage people to undergo surgery using illegal or unsafe routes. On a discursive level, the legislation that regulates gender transition constitutes an exemption to the general legal invisibility of trans people. Yet this occurs by pathologizing transsexuality as a psychosexual disorder, thereby stigmatizing transgender people as 'abnormal'.

Another category that deserves attention while discussing medico-legal regulations are people with intersex variations. According to recent statistics this is as common as one in two hundred births (van Lisdonk 2014). The demands of the intersex and transgender political movements seem to diverge. The goals of trans activists include more accessible gender-affirming medical services, whilst intersex activism works to end the irreversible medical intervention on infants and children born with noticeably ambiguous genitals. On the other hand, both intersex and transgender politics challenge the medical institutions that pathologize them (Chase 1998). The right to self-determination of both groups is violated either because they undergo medical interventions without their consent ('corrective' surgery on intersex babies) or because gender-affirming medical and legal services are not accessible. Moreover, for these groups, common medical procedures attempt to either "correct" the bodies that are outside the binary gender distinction or to construct bodies that would only be compliant with that binary distinction.

The biography of Herculine Barbin, born in 1838 in France, is an early example of how the lives of people with intersex variations are shaped by the interventions of the legal and medical authorities (see Foucault 1978). After medical examinations, Herculine was defined as male and was, therefore, required to undergo a public transition from "womanhood" to "manhood." As a result Herculine lost his/her school, job, and partner (Lafrance 2002:121). In a state of acute poverty, psychological trauma, and social isolation, Herculine committed suicide shortly after his/her non-surgical transition (Lafrance 2002:121). Analyzing medical reports, legal documents, and newspaper excerpts on the "scandalous" case of Herculine, Foucault (1978) suggests that the regimes of power-knowledge regulate bodies and sexualities that disrupt heterosexual, reproductive, and medico-juridical hegemonies (see also Butler

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[31] This colloquial term, also referred to as a 'rotten report' is generally used in the context of military service, refers to the "ineligibility certificate." It is proof that a person cannot perform mandatory military service, for instance on the basis of a "psychosexual disorder" (Atuk 2019). In this context, it refers to the comprehensive medical report needed to initiate the sex reassignment process.

1999:26). The medical interventions that shape the lives of intersex children still take place. The practices that regulate intersex bodies have similar motivations to the strict medico-legal procedures relating to the gender reassignment of trans people. As we will see in the next section, sex work regulations add a further level of complexity to trans sex workers' lives in Turkey.

The Legal Ambiguity of Sex Work

In Turkey sex work is regulated by *Genel Kadınlar ve Genelevlerin Tabi Olacakları Hükümler ve Fuhuş Yüzünden Bulaşan Zührevi Hastalıklarla Mücadele Tüzüğü* (the Act about Provisions on Prostitutes and Brothels and Fighting against Venereal Diseases Transmitted through Prostitution).[32] Accordingly, prostitution is not defined as a crime, but several articles in the Turkish Penal Code stipulate that "coercing, encouraging or facilitating another person to become a prostitute," "providing a place for prostitution," and "benefiting from the income of a person engaged in prostitution" are punishable acts (Ördek 2014:50).

Transgender sex work does not appear in the sex work law. However, since a sex worker is defined as a 'woman', trans women need to have completed their transition and to have a fully-legal female status in order to register themselves in a legal brothel. This implies that those who do not wish to or who cannot afford to change their legal sex status by taking the required medico-legal steps cannot participate in the regulated sex industry (Taşcıoğlu 2021). Likewise, people who do not hold Turkish citizenship are also excluded from regulated sex work (Ördek 2014:47). Consequently, an overwhelming majority of trans women operate as unlicensed sex workers in different settings, and their labor is by definition not legally recognized.

Although the aim of existing laws does not seem to punish sex workers, trans women in the unregistered sex trade are often subjected to punitive treatment. Most commonly, they are fined under the Misdemeanor Law,[33] which was adopted to protect "public order, general morality, general health, the environment and the economic order" (Taşcıoğlu 2021:394). Trans sex workers are fined based on several articles of this law related to disturbing the peace of others by making noise and selling goods and services, and disobeying the lawful orders of authorized agencies. In addition, they are also fined on the basis of the Traffic Law[34] for occupying the streets and interrupting traffic. Finally, during Turkey's state of emergency in

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[32] Genel Kadınlar ve Genelevlerin Tabi Olacakları Hükümler ve Fuhuş Yüzünden Bulaşan Zührevi Hastalıklarla Mücadele Tüzüğü. Retrieved from https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/2.4.5984.pdf
[33] Kabahatler Kanunu. Retrieved from https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.5326.pdf
[34] Karayolları Trafik Kanunu. Retrieved from https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.2918.pdf

2016, along with a set of changes to the existing regulations, advertising prostitution has also been defined as a punishable act, for which the business cards and social media accounts of sex workers could be used as evidence (Alpar 2020). Thus, even though prostitution does not constitute a criminal act by law, the forms of sex work that trans women engage in—outside of registered brothels—are punishable.

Aslı complained about the fines that they often received for "violating" the Traffic Law: "Are we vehicles? This is so absurd!" Sevda said her fines amounted to a total of 30,000 Turkish liras (a sum of more than two years' rent), which she had received while standing in front of her apartment soliciting clients. As she did not have the funds to cover it, her fines had gradually multiplied. Since then, she has not had a bank account or purchased property to avoid the seizure of her money and other possessions as a compensation for her unpaid debts.

If incarcerated, trans women are placed in prison according to their official sex registers, irrespective of their self-declared gender identity. To reduce the likelihood of assault or victimization by other prisoners, unless there are other trans inmates, they are conventionally assigned to single cells.[35] This system of solitary confinement prevents them from having access to the communal areas and participating in common activities with other inmates, and leads to their further victimization (Berghan 2017:18). Their access to transition-related health care, such as hormone therapy or gender-affirming surgery, depends on arbitrary decisions made by prison staff. In these circumstances, trans women may try to commit suicide and engage in hunger strikes in order to make their demands heard (Berghan 2017:17).

Hence, the engagement of trans people in sex work remains legally ambiguous. On the one hand, this may grant them the leverage to contest fines and police orders. For example, in 2017, after a two-year legal battle, a trans sex worker won a lawsuit objecting to a fine she received based on the Misdemeanor Law while soliciting in Ankara.[36] The Supreme Court ruled the fine unlawful and decided that "no one can be punished for an act that was not considered a crime by the law in force at the time the act was committed." Such exemplary decisions do exist, but they are rare. Furthermore, many trans sex workers have little trust in the legal institutions and limited access to the judicial system due to financial barriers and gender-based discrimination.

On the other hand, Taşcıoğlu (2021:389) asserts that this ambiguous legal position in

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[35] Karakaş, Burcu. 2019. Cezaevinde LGBTİ olmak: "Her gün ayrı mücadele". Retrieved September 2, 2022. (https://www.dw.com/tr/cezaevinde-lgbti%CC%87-olmak-her-g%C3%BCn-ayr%C4%B1-m%C3%BCcadele/a-50259909)

[36] Gazete Karinca. 2017. Retrieved August 15, 2022. (https://gazetekarinca.com/aymden-emsal-karar-seks-iscilerine-kabahatlar-kanunundan-ceza-kesilemez/)

which both the law and the way it is applied are open to interpretation "leaves the regulation of their work solely on the authority afforded to the police via executive order." My observations in the trans neighborhood in Izmir provide evidence in support of this claim. My research participants explained that every time a new police chief was appointed in the city, they faced a new set of rules introduced in the name of providing safety, peace, and decorum for local residents. I witnessed significant discrepancies in the practices of the police teams patrolling the trans neighborhood. For instance, trans women's mere existence on the streets during certain hours of the day were penalized by some patrol teams. Thus, the legal ambiguity translates into broad powers given to the law enforcement in managing street-based sex work, resulting in arbitrary police measures taken against trans sex workers on the streets.

How does the sex work regulation aggravate the everyday vulnerability of this population? Unable to find employment or facing workplace harassment in other sectors, an overwhelming majority of trans women in Turkey depend on sex work for their livelihoods. Yet, (largely) excluded from the regulated sex trade, they also face punitive measures for operating without a license. First, the combination of these exclusionary and punitive conducts violate trans women's right to work. Second, it produces a vicious cycle, in which they need to work for extended hours on the streets in order to pay the fines, but the longer they work, the greater the likelihood that they will be fined again. Third, in order to escape the threat and enactment of criminal and administrative sanctions, many trans sex workers solicit in peripheral and isolated locations.

In the peripheral locations to which my interlocutors commute to work, for example, highways, abandoned industrial zones, or bus terminals, they are much more likely to be the victims of physical and sexual violence. In such dark and spacious venues, perpetrators can conceal their identity and commit violent acts in anonymity. While attackers can hide in their vehicles and speed away easily, standing on the roadside with no protection, sex workers in these places are largely undefended against physical assault. One night, I came across a worker who said she had been attacked with stones while standing by the highway together with a friend: *Here [in their neighborhood], we have places to hide. It's very dark there, utter darkness. A stone almost hit me*. Unable to identify where her attackers were, she was unsure about which direction to escape.

In general, my interlocutors are alert about being targeted on the highway with bottles, stones, lit cigarettes, water, or spittle. Not being able to earn an adequate income in the inner-city, Sevda sporadically worked either next to the highway or near a bus terminal. On one occasion when she was working along the highway, she told me she felt frightened there: "On

the highway, an actual highway [she emphasized], what we are scared of the most is a car approaching really fast. I feel frightened by this. I immediately step back. If a car is passing very fast, most probably a stone or a bottle will be thrown out of the car window. Or, someone may fire a gun." In fact, she once risked getting burned by a lit cigarette thrown from a car window.

Furthermore, in these remote and isolated places, workers lack access to formal and informal support systems, which serves not only to deter violence but also to give a helping hand during an attack. For example, a young member of the community, Tuna, explained why she was not working by the motorway any longer: *No one would even notice, if one of us is murdered there.* In contrast, in the streets where some of them also have their working flats, Kübra said that there are some places where they can hide out, and people from whom they can get support. Nevertheless, many of them needed to work in these peripheral locations, in spite of the risks involved. In their own words, *it was earning one's bread and butter.*

In sum, expanding on the idea that trans women's involvement in sex work remains legally ambiguous (Taşcıoğlu 2021), in this section I tried to understand the consequences of this ambiguity in the lives of my interlocutors. Despite their invisibility in sex work regulations, the law is used to implement social-spatial control by an unrelenting and extensive police presence in their lives. Although consensual sex work is not a criminal activity by law, police are authorized to "discipline" trans sex workers on the streets by means of surveillance, fines, and arrests. Police repression does sometimes go as far as penalizing the visibility of trans feminine bodies in public spaces. By doing so, they threaten the economic and physical survival of my interlocutors. Here we observe how the structural violence that harms this population operates through institutional channels. Law enforcement efforts aim to keep the manifestation of sex work away from the public eye. They promise to ensure the peace, morality, and safety of the "locals" at the expense of trans sex workers, who are not deemed worthy of safety, security, and protection.

Institutional Discrimination

The state authorities not only fail to combat discrimination against trans people—and other sexual minorities—but also actively discriminate against these populations. For instance, since 2015, the governorships of the large cities, including Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, Antalya, Mersin, and Gaziantep, have banned the Pride and Trans Pride marches on "security grounds" (Sezer 2019). In November 2017, following Turkey's state of emergency, all queer public events and gatherings in Ankara had been prohibited for an indefinite period "to prevent crimes

being committed," "to protect public health and morality," and "to protect other people's rights and freedoms" (Human Rights Watch 2019). The ban continued until April 2019, when the court in Ankara decided that it was unlawful and should therefore be lifted. Yet, the discourses used by authorities to implement or support the restrictions on rights and freedoms are revealing. Trans workers are accused of violating "our" traditions, faith, and religion, and political figures have often portrayed queer populations as a threat to the "respectable" and "legitimate" sections of the society and have tried to reduce their public visibility and engagement by means of discriminatory measures.

Discrimination against trans sex workers is also prevalent in the legal domain. A criminal lawyer who I interviewed told me about the violations in some legal cases where she had assisted trans sex workers. For instance, by alleging that sex workers had tricked clients into sleeping with them, physically abusive clients managed to avoid the legal consequences of their actions. The perpetrators of hate crimes, even murders, could receive reduced penalties, such as small fines or minor jail time, on the grounds of "unjust provocation." There are numerous instances in which perpetrators' allegations, for example, "I didn't know she was a *travesti*" or "she offered to take the passive sex role" served as unjust provocation before the legal authorities (Zengin 2014:217).[37] One of my interlocutors, Melike argued that attackers are encouraged by the fact that it is common knowledge that the state does not look after trans sex workers. As no one safeguards *travestis*, she said, they are much more likely to be the victims of violence. In fact, this kind of discrimination also discourages sex workers from reporting the crimes committed against them and from seeking justice by applying to the legal authorities.

Violence committed against sex workers at the hands of the police, clients or third parties is still not taken seriously by those in positions of authority across Europe (Campbell and Kinnell 2000). Police misconduct remains among systemic rights violations committed against trans sex workers beyond Europe, too (see Chakrapani, Newman, and Noronha 2018:217; Lyons et al. 2017; Sausa 2007). Lyons and colleagues (2017), in their research on the experiences of trans sex workers in Canada, observed that this community is unlikely to report client violence to the police due to their common experiences of "police inaction." The lack of action on the part of the police was also the experience of some of my research participants. Withholding protection from this group, who often undergo violent assault,

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[37] Taşcıoğlu (2021:393) noted that judges often employ Article 29 of the Turkish Criminal Code on "unjust provocation" to this end. See, for example, https://www.birgun.net/haber/kadinlar-icin-adaletin-bir-yili-76161

increases their risk of exposure to harm. On the other hand, there have been instances in which police took action against them without clear evidence of a crime. For instance, Aslı, who had recently been released from prison when I talked to her explained what she was convicted of:

> I made a deal with a client I met on the street. You know Turkey's conditions; the client hooked up with me only in return of 50 Lira. Afterwards, he accused me of extorting money from him and reported me to the police. I was charged with theft and extortion. But the police did not know how ill-intentioned this person was. He ruined my life for 50 Lira, for nothing… I would like to make that clear: the state wants these people to sweep us away.

We can also observe discrimination in the authorities' treatment of the trans community as a whole. Shortly after his appointment in 2006, Hüseyin Çapkın, the infamous Izmir police chief with his involvement in torture, launched a 'clean-up' especially "against the persons called *travesti* and all the problems they cause." A newspaper report describes this.[38] "To safeguard the peace and the security of local residents," patrol units were sent to the parts of the district where *travestis* commonly solicited clients. Trans women who were seen around these locations between 21:30 in the evening and 02:00 in the morning were automatically taken to the police station, kept there for hours, and fined. For trans women this meant being out on the streets was a sufficient reason to be penalized, irrespective of whether or not they were working. In other words, the visibility of the trans feminine body in the public spaces during certain hours was criminalized.

The discriminatory approach of law enforcement to sex workers was particularly evident when tensions between the trans community and other residents of the neighborhood rose. According to a newspaper report,[39] in 2001 a gathering of about 100 people attacked the working apartments of trans women, leading to a clash between protesters and sex workers. Following this incident, the vice-chief of police met the protestors and promised them that their peace would no longer be disturbed. As a result, the police began to make regular patrols in the area.

My interlocutors told me that anti-prostitution protests had also taken place more recently. During the last occasion, a group of non-sex worker residents collected signatures for a petition demanding that sex commerce be stopped in the area. A community protestor whom I interviewed affirmed that their action had been successful in drawing the authorities' attention

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[38] Erol, Ali. 2009. "2. bir emre kadar her gün". Retrieved September 12, 2021. (https://kaosgl.org/haber/lsquo2-bir-emre-kadar-her-gunrsquo)

[39] Milliyet. 2001. "İzmir'de travesti operasyonu..." Retrieved September 12, 2021.
(https://www.milliyet.com.tr/gundem/izmirde-travesti-operasyonu-374684)

and routine police presence to their neighborhood. A young sex worker, Kübra, described how their work routine has been interrupted by this event. Since then, she said, it had become virtually impossible to work until the police left the neighborhood in the early hours of the morning. That is precisely when violent attacks are more likely to take place. She also suggested that long hours of police presence do not necessarily make trans sex workers' lives any safer. Police made efforts to protect the non-sex worker residents of the neighborhood from the "harm" caused by prostitution. Collaboration that certain groups of urban residents establish with the police to remove the manifestations of "deviant" sexualities in their localities is a widely observed phenomenon (Dolinsek and Hearne 2022:129). Hence, the wider public take an active part in the socio-spatial construction of heterosexual normality (see Hubbard 1999:149).

This section described the discriminatory conduct of state authorities against trans sex workers, especially during neighborhood protests against prostitution. A closer look at the practices and speeches of the authorities demonstrates the division drawn between the respectable "local residents" or "public" who deserve protection and the "*travestis*" whose criminality is a threat to the former. Institutional discrimination motivated by this distinction not only deprives trans sex workers of protection, but also increases their risk of being exposed to harm. The activities of state authorities have exacerbated the vulnerability of this population, especially during Turkey's most recent state of emergency, as will be shown in the next section.

The State of Emergency

In July 2016, in the wake of a failed *coup*, the Turkish government declared a state of emergency, which was extended seven times and lasted two years.[40] During this period, a cleansing operation was carried out against various groups of dissidents in Turkey, and a range of rights and freedoms were restricted or suspended.[41] In 2018, the government introduced "counterterrorism legislation" to ensure that many of the powers of the state of emergency remained in force.[42] Practically, the decrees extended the powers of provincial governors to restrict assemblies and movement in certain places and during certain hours, and increased

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[40] Köylü, Hilal. 2018. "Turkey lifts state of emergency, but fear of repression lingers." Retrieved September 15, 2021. (https://www.dw.com/en/turkey-lifts-state-of-emergency-but-fear-of-repression-lingers/a-44711201)

[41] Over 150,000 people in the police, military, academia, judiciary, media and civil service were detained, arrested, or dismissed from their positions. Freedom House. 2017. Retrieved April 20, 2021. (https://freedomhouse.org/country/turkey/freedom-world/2017)

[42] Shaheen, Kareem. 2018. "'Suffocating climate of fear' in Turkey despite end of state of emergency". Retrieved September 12, 2021. (https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/18/turkeys-state-of-emergency-ends-but-crackdown-continues)

police powers, for instance, extending police custody to up to 12 days.[43] This meant that the city governors could restrict basic constitutional rights and freedoms of citizens in cases where "public order or security is disturbed" or "there are serious indications that they may be disturbed."[44] Such vague statements enabled the local authorities to take arbitrary security measures.

In this period, trans sex workers, who rely extensively on the streets for their livelihood, encountered further obstacles. Police routinely conducted "peace" operations, during which they set up street checkpoints, ran ID checks, fined sex workers, and deterred potential clients from visiting the sex work locations. Certain streets where unlicensed sex trade took place were blocked off at night, which significantly narrowed trans sex workers' spaces of solicitation.[45] These checks and restrictions on the streets have been maintained in the years that followed as part of the precautionary measures against COVID-19.

Beginning in 2017, the greater part of my fieldwork took place in the shadow of the state of emergency, during which I observed a constant police presence and an uneasy atmosphere in the trans neighborhood. Without exception, every night, a police team with patrol vehicles moved into the area to carry out document checks and to prevent sex workers soliciting on the streets. As explained earlier, police patrols had occasionally been present in this neighborhood before 2016—in some periods more than others. However, the increasing security measures with the state of emergency brought police patrols to the area for much longer hours, substantially restricting the time and space that trans women had to work. Every evening, different police groups, including vice squad and uniformed officers—some of whom normally operated in other districts, or even neighboring cities—arrived in the quarter. The restrictions imposed varied greatly depending on the chief officer in charge of the team. While some teams were relatively tolerant, others took more coercive and inflexible measures; for example, completely banning trans women's presence on the streets or closing off the alleys until the morning.

It was one of those nights when the streets of the neighborhood were overwhelmed by police forces. *They [the officers] are taking whoever they see on the street*, said a sex worker who just rushed into the beauty salon. This also created apprehension among the others who

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[43] Human Rights Watch. 2019. Turkey Events of 2018. Retrieved September 12, 2021. (https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/turkey)

[44] Evrensel. 2018. "OHAL'i kalıcı hale getiren yasa, Resmi Gazete'de yayınlandı." Retrieved October 1, 2021. (https://www.evrensel.net/haber/358164/ohali-kalici-hale-getiren-yasa-resmi-gazetede-yayinlandi)

[45] Kaos GL. 2017. "OHAL'de sokaklar seks işçilerine kapatıldı". Retrieved October 1, 2021 (https://kaosgl.org/haber/ohalrsquode-sokaklar-seks-iscilerine-kapatildi)

were getting ready to start their night's work. Customers were reluctant to leave the salon. The following afternoon, I spoke to various people to find out what had happened the night before. I was told that the police team, swearing and shouting, had ordered that all *travestis* stay inside. Those who didn't obey their commands had been taken to the police station. This particular event seems to have sparked outrage among the trans community. A shop owner joined those complaining: *The state doesn't make jobs for them, and the state police come here to insult them. Now that there is the state of emergency, their authority is unlimited; they do whatever they want.*

Taşcıoğlu (2021:384) has noted that "trans women's lives in Turkey are marked by a stark contrast between invisibility in legal texts and overwhelming presence of the law in their daily lives." Expanding on the previous argument that trans sex work is managed by the increased powers of law enforcement, this section shows that it was exacerbated during the period starting with the state of emergency. We also see that harsher measures implemented against trans sex workers in public spaces in this period are enacted through the instrumentalization of law. Therefore, some of the law enforcement practices affecting trans sex workers cannot be clearly described as police misconduct and are indeed difficult to situate in the lawful/unlawful binary distinction. The following section explains how the state authorities in collaboration with various other actors have engaged in spatial exclusion of this population.

Spatial Exclusion

Over the decades, trans communities in Turkey's large cities have become the targets of collective assaults and forced eviction (Human Rights Watch 2008). One such event took place in Ülker Street in the Cihangir district of Istanbul in 1996 (Human Rights Watch 2008:7). As briefly explained in Chapter 1, trans women and sex workers, along with other socially disadvantaged groups living in the area, were forced to leave their homes. Those who resisted were arrested and subjected to violence and torture (Human Rights Watch 2008:7; Selek 2007). A former resident described what she experienced during the Ülker Street displacement to the Human Rights Watch (2008):[46]

> The police would pick us up all the time. They used to cut our hair, electroshock our bodies, leave us naked in ice-cold water. They would throw us naked into a cell with broken windows,

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[46] Human Rights Watch. 2008. Retrieved October 8, 2020.
(https://www.hrw.org/reports/2008/turkey0508/2.htm#_ftn4)

in the winter; we were splashed with water and thrown into the room. I would offer sex to the police so they wouldn't torture me.

Oral history sources contain similar descriptions from other *lubunyas* who showed resistance against the displacement from Ülker Street. These testimonies reflect the brutality of police violence against trans sex workers in the Ülker Street incidents.

The forced eviction in this particular event was carried out to "cleanse" the area of "deviant" genders and sexualities and to segregate them from the rest of the public. Presented as a fight against prostitution, these removals were explicitly supported by the non-trans residents, neighborhood associations, ultra nationalist groups, and the media (Bayramoğlu 2013:9). On the other hand, given the large financial profit generated after the eviction, these efforts should not be interpreted as a purely moral enterprise (Bayramoğlu 2013:4-5). The neighborhood was next to the city's business and cultural center, and has later been populated by upper-middle class residents, who invested in real estate and increased the financial value of the area (Zengin 2014:105).

A similar incident took place in the Tarlabaşı neighborhood of Istanbul (see Figure 4), a historical district directly adjacent to Taksim Square (Unsal 2015:49). Tarlabaşı was once home to many of the city's "outcasts", including ethnic minorities, migrants, low-income groups, Roma, and sex workers. A mega renewal project undertaken in this neighborhood led to the displacement of approximately 3,000 inhabitants beginning in 2009 by means of harassment, (forced) eviction, and a massive increase in property values (Unsal 2015:53-54). In Tarlabaşı, as in Cihangir, during displacement and demolition, the municipality and the press instrumentalized the territorial stigma, depicting the neighborhood as a criminal area which posed a threat to the public safety and security. The project substantially enhanced the real estate value of this locality by attracting middle and upper-middle class residents and building spaces for commerce and tourism, and offices (Unsal 2015:50-54). Ironically, the announced objective of this project was to protect the historical urban fabric, to facilitate economic recovery, and to benefit the social and economic well-being of the residents of this sub-district (Unsal 2015:50). Yet, the displaced populations, such as trans sex workers, were not among the residents whose lives were to be improved with the realization of this project, but whose bodies to be removed from the area. To legitimize the displacements "needed" to carry out the restructuring, the local authorities drew on the criminalized image of the marginalized populations living in this neighborhood (Can 2018).

Figure 4: Tarlabaşı's Fıçıcı Abdi Street before (left) and after (right) urban renewal, published by the company that carried out the project (www.tarlabasiyenileniyor.com)

Hence, the urban transformation projects described above sought to turn these areas into profitable neighborhoods, with no place for marginalized populations (Bayramoğlu 2013). These collective evictions, which have always been supported by state institutions, have had devastating consequences for these populations. They disrupted the working lives, social relationships, and spatial belongingness of *lubunyas* as well as other displaced inhabitants of the neighborhood (Unsal 2015:54), working as processes of dispossession.

Urban improvement initiatives leading to the elimination of trans feminine bodies and sex workers are not limited to Turkey. For instance, Ritterbusch (2016) explains how transgender sex workers in Bogotá have no protection from violence in the limited areas where prostitution is legally permitted. Edelman (2014) discusses prostitution-free zones and other exclusionary urban policies in Washington DC that were implemented to protect the health and safety of "productive" residents. In particular, he argues that in gentrified spaces, the displacement of these populations is carried out by the combined efforts of the nation-state and land-developers. These insights have been useful to understand the structural violence inherent in such spatial policies. The forceful displacements described in this chapter operate on a logic of disposability of the marginalized social groups for the sake of development and the prosperity of the 'worthy' citizens of the city, and the city itself. This is grounded in a naturalized understanding of whose lives deserve a home, a community, respect, and protection, and whose lives are simply disposable (see Mbembé 2003).

Discussion

Using the analytical lens of structural violence, this chapter has taken a closer look at the political, legal, and economic environment in which trans sex workers in contemporary Turkey live. In particular, it focuses on the lack of antidiscrimination laws for gender and sexual minorities; the complex and lengthy medico-legal requirements regulating gender

reassignment; the legal ambiguity of trans sex work; the increasingly arbitrary powers of law enforcement; institutional discrimination; and the collective displacements carried out as a part of urban transformation projects. Most importantly, bridging ethnographic and interview data with legal texts and online sources, it explains the consequences of such legal, political, and economic arrangements (or their absence) in my interlocutors' everyday lives.

Given the absence of antidiscrimination and equality legislation to safeguard the LGBTI+ populations in Turkey, trans people face widespread individual, institutional, and structural discrimination, which compromises their fundamental rights. The legally ambiguous status of street-based sex work translates into persistent police surveillance, fines, and arrest. To avoid the police, many of my interlocutors—regularly or occasionally—commute to remote or isolated locations, where they face a higher risk of violence and work with limited access to formal and informal protection mechanisms. Furthermore, their communal living and working spaces have also been threatened by a number of social actors. In several locations, profit-driven urban renewal projects have led to the forced removal of trans sex working communities from their homes and neighborhoods. In these precarious circumstances, a crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, severely compromises their political, economic, and social wellbeing.

In addition to extra-legal practices, following Taşcıoğlu (2021) I show that the systemic violence, abuse, and discrimination faced by this population are exacerbated by the use of the law. For instance, by introducing administrative fines, expanding police powers, and permitting spatial exclusion, the law increases their vulnerability. This has become the case with the vast legal reforms introduced in recent decades, but more severely since Turkey's state of emergency in 2016. The invisibility of trans sex workers in legal texts, and hence their legal ambiguity, facilitates the instrumentalization of the law against them.

Furthermore, the governmental logic underpinning these efforts is to make the bodies that transgress the normative gender presentations and sexualities invisible in the city. As in other social contexts (see Aizura 2014:140; Edelman 2014:179), the institutional practices reviewed in this chapter are justified on the grounds of protecting public safety, security, morality, and health. Yet, they operate according to a logic of the disposability of trans sex workers, who are branded as pathological and criminal, and whose presence undermines the development and prosperity of "worthy" and "respectable" citizens of the city, and of the city itself.

This chapter has dealt primarily with the political, legal, and economic structures that harm trans sex workers in different ways, but there is also a cultural aspect to the violence that surrounds their lives. Countless acts of violence inflicted by various social actors point to a

deeply-rooted and normalized transphobia in this cultural context, which I have not addressed here. As we will see later in this thesis, natal families, intimate partners, neighbors, passers-by, property-owners, business owners, and service providers also perpetuate violence, harassment, and discrimination against this social group. Furthermore, while the focus of this chapter has been on how structural constraints affect the lives of trans sex workers, this is not a denial of the individual and collective agency that enables them to persist. On the contrary, the remainder of the dissertation will prioritize the responses of sex workers to the conditions of violence, namely their community practices, support networks, and acts and expressions of defiance.

Chapter 3: Community Practices

On a late summer afternoon in 2017, Sevda and I were deep in conversation during our first meeting. After telling me about her childhood memories and work experiences, she brought up the issue of friendship. To my surprise, she said she had little trust in her friends because competition and jealousy had "contaminated" the relationships in the community. In her own words, "I was hurt by my own friends with whom I am bonded by fate. We undermine each other." In fact, the gossiping and quarreling I heard in the first weeks of my fieldwork supported Sevda's testimony. Based on these hasty observations in the early stage of my fieldwork, I thought that conflict and rivalry must have largely obstructed the sense of community among the women I met.

When I returned two months later, spending an extended period in the neighborhood allowed me to gather a variety of impressions. On one occasion Sevda told me about the trouble she had had the night before. Early in the morning, she had been assaulted in front of her apartment by a client who had insisted on negotiating the price of the date. Hearing her scream, the *girls* working in the surrounding houses had come to her aid with sticks and stones and protected her from getting hurt. Her answer to my query about how consistently such daring mobilization took place was unambiguous: "We certainly help each other in this kind of situation. Everyone is very sensitive about safety." Given the disappointments that she had described earlier, such rigorous and potentially risky mobilization puzzled me, but it shaped my research questions and motivated me to pay closer attention to the social dynamics in this space.

Sevda's account suggests that despite the frequent conflicts between workers, the community exercises an extensive web of solidarity, especially on matters which threaten their safety. This means that the everyday life in this social space is characterized by aspects of both solidarity and conflict. There have been divergent sociological accounts on whether intragroup conflict has unifying or dis-unifying consequences (see Levine, Carter and Gorman 1976:1121). Conflict is not necessarily a destructive phenomenon for groups. It can also be a productive force. For example, it can help resolve disagreements; it can be a democratizing process and a catalyst for politics; it can contribute to the production of knowledge. Many quarrels, ingrained in the language and the culture of the trans community are a part of their interactional codes. The contentious nature of these social interactions helps them to bond, to release tension, and to form alliances. Yet, interpersonal conflicts can also place people on hostile terms with each other and disrupt relationships (see Desmond 2012; Menjívar 2000).

Contemporary research in urban sociology has suggested that pervasive conflict can induce hostility, create wariness and distrust, and destabilize relationships between people (Desmond 2012; Menjívar 2000). In these ways, internal conflicts can undermine the social relationships and the provision of support. The coexistence of solidarity and conflict may, therefore, create competing motivations within groups. This chapter interrogates how the trans community remains together and maintains supportive exchanges despite living in a context that engenders prevailing tensions, rivalries, and conflicts. The issue has been largely overlooked by past research, and is the central concern of this chapter. The community structures examined in this chapter are revisited in Chapter 4, which takes a closer look at the support mobilization within the trans community.

Solidarity and Conflict

> Contradictions are not always contradictory: they are windows onto the messy relationship between agency and structure. Or rather, they reflect the ways in which people reconcile their personal circumstances with a view of how the world ought to work.
>
> —Wendy Wolford (2007)

Chapter 1 introduced the idea that gathering around a neighborhood facilitates community building, social relationships, and support networks among *lubunyas*. As we will see in Chapter 4, even though they are not a completely cohesive community that exchanges all kinds of resources, they make considerable effort to protect one another. In this context solidarity stems from both the feelings that these women have for each other and the need for community-level engagement to enhance neighborhood safety. Arguably, a sense of solidarity and the everyday commitment it generates partly explain how *lubunyas* have managed to preserve the neighborhood as their living and working space for decades, in the face of police deterrence, local protests against prostitution, and other forms of everyday violence.

At the same time sharing a living and working space has also aggravated the competition, disagreement, and friction among *lubunyas*. I have witnessed incidents where workers maligned their colleagues to clients, belittled those with whom they were not on good terms, and spread rumors. While internal tensions are to be expected in any social group, the particular pressure under which the trans community lives and works through deepen these tensions. In the same way, competition exists in many work environments, yet there are certain structural and organizational forces that make competition in our context very distinctive. For example, economic marginality, leaving workers with low levels of security and high levels of

instability, exacerbates feelings of competition and provokes conflict between workers. Competition for customers and space led to contention among my research participants, especially during times of growing financial stress. Moreover, the economic activity takes place in their living spaces. A concentrated urban space where a worker's dealings are visible to the others who may live or work nearby makes competition in this setting particularly salient. As a result, solidarity and conflict which are both prominent in the community, are integral aspects of the relationships between my research participants and the everyday life in this social space.

Several scholars from the North American context have also written about competing dynamics in stigmatized groups whose lives depend on the informal economy. For instance, Snow and Anderson (1993) have argued that homeless people are burdened by contradictory pressures, such as being on guard for exploitation by their associates on whom they also depend for particular resources. Bourgois (1998:2331-2332) has found that a network of substance dependent homeless people are involved in a moral economy of sharing, even though they are distrustful of one another. Moreover, mutual solidarity and interpersonal betrayal coincide in their daily struggle for survival and respect (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009:9-10). Venkatesh (2006:155,187) has observed that the competition-based disputes between underground traders occasionally lead to physical fights; yet, at the same time, these people attend to each other's needs. Finally, Duck (2015:39) notes that competition between drug dealers in poor black neighborhoods can be fierce, but that there is also a strong willingness to help one another.

The interpersonal relationships of sex workers in various cultural contexts also involve some aspects of mutual solidarity and conflict. For instance, Campbell (2000:18) explains that the robust social support networks of sex workers operating on the underground market in South Africa are sometimes weakened by "the jealousies and competitiveness of negotiating survival in a hostile environment." Although these workers identified themselves as "completely alone in the world," the bonds that tie them together enable the provision of mutual emotional, material, and practical assistance. Similarly, Hubbard and Sanders (2003) have noted that, alongside the tensions that arise from competition over spaces, streetwalkers in the UK often collaborate in the areas where they work together. Zheng (2008) has found that bar hostesses in China form temporary alliances in small groups in which they assist each other in finding work and acquiring professional skills, but competition for scarce resources creates a strong incentive to betray group members.

Despite observing distrust, wariness, and competition on the one hand, and collaboration, support, and assistance in sex worker communities on the other, these studies

have not elaborated on how people navigate these competing dynamics in everyday life. Nevertheless, the research reviewed in this section suggests that community life at the margins of society, especially if intersecting with an informal market, tends to contain aspects of both solidarity and conflict. As in the trans community, despite conflicts, the provision of social support persists within these groups. The next section examines how marginalized circumstances influence community relationships and social cohesion.

Remain Together or Fall Apart

In what ways are relationships and community dynamics affected by the structural processes of exclusion, dispossession, and exploitation? According to prevailing perspectives in urban sociology examining this question, under such conditions relationships between people can weaken or even break over time and social cohesion within communities can gradually decline. This view draws on relatively recent and older studies. For instance, Menjívar (2000:35) has observed that the political and economic precariousness disturbs the ties between immigrants. Likewise, Desmond (2012) has explained that the connections among evicted tenants that are forged to exchange support are severed as a result of the excessive demands put on them, which in turn increases instability in people's lives. Some research in this direction has attributed the deterioration of relationships to the *tensions* that arise between people during day-to-day struggles. For example, Lubbers and her colleagues (2020) have found that the expectations placed on family and friends to cope with poverty can lead to lasting conflicts and harm relationships in very poor urban households. Other scholars have noted that people may retreat from their social ties, and that social cohesion may erode due to the *distrust* engendered by hostile conditions (see Furstenberg 2001; Tigges, Browne, and Green 1998; Wacquant and Wilson 1989). Based on the findings of past research, we might expect that, given the distrust and tensions provoked by the hostile and competitive conditions, sex workers in this research context would withdraw from their community and collective efforts to alleviate negative living and working conditions. Yet, this is not what I observed during my fieldwork.

Another, emerging, perspective on this topic is the "selective solidarity," proposed by Danielle Raudenbush (2016). This suggests that people restrict their support networks and become selective about those with whom they maintain relationships in response to a sense of distrust that emerges in hostile contexts (Raudenbush 2016:1021). In a similar way, Jones (2004:58) has written that young women experiencing neighborhood violence try to stay safe by building loyalty links with closely related friends, while limiting their contact with others

who they only consider as associates. Although distrust and conflict partially discourage the exchanges—especially among acquaintances—also in my research context, sex workers nevertheless remain together and engage in community-wide mobilization against various external threats.

Thus, these perspectives, while generating useful insights into the relations and commitments at the margins, do not sufficiently explain community dynamics of the current case. Some questions still have to be explored: How do people continue to stay together and maintain supportive community relationships in the face of prevailing internal frictions and rivalries? Are there any community-level mechanisms that assist them in dealing with the tension that may arise between these two dynamics?

Local Social Order

According to Erving Goffman's classical work (1983), social situations create their own social order which governs how people relate to one another. He calls this "local interaction order," a set of sense-making tools and strategies oriented toward the necessities of a specific place. Based on similar reasoning, some scholars have theorized how social and community life is shaped by the persistent challenges people face in socially or economically marginalized settings. For instance, Howard Becker (1963:80-81) has proposed that "a subculture" arises as a response to problems faced by a group of people with a common corner in society, namely "outsiders." Elijah Anderson (1999) observes that in disadvantaged contexts a "code of the streets" emerges; this street culture is defined as a set of informal but commonly understood rules that govern interpersonal behavior. Anderson argues that the street code develops, particularly in violent settings where institutions fail to keep people safe and secure. There is a shared understanding of and wide adherence to these codes. The idea of a local social order contrasts with the disorder arguments commonly formulated to describe life in marginalized or poor urban communities.

Local Social Order in Underground Markets

The notion of social codes has also been used to explain the common practices and interactions in neighborhoods that intersect with an underground market, such as drug dealing, sex work, smuggling, and other types of underground trading. In the absence of a formal regulation of labor and market relations in underground economies, competition for business and space may be fierce, and lead to disagreements and disputes between people involved in these markets. According to Venkatesh (2006:2013), these are the universal features of markets embedded in underground economies. Yet, such problems need to be tackled for trade to

continue and for the stability of community relations. Duck (2017) provides a detailed description of the local social order that has emerged in a neighborhood where street-corner drug dealing is the main economic activity. He observes a high degree of mutual commitment to the neighborhood codes and reciprocity. Venkatesh (2006:187) has written that underground traders rely on "an elaborate and carefully cultivated social order" to settle disputes and to regulate business, for example, the amount of sales and the location and time of certain activities, so that they respect one another's needs (p. 163). Several outstanding ethnographies have explored the moral and cultural norms in sex work settings. For example, Parreñas (2011) observes that when it comes to flirting with customers, Filipina hostesses in Japan abide by certain cultural norms that mitigate competition at their workplace. Hoang (2015) has similarly noted that bar hostesses in Vietnam have established moral codes,[47] which hinder rivalries and help maintain a collaborative work environment.

Building on the insights of this line of research, I show that there is a social order governing the everyday life in the trans neighborhood. Parallel ideas have been articulated in urban literature. Based on the conceptualization of urban margins as spaces of ambiguity (see Achilli and Oesch 2016; Oesch 2017), which I discussed in the Introduction, I argue that the urban margin at which the trans sex working community is situated not only means police surveillance, societal discrimination, and economic exclusion, but is also generative of self-organization: a local social order, and a set of codes and practices defined within this order. These include the social and spatial organization of the community, shared codes, and work practices.

The social order conceptualized here emerges as a response to the persistent local challenges faced by people in a shared space (see Duck and Rawls 2012; Venkatesh 2006; Suttles 1969). I am also interested in how different aspects of the local social order help the community to navigate solidarity and conflict in everyday life. In particular, I try to understand the organization of social life and labor practices that help the community to foster solidarity and to address the internal tensions and disputes. We will see that this social order consequently helps them remain together in the face of external threats. What this chapter does not provide is a comprehensive narrative of the subcultural practices of this social group.

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[47] Referring to a shared sense of duty and obligation, complemented by a desire to follow it, some studies reviewed in this section use the term "moral code." Others use the term "social code" to describe the collective practices adopted rather instrumentally, arguing that they are not necessarily integrated into people's moral logics. Despite using the concept of social code, I avoid making such a distinction, which is beyond the objective of this chapter.

Viviana Zelizer (2010) contests a clear-cut conceptual separation between social life and market life, and argues that the two are "connected lives." Zelizer (2005) goes on to explain that even in "caring relations," intimacy and economic consideration are inextricably intertwined and mutually shape each other. Everyday life in this neighborhood also resists such a clear separation. There is a considerable overlap between economic life and the community life, in terms of physical and social space. As a result, tensions and conflicts originating from work-related matters are reflected on the everyday interactions between friends, housemates, neighbors, and acquaintances. Duck and Rawls (2012:65) assert that at the interface of an underground economy with a neighborhood, the economic activity plays a powerful local social force and shapes daily activities and social interactions among residents in significant ways. Using the same reasoning, such markets cannot be understood without their relationships to the neighborhood settings where they take place (Duck and Rawls 2012; Venkatesh 1997, 2006). I follow these perspectives to analyze the labor dynamics in the sex market in connection with the community structures; and inversely, I consider the implications of labor structure for community organization.

My interlocutors did not act merely as sources of data. They have a tacit or articulated understanding of how they navigate their relationships through various external pressures and internal tensions. Some of them provided me with their own interpretations of how the community life might have been shaped by their living circumstances. Thus, the analysis in this chapter was not entirely separate from the data collection. Below, I begin by explaining how community and market have been organized and the implications that such organizing has on community dynamics.

Community and Market Organization

When I first met her Beril, a young sex worker, I asked if she was new to the neighborhood. Her friends were amused by my question. *She wants to know if you're a kezban*, one of them teasingly explained. Those who recently joined the community are called *kezban,* which means having less experience as sex workers and in performing their gender role and being less acquainted with the *lubunya* subculture and its slang, *Lubunca*. Moreover, these workers are usually in the initial phases of modifying their bodies, faces, hair, and so forth.[48] Some of them wear a wig, which they call *maydonoz* (parsley). Beril said that she had only worked there for about a year and a half. I thought she would no longer be considered a novice

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[48] Not all trans women I met had feminized their bodie, and some chose to feminize their bodies to different degrees.

after all this time, but she made me realize that she had far less experience than her friends who had been working there for almost a decade. Yeliz joined the community seven years ago and Kamelya eight years ago. With the realization of how fast time passes, laughter gave way to melancholy.

As this anecdote suggests, there is a hierarchical differentiation among the women based on age and experience. Rana *Anne* also explained that everyone has a standing; *there are newcomers, intermediate, and senior workers*. Melda's account confirms this: *Everyone here gets a ranking based on their entry time. It is a system like the one in the army. There are different levels according to which we treat one another.* At the top of the social structure are the mothers—*Anne*, which is a form of address meaning mother in Turkish—the experienced trans women who manage the working houses. There are no strict rules about who becomes a mother. I have also met relatively young mothers, but managing a house requires experience with the market and familiarity with the community. On the other hand, not every experienced trans woman in sex work becomes a mother. It is not something every woman in the community aspires to. For instance, after her mother died, Sevda proposed that her friend work with her in the same house. However, she did not want to act as a mother and charge her friend for the room that she would provide. She found such managerial arrangements unfair. Several other women said they would be reluctant to take on the responsibility of being a mother.

The roles of mothers in managing the labor have been briefly discussed in Chapter 1. They are, in the first place, responsible for protecting their business as the managers of working houses. Yet, mothers' roles in managing the labor deviate from the prevailing depictions of pimps or other facilitators of sex work in the academic literature and popular culture (see Hodgson 1997; Raphael, Reichert, and Powers 2010) as applying deceptive recruitment, manipulation, pressure, and physical violence. However, there were several exceptional cases. According to Leyla, some 'mothers' try to discipline the *girls* by blackmailing them. Nazlı said that, in order to keep them under control, one mother tried to make her *girls* spend all their earnings on alcohol and drugs. But I was made aware by many young women who worked with managers that these efforts at control did not have much practical impact on their lives and that mothers have largely lost the authority that they once had over sex workers. For instance, all the sex workers I talked to said that it was always up to them to decide whether to accept or decline a client. This kind of consent that workers exercise in their relationships with mothers also characterizes Kimberly Kay Hoang's (2015) description of labor relationships between 'mommies' and bar hostesses in Vietnam.

Most importantly, these parties have a voluntary relationship; the informal contract can be proposed by both sex workers and mothers and is established by mutual agreement. In addition, there is a collaboration between them; mothers maintain a house that provides workers with a space to offer sexual services. They also meet the daily necessities of the working apartments, such as, cleaning, paying bills, and keeping the house safe. In return, sex workers pay a daily fee. Being part of a house has implications beyond working with a manager. In particular, houses provide social support, a network of friends, and an intimate queer social setting. While being a mother has different meanings and serves different roles, houses managed by mothers (and sometimes fathers) provide similar qualities among Black GLBTQ youth in the United States (see Arnold and Bailey 2009). Finally, workers can establish a contract with another mother and move into another house, meaning that managers cannot claim possession of workers. Even though losing their sex workers to another house could potentially create minor disputes between mothers, this does not occur often and does not cause lasting conflicts. While several houses have stable members who have worked together for years, other houses have a more variable composition. This adds some fluidity to the social structure of the community.

The labor model in this research context diverges from the strict vertical organization common in some underground markets. Instead, it resembles "the resource-sharing model", suggesting that participants form partnerships and combine the necessary resources and skills to accomplish a shared objective in competitive settings (see Morselli and Savoie-Gargiso 2014). Documented in various underground markets, for example, the drug trade (see Adler 1985; Desroches 2005) and human smuggling (see Zhang 2008), such partnerships can be transient and control can be relatively thin. However, the partnership between mothers and sex workers in this context is far from equal. In comparison to sex workers, mothers accumulate a disproportionate degree of social and economic capital through their managerial roles. In some cases, this gap is wider due to the financial exploitation of workers by their managers. Nevertheless, as explained, the labor model adopted in this context does not entail mothers' coercion of their *girls*.

In addition to the managerial positions that they take in their houses, mothers also play roles in the wider community—the extended trans family. Despite the labor model that resembles a partnership between mothers and their *girls*, the community is organized hierarchically. Senior mothers are particularly influential in the community as a whole—much more than younger mothers. It is not only that socially resourceful *lubunyas* tend to become mothers, but that motherhood is an experience through which the social capital is enhanced.

As the next paragraph exemplifies, their status is based on prestige, which is acquired through the accumulation of knowledge, skills, and resources in their domains and the transmission of this to others in the community. In this sense, prestige is different from dominance—attained by coercion, threat or fear of punishment (Henrich and Gil-White 2001). Those with considerable experience, a high reputation, and good connections have more influence in the community. For instance, Selda *Anne* is a well-established mother with a deeply rooted social network.

One late afternoon, I was excited to meet her by chance at a beauty salon when she was having her hair dyed. The salon was full of women of all ages. I found a narrow spot on a couch where I could squeeze in and started listening to the conversation. Selda *Anne* was energetic, assertive, and expansive. She asked one of the young women in the salon who she was, as she had never met her before—nor had I. Hale introduced herself and added that she had been in prison for two-and-a-half years. Selda *Anne*, replied *I've heard your name so often, but I've never had the chance to meet you*, she added enthusiastically. No matter how well they know the senior mothers personally, they treat them with respect and address them as *Anne*. Selda *Anne* urged her to be careful not end up in prison again, *God forbid you ever end up there again*. And then, she proudly shared some episodes of her life, including how she started working in this neighborhood and the difficulties she underwent to achieve everything she has from nothing. In fact, she herself never had a mother. Then she advised everyone to work hard and never to trust men. *Men are dishonorable*, she alluded. The women in the salon nodded silently in agreement. As this example illustrates, Selda *Anne* is not only a manager of her working house, but she also guides other trans women affiliated with this neighborhood. Thus, the title of 'mother' has a broader social meaning in the community.

Given the reluctance to involve the police in their internal affairs—although there have also been incidents in which they called on the police—the community relies on informal means to address some of their internal conflicts. Senior mothers, for instance, can provide such assistance. Respected and regarded by many, they are sometimes involved in managing or preventing conflicts among workers. The social influence that they have in the community allows them to take a mediating role.

One example of how a work-related dispute between two workers was settled was the case of a young but experienced worker, Canan. She was annoyed with Janset who had allegedly offered longer treatment to her clients. From what Janset told me, one of Canan's regulars had expressed dissatisfaction with her service after having a date with Janset. Then, Canan complained to her mother that her colleague puts pressure on others by over-performing

the work and undercharging clients. In the end, Janset, despite operating without a manager, could solve the dispute by asking for support from another well-esteemed mother in the community. In similar cases, if anything, they could ask the assistance of mothers so that they avoid direct conflict.

Local mediators have also been identified as part of the underground markets in other contexts. Facilitators of sex work (namely, pimps, brokers, managers, and business owners) all help maintain the social order and also address the conflicts in sex markets in other cultural settings (see Blanchette and Silva 2017:42; Chapkis 2000; Morselli and Savoie-Gargiso 2014:251; Zhang 2008). When the legal channels are not available, local mediators are similarly involved in defusing disputes among street sellers in other underground markets (see Venkatesh 2006:354).

Besides the particular position enjoyed by mothers in the community, the hierarchical differentiation also governs the relationships between other senior and junior workers. Senior members are respected, and younger members are looked after, which fosters solidarity in the community. Kübra's friend, relatively older and more experienced than her, had been her mentor and taught her the tricks of the trade, such as how to treat and speak to different people. Beril said that when she first started out as a sex worker, she was guided by her seniors who knew the environment, which helped her stay out of trouble. Melda supported the junior women in the community in the same way that her elders had supported her. In particular, experienced workers usually alert newcomers of the troublemakers and advise them to remain calm and composed in order to avoid fights. Working on a regular basis in order to save money is also among the customary tips given by seniors.

On a Friday night, there was a large group of women crowding to get into the hair salon that I used to frequent. Unless there is an exceptional event, such as a soccer game between two rival teams or a religious holiday, the neighborhood is at its liveliest on Friday and Saturday nights. Therefore, many workers rush to take advantage of the most profitable time of the week. There was a lot going on at the salon. Some were putting on makeup in front of the mirror, others were on the phone trying to set a date while smoking. Several workers had food delivered and were having supper. In the parallel, a lively conversation was taking place, for some time in small groups and then all together. Yaren, a skinny teenage girl with a sporty outfit, entered the salon. She was eye-catching. The hairdresser looked at her with a mixture of affection and pity. *Look! How adorable and young. Still just a child*. Others complimented on her look, *just*

like a gacı.[49] In such ways, they often evaluate their own and peers' appearances based on the potential to "pass" as non-transgender.[50] As soon as Yaren got in, she smiled with a childlike innocence; greeted all her elders by kissing; and asked them how they were. When she was asked the same question, she said that she had settled in a working apartment because she found working on the highway exhausting: *By going here and there, I feel exhausted. I want to work in one place only and then go straight home*, she added. However, due to long hours of police presence in the neighborhood, some of her peers are accustomed to working at several locations. An older woman gave her a piece of advice in a self-assured manner: *You're so young. You should work hard now and save up some money so that you can live in your own house when you get older.*

Home ownership was frequently mentioned as a hard-to-achieve goal, which many junior workers are committed to working towards and several senior women had already realized. 'Home' is a complicated notion for my interlocutors. Many of them have abandoned their parental home since they experienced it as a space of oppression. Therefore, a home must primarily provide refuge and protection from danger. Sevda perceives her apartment as the only place where she feels sheltered and peaceful, isolated from all disturbances. Neither at her family's nor friends' places does she feel this way. "Only when shutting yourself between four walls, you find peace," she explained. Moreover, as Wardaugh (1999:93) notes, the concept of home cannot exist without the concept of homelessness. My interlocutors also consider home-ownership as life-long housing security.[51] As opposed to some women who live and work together in this neighborhood, some own an apartment in other districts where they live alone. In this sense, homeownership has transformed the communal living practices. Nevertheless, owning an apartment is seen as a milestone for which younger women are advised to save money.

Yaren also consulted her older peers about transition-related medical procedures. Each woman gladly shared her knowledge and experience on this topic with the youngest member of their community. Thus, workers of different age groups are often in contact with each other;

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[49] This means "woman" in *Lubunca*. In this context, it refers to cis-woman.

[50] Conforming to the feminine beauty ideals and "passing" as non-transgender help to offset stigma and enhance personal safety for trans women (Grant et al. 2011).

[51] Owning an apartment does not always guarantee a safe and secure shelter. There have been incidents in which trans women have been forced to leave their apartments by their neighbors through intimidation or the threat of violence. Duvar English. 2020. Retrieved November 29, 2020. (https://www.duvarenglish.com/human-rights/2020/01/13/trans-woman-unable-to-enter-own-home-for-7-months-due-to-transphobic-violence)

the younger ones are expected to treat the older ones with respect, and the older ones are usually helpful when they are consulted. The exchanges between Yaren and her seniors exemplify how the codes of respect and responsibility embedded in this hierarchical social structure foster community cohesion. Chapter 1 hinted at the high mobility rates and fluidity within the community. However, the cultural codes are largely maintained and transferred to newcomers through older members—such as mothers.

In sum, the dominant political discourses suggest that many women or young people become involved and remain in underground markets by means of violence, intimidation, and coercion (see Irwin-Rogers 2019). When it comes to sex work, pimps or other facilitators are usually portrayed as using deception or physical force to exert monopolistic control over prostitutes (see Hodgson 1997; Raphael and Shapiro 2004). On the contrary, other researchers have used the resource-sharing model to describe the collaboration of sex workers with third parties, for instance, to address safety issues (see Morselli and Savoie-Gargiso 2014). The labor agreements and work relationships between mothers and daughters in my research context resemble this model. As explained earlier, even though this partnership does not mean that workers and managers benefit equally from this trade, the relationships of my interlocutors with the facilitators of sex work entail a large degree of autonomy. The resource-sharing model also explains the labor relations in other underground markets such as drug trading (see Morselli 2009; Pearson and Hobbs 2001) and human smuggling (see Zhang 2008). In such partnerships, collaboration is usually flexible and control is relatively weak (see Desroches 2005).

The social organization in this community is not separate from the organization of the market; on the contrary, the two are closely linked to one another, which echoes Zelizer's (2005) argument. For instance, being a mother has implications beyond the management of houses. Their social influence in the community allows them to get involved in managing communal problems and settling disputes between younger workers. Their capacity for social influence originates from the experiences and knowledge that the mothers transmit to the younger generation.

Moreover, the expectation and provision of respect and guidance, defined on the basis of hierarchical relationships, nurture the sense of solidarity and cohesion within the community. Despite the social organization and the social codes that limit the likelihood of conflicts between older and younger community members, competition between workers for clients and locations still gives rise to disputes. The community mechanisms help to reduce such episodes and facilitates conflict resolution.

Houses as Autonomous Entities

Aslı explained how she and her housemates managed "the new girl" in their house. They were not happy that she was seeing a man known as a troublemaker in the community: *We asked her to end it. She's our girl; we would get into trouble too. It's not worth it. Another girl would be free to do whatever they want. But, our girl should stay away.* Despite initially disregarding their request, "the new girl" eventually decided to take her co-workers' advice. On the other hand, one of Meltem's housemates who had repeatedly "made trouble" for her co-workers was asked to leave the house. Meltem defended her own and colleagues' decision. *It can happen once, twice, or three times. But there's been an incident every day. Even the police came [to our door]. In the end, we were reluctant to keep her.* As these examples demonstrate, workers who share a house may employ social control mechanisms to deter practices that may put the whole household at risk of harm. Besides, to my knowledge, every worker decides on their own how many days a week to be on the streets, how much to charge, who to date, and so forth.

On the other hand, each working house enjoys a large degree of autonomy in relation to the other houses, managing their internal affairs relatively independently. As briefly explained in Chapter 1, while around a dozen houses are still managed by mothers, some young workers have abandoned this arrangement. They have instead created a system whereby several friends rent an apartment where they work together without a manager. These workers choose not to collaborate with a mother in order to avoid spending a significant portion of their earnings on a contract. In spite of the severe safety risks, a few other women work alone in their own apartments. One time, when her friends complained about the low market prices charged in this neighborhood, compared to other sex work locations, Melda challenged them: *Our mistake is that we don't unite; everyone here works on their own. Why?* She then suggested that a more centralized and coordinated structure could grant them better negotiating power. Although workers may share tips and advice on pricing with each other, to my knowledge, there is no coordination within or between houses on setting a minimum or fixed price. A fixed price could alleviate competition among sellers in the market. However, given that the demand for services and workers differs in this informal market, sex is available at a wide range of prices. The main point here is that alternative ways of structuring labor have emerged and become widespread in this neighborhood, and no one objects to them. More generally, despite the hierarchical organization of community life, labor is loosely coordinated; neither mothers nor other senior women meddle in the internal affairs of other houses, unless there is direct disturbance caused to their own house.

But even when people are bothered by the events in other houses, they may choose not to intervene. For example, I once saw two co-workers being threatened by a speeding car coming towards them, while walking down one of the narrow streets. In fact, that is not an uncommon scene; aggressive driving is a common way to display masculinity for young men visiting this neighborhood. The driver stopped the car only when it was very close to hitting them, which outraged the women. One of them pulled the pepper spray from her pocket and, sprayed through the car's open window. This prompted a loud quarrel that quickly turned into a heated fight. In the meantime, the housemates of these women showed up and helped to de-escalate the fight. While leaving, the driver screamed out at the top of his voice several times *fucking travestis* thus threatening the whole community. The noise only distracted the conversations in the street momentarily. It surprised me that so many people in the surroundings minded their own business as if nothing extraordinary was happening.

I tried to understand how the community viewed their friends' involvement in this conflict. Although there was a general agreement that the man had an unsolved issue with the workers of that house, some women who work in the nearby apartments clearly disapproved of their peers' act. Pointing at the pervasiveness of conflicts that this house gets involved in, Janset criticized them: *Yet another incident. One day, they'll get into real trouble. See what they've done! No wonder there isn't [much] business around here. It is because of their stealing and acting up. We are losing customers.* To my question about whether anyone was concerned about this kind of risky episode, Sevda responded with a rhetorical question: *What could we possibly do, dear?* Several others argued that only the 'mothers' could step in, but other *travestis* do not have a say. As seen in the previous section, mothers sometimes intervened in events that directly disturbed people working in other houses, yet, in this case, no one openly contested their neighbors. Most people I talked to viewed this avoidance as a way to stay out of trouble.[52]

I encountered another fight between workers of a house and a day laborer who does small chores for trans women in exchange for pocket money and shelter. Instinctively, I tried to move towards them, but I was blocked by Sevda, who was also at the tea garden: *Come here and sit down. One should never intervene in travestis' private affairs.* She did nothing herself to help de-escalate the conflict. Although it fortunately ended soon without interference, these situations could potentially threaten neighborhood safety or attract the police to their space.

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[52] On the other hand, they often gossip about such events. Gossip may also serve to maintain the social order without risking retaliation in small and closely-knit communities, such as this one.

Nevertheless, there is a tacit agreement that other workers, shop owners, or neighbors should not get involved in the private affairs of a house with outsiders. This was another example of a dispute a house had with an outsider, which rest of the community knew nothing about and were not expected to step in.

The previous section explained that the trans community has created a hierarchical social organization, which prescribes the codes of showing respect and providing assistance to one another. It also showed that the influence that mothers have in the wider community allows them to take a mediating role in settling some of the internal disputes. However, this social organization does not involve coercive relationships. This section provides further evidence that the hierarchical relationships do not imply tight control of mothers or other seniors over the rest of the community. In fact, the houses have relative autonomy when it comes to their business and social affairs, for instance, structuring labor and navigating conflict with outsiders. I reason that the autonomy of houses to manage their internal affairs could impede disputes between households, hence help the community to limit the scale of conflicts. It also prevents fights with outsiders from spreading to the life of the community. Finally, the anecdotes and accounts reported in this section make it clear that conflicts are, nevertheless, a part of everyday life in the neighborhood, although they are usually kept under control.

Spaces of Solicitation

Every time I visited the neighborhood in the late afternoon or early evening, I found the sex workers standing in the same spots in the company of their group of friends. Beginning from the early stages of my fieldwork I took notice of regular spatial behavior, which was part of a broader socio-spatial order. Delving into some elements of the socio-spatial order, this section examines the purposes it serves for the trans community.

Research on geographies of sex work agrees that moral denigration and spatial confinement of street prostitution is a ubiquitous phenomenon (see Brewis and Linstead 2000). The human geographer Tim Cresswell (1996) focuses on the strong link between moral and spatial, and argues that dominant moral codes and power relations are reinforced through the organization of space. Spatial arrangements, particularly reestablish the distinction between normality and deviance in material and embodied forms. This idea is particularly clear in the case of street prostitution where the marginalization of sex workers in the moral discourse and geographical space go hand in hand (Hubbard and Sanders 2003). Street prostitution is often seen as a threat to the (dominant) social order and "family" life (Duncan 1996:140; Schlör 1998:199). Representing "improper" sexuality, trans sex workers in particular are treated as a

disturbance to the public peace (see Sabsay 2011). To protect the heteronormative order, territorial actions are taken against street prostitution, such as segregating (trans) sex workers from the public view and confining them in marginal areas (Duncan 1996).

The constraints faced by the trans community faces in terms of where they can work and live in the city exemplifies the materialization of the dominant moral codes as a spatial restriction in their lives. Profitable business streets, with up-market shops, restaurants, and bars, come under police surveillance and the scrutiny of private security personnel. On the other hand, dense residential areas, where no other commerce takes place are also prone to community policing. More recently, a night-time security force known as *bekçi*, or watchmen, have been assigned to support police officers in maintaining public safety in business and residential urban neighborhoods.[53] All these factors limit the extent to which sex workers can use street spaces for solicitation. Moreover, trans women also have limited housing options. In most areas, property-owners, in agreement with other residents' demands, are reluctant to sublet property to trans women and other groups of social "deviants." My interlocutors who have rented apartments outside the trans neighborhood pay much higher amounts than the average rental prices for those areas. All in all, exclusion, inflicted by a range of actors, including security forces, businesses, property-owners, and other residents, limit the urban spaces where trans communities can live and work.

On the other hand, like other marginalized subjects in urban areas, sex workers exceed the socio-spatial confinement and participate in shaping their environments (Hubbard and Sanders 2003). In this research context urban marginality works not only as a limiting, but also as an enabling force. In this regard, the trans community has created a socio-spatial order and a set of practices embedded within this order. These include forming a place-bound community; buying houses and subletting them to fellow sex workers; and adjusting working hours and locations to avoid police patrols. These practices are critically important when it comes to transgressing the spatial restrictions they are subject to. In so doing, they also mitigate the hardship they face in urban spaces with respect to safety, work, and housing.

As indicated above, there are various socio-spatial codes, yet here I concentrate on those that define where sex workers locate themselves in the neighborhood while soliciting. Above all, the location of a working house largely determines where its tenants can operate in the

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[53] Çarşı Ve Mahalle Bekçilerinin Vazifeleri İle İlgili Olarak Riayet Etmeleri Gereken Hususları Gösterir Yönetmelik. Retrieved May 5, 2021.
(https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/File/GeneratePdf?mevzuatNo=9179&mevzuatTur=KurumVeKurulusYonetmeligi&mevzuatTertip=5)

streets. Every group is generally allowed to take up some space in front of the apartment building of their working house or the nearest street corner—if vacant. Street corners have a competitive advantage as they allow workers to scrutinize multiple streets simultaneously. Corner locations (or crossroads) are also the most frequently occupied spots of street vendors operating in this area.

The code of standing in the same spot for a solicitation near one's own house is largely respected. I have only witnessed a few incidents in which workers were accused of having occupied other groups' spaces. Sevda explained that everyone usually takes up the spaces next to their doorsteps. Pointing at an unfamiliar face with annoyance, she complained: *But some people, like her, work in front of our apartment. Actually, she is not supposed to work here because this is the front of our building.* Another incident of a violation of this spatial code resulted in a fight. A young worker who was loitering next to someone else's working house was warned by a mother not to cross the area in front of the mother's house. Next time the worker strolled by this house during the same night, a fight broke out between the two. While these examples exist, the codes and norms are broadly respected.

After purchasing a three-story apartment to run with her friends, Itır gave the building her own name by getting a proper apartment sign made. Several other apartment doors are marked in red with the names of the women working there or the young mothers managing the houses. One reason for putting up these indications is to guide familiar clients to their apartment, hence to increase their visibility and sales. Another intention is to signal ownership of the space around their apartments to the workers of other houses.

Thus, the spaces that sex workers occupy to solicit are mostly stable. Only when they switched the house where they worked, did I then see them standing at a different location around their new colleagues. Moreover, the women working in the same house stand together in the street in the vicinity of neighboring groups. At the same time, groups from different houses are located in the streets at a slight distance from one another, respecting each other's work space. This means that while they remain apart from one another, they are also significantly connected. Overall, there are two vital consequences of how groups are positioned in the streets with respect to one another. First, having well-defined, stable spots in the streets limits conflicts over working spaces. Standing apart, furthermore, grants each group space in the marketplace and lessens competition between houses. Second, that neighboring groups stay in proximity to one another also helps them in different ways. As stated in Chapter 1, a concentrated urban space where groups stay in each other's vicinity allows the community to

mark and maintain the market. But proximity also facilitates the communication and mobilization among groups, especially when threatened with violence.

To be clear, the spatial boundaries do not generate fair participation in the sex market or equal distribution of income in the community. The workers of several houses cannot run their businesses in front of their apartments because their streets are not appropriate for soliciting customers. These houses may be along business streets, which are too risky to perform an underground type of work as explained earlier. Or the area where they are located may not be recognized as a sex work zone, which therefore does not attract customers. Yet, even in the sex work area, some streets are patrolled by law enforcement officers more than others. This means that while some groups are hindered from standing on the streets, others may have some space to continue operating, albeit discreetly. Therefore, having a vibrant business activity is closely linked to acquiring a prime location. Consequently, these codes, while facilitating the work routine of some groups, may leave others with a lesser share in the market.

In sum, building on the idea that the organization of space is a powerful ordering tool in society (Cresswell 1996), various remarkable accounts have emerged on geographies of prostitution. These accounts assert that the spatialization of moral boundaries creates physical boundaries between "legitimate" and "repudiated" sexuality, and hence reinforces the normative heterosexual order (see Brewis and Linstead 2000; Sabsay 2011). In practice, these efforts result in limited access of sex workers to the urban space and highly concentrated prostitution sites in the marginal areas of cities (Duncan 1996; Sabsay 2011). The tight surveillance the trans community is subject to largely restricts where they can find housing and where they can loiter or solicit clients in public spaces.

On the other hand, the trans community has created a socio-spatial order, and codes and practices defined within this order. This section focuses in particular on the socio-spatial codes that govern where sex workers locate themselves in street spaces and argued that these codes helped them address both the external threats and internal tensions that the community faces. Generally, workers take up the space in the streets next to their working houses or the nearest street corner. In so doing, they occupy stable locations on the streets and seek clients around those with whom they share a house. This creates a steady work environment, physically and socially. Although flexible and invisible, spatial boundaries are created through physical distance between different groups. A degree of distance provides each house with some privacy, space in the market, and exposure to different clients. These codes that restrict who can work where are largely respected, which reduce competition and conflicts among the

houses. On the other hand, their positioning on the streets allows different groups of workers to stay connected with one another, facilitating rapid community mobilization particularly during threatening events.

The codes described here are not unique to the trans sex working community. I have noted that street vendors, for instance, those who sell roasted chestnuts in the same neighborhood, use similar spatial codes. More generally, informal rules, regulating who can work where and at what price, have also been observed amongst underground traders in other contexts (see Venkatesh 2006).

Attitudes to Conflict

So far, this chapter has discussed the social organization, work practices, and socio-spatial codes that assist the community to diminish or settle disputes and foster social solidarity. As pointed out earlier, despite these informal mechanisms, rivalries and quarrels still occur in the community. The frequent deployment of some *Lubunca* words in everyday life indicates the ordinary nature of different kinds of conflict in this social space. For example, *madilemek* refers to the act of maligning, hurting, or battering someone (Ördek 2014). *Madilik* similarly refers to behavior or speech that insults or hurts people, hence of a malicious nature (Savcı 2013:100). Given the prevalence of conflict both in language and in practice, this section tries to understand how the community deals with internal conflicts and whether such conflicts undermine relationships.

In the first place, conflicts usually do not prevent workers from supporting one another in the event of serious violence, or during the moments of grief. Hakan, a middle-aged cis man who has lived in this neighborhood all his life shared his observation of how the trans community mobilizes against attacks: "They all come to each other's aid. You can see dozens of people reaching out ready to defend if it comes to a fight. They would back each other, even if they had quarreled earlier on." Hakan's testimony, which was supported by my other interlocutors, suggests that not being on good terms does not stop workers from protecting each other. What makes this mobilization consistent is the code of disregarding the resentment they feel towards fellow community members when threatened with external violence. Hence, the urgent question of safety is prioritized over interpersonal conflicts. This point is explored in greater detail in Chapter 4.

The following fight between Janset and her close friends exemplifies how the economic stress affects the relationships in the community. Due to her deteriorating relationship with her boyfriend, who had partially supported her, Janset—a sex working cis woman—found herself

in a difficult economic situation. She decided to find an additional means to provide for herself through this challenging time and decided to ask Ismet, a regular, to lend her a large sum of money. Ismet is a financially secure middle-aged man who frequents the neighborhood either to buy sexual services or to spend time in the tea garden with the neighborhood dwellers. He is known to be fond of Janset and occasionally brings gifts for her to show his affection. However, since Ismet is also a client of some others in the community—both sex workers and other business owners—Janset's request caused unease within her circle of friends. Sevda and Serkan, also having problems making ends meet during this period, outraged Janset by persuading Ismet, who had initially agreed to help her, not to lend her money. She seemed infuriated when she told me that her friends wanted Ismet to break the deal with her because they wanted the money to be spent on their business instead. *This is what happens when people's material conditions worsen.* As this dispute illustrates, increasing competition in times of shortage leads to disputes over the limited means to generate income. As a result of this huge fight, Janset stopped talking to her friends.

Four months later when I returned to the neighborhood, however, I saw Janset and Sevda back together passing their time together at Serkan's tea garden. No one seemed to hold a grudge for the previous conflict, which had been deeply upsetting for Janset at the time. Living just a floor apart, Janset and Sevda are neighbors, friends, and companions; they provide mutual support to each other with household chores and other practical matters. The two also took care of each other during their tough times, for example, when Sevda was grieving the loss of her mother, and when Janset broke up with her long-term partner. These women, who are fond and supportive of each other, spend a great deal of their time at Serkan's tea garden, which they consider their second home. As this example demonstrates, conflicts are common, yet they usually do not break the relationships in this space.

In the same way, Serkan and Sevda also share a generous camaraderie. During a night when a police team was indiscriminately picking up all the trans women on the streets, Serkan, who knew some of the officers, managed to convince them to release Sevda. In the same year, he organized a birthday party for Sevda at his tea garden and bought a cake, prepared appetizers, decorated the place, and invited her friends. Until police patrols arrived in the early evening, Sevda, dazzling in her elegant pink-red dress, danced in the street to her favorite music whilst sipping a drink. Afterwards, she expressed gratitude to everyone for this memorable day, but especially to Serkan. She said that she never had such a special birthday. Even if these two friends sometimes quarreled, the resentment did not last long between them.

Frictions between friends are widespread in the community, but, as these incidents exemplify, after a while they are disregarded, left behind, and the resentments are not long-lived. Rana *Anne* explained that "forgetfulness" is imperative, for they have no other stable source of support than their community. But also, in her eyes, the arguments that they have are inevitable, or natural, events among a group of individuals with family-like bonds. This point is expanded in Chapter 4. Unlike these examples, I also heard several cases in which such upsetting fights fractured friendships for a long period. For instance, Şeyda said that she cut off her relationships with her friends who revealed her private matters to other people. Nazlı also ended a close friendship since her friend slept with her boyfriend. However, conflicts did not usually break relationships to this extent.

In various contexts, researchers have noted that the pressures that the experiences of exclusion and precariousness engender weaken or sever social ties (see Desmond 2012; Menjívar 2000). In contrast, the social ties in this context are not shattered by the tensions and conflicts evoked by the hostile circumstances. Since there are not many people on whom my interlocutors can rely, even serious conflicts between friends do not generally break their relationship. Some of them understand interpersonal conflicts as natural occurrences. "Forgetting" disputes, when faced with an external threat, but, also, more generally, not keeping resentments for long make their togetherness enduring.

In addition to the fights that spark serious resentments, many smaller frictions permeate the everyday social life of the community. For example, a quarrel between two close friends ended with their spending the night at the police station. Yet the following morning the two were seen walking home arm in arm. They appeared cheerful and acted as if nothing disagreeable had taken place between them. In contrast to the Janset's fight with her friends, which was genuinely upsetting, this one was probably nothing more serious than an alcohol-fueled outburst. Like many conflicts of this kind, the anger was short-lived, or even momentary.

A great deal of quarrels seemed ingrained in the language and the culture of this community. I often heard sex workers half-jokingly criticizing their colleagues' appearances, clothing, makeup, and plastic surgery. For example, Kamelya once seemed annoyed by her best friend's typical comment: *Where did you get that dress? It doesn't suit you at all.* These quarrel-like interactions are fairly common that they seem to be a part of everyday social interactions.

We can draw connections between these habitual quarrels and some subcultural practices of other queer communities. For example, dancing battles (Vogue), depicted in the cult documentary, *Paris is Burning* (Livingston 1990), used to be common in marginalized

queer communities in the United States. Through creative performances, voguers compete for the reputation of their "houses." This highly stylized form of dance, which shows that gender is a performance, offers their community, whose lives are not valued by the mainstream society, a sense of identity, belonging, and dignity. Another performance that has emerged in the United States is "reading," which refers to insulting or deriding someone imaginatively. In this battle of wit, the "reader" exaggeratedly ridicules some aspects of the other person, for instance, clothes or makeup, to make the crowd laugh. Some have interpreted 'voguing' and 'reading' as ways to peacefully settle disputes among rivals (Wolde-Michael 2017). The idea behind this interpretation is that expressing hostility through different—more acceptable—channels may help groups to release tensions so that more serious conflicts are prevented from flaring up.[54] Navigating survival in a marginalized context gives rise to tensions within the trans community. Drawing on the interpretations of the performances that exist in other queer spaces, I reason that the quarrel-like interactions habituated by the trans community in my research context, albeit less organized and hence more embedded in the everyday, might work to move the tensions to a different—less threatening and more manageable—field of life. This also implies that conflict is not necessarily a destructive dynamic; it can also reinforce togetherness.

All in all, both daily quarrels and the fights that cause serious resentments are common in this social landscape. However, even after a serious dispute, it usually does not take too long before they return to their usual interactions. Although I heard of several cases of sizeable conflicts mediated by mothers, most conflicts are resolved without any outside involvement. The code of discounting or disregarding disputes, or as Rana *Anne* puts it, "forgetfulness," prevents internal conflicts from breaking relationships and tearing apart the community. This social code also makes more room for them to realize a united mobilization, for instance, when they face a threatening situation or other common problems. Given the critical importance of community mobilization for their personal safety, disregarding disputes is seen as an obligation. Daily quarrels, on the other hand—though can be hurtful in some cases— are usually considered a normal mode of communication and do not generate much bitterness between people. Relating this case to some subcultural practices in other contexts, I suggest that expressing rivalry or resentment through quarrel-like conversations may also help this group release internal tensions, thereby hindering the emergence of more serious fights.

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[54] Psychological accounts have noted that once anger reaches a conscious level, it loses some of its power (see Kindlon and Thompson 1999:238). Linguistic mechanisms, including humor or satire, can be beneficial for identifying, expressing, and channeling aggression before it erupts violently (Gilligan 1996:58).

Discussion

In this chapter, I examined how the trans community continues to stay together and maintains supportive relationships in the face of internal conflicts and rivalries. In particular, I analyzed the community-level mechanisms that assist them in coping with the tension that may arise between these two dynamics. Based on the view that urban margins—understood as ambiguous spaces—have not only a constraining force, but also a productive potential (see Woroniecka-Krzyzanowska 2019), I argued that the marginality that my interlocutors live in are generative of self-organization. Moreover, like Venkatesh (1997) and Duck (2015), who examined the local social order in neighborhoods that intersect with underground markets based on Anderson's (1999) idea of "code of the street," I tried to make sense of the local social order within the trans neighborhood, and a set of codes and practices defined within this order. Building on Zelizer's idea (2005, 2010) that contests the separation between culture and economy, I took into account the considerable overlap between market life and community life in terms of physical and social space. I found that the shared codes that regulate economic activity penetrate the community life of my interlocutors. Likewise, the organization of community life also shapes how labor is structured in my research context.

In particular, the community life is organized hierarchically, based on which the codes of respecting seniors and guiding juniors are defined and exercised. Mothers, who manage the working houses have a considerable social influence in the entire community. On the other hand, centered around the apartments in a concentrated space, work is loosely organized. The work agreements between mothers and sex workers are settled mutually and voluntarily. The houses exercise a great deal of autonomy in structuring labor and handling their social affairs. Besides, the community organizes itself in street spaces according to a local socio-spatial order, which allows different groups to stay partitioned but still connected with one another. Finally, tensions, rivalries, and disputes are common, yet the resentments arising from both serious conflicts and daily quarrels are usually disregarded or not kept for long. All these ways in which the community structures its social and economic life foster community cohesion and facilitate mobilization, while lessening the salience of competition and reducing the scope or weight of interpersonal conflicts. By doing so, the social order investigated in this chapter also helps the community to remain united against external threats.

Living with the threat of persistent violence and marginalization creates an urgent need for solidarity, while, at the same time intensifying the potential tensions between sex workers. As a result, both solidarity and conflict remain common social dynamics within the trans community. Urban sociology has paid some attention to marginalized groups' contradictory

actions and statements (see Desmond 2012; Jerolmack and Khan 2014; Raudenbush 2016). Some researchers suggest that the relationships at the margins of society are "plagued by contradictory characteristics" (see Snow and Anderson 1993). As the opening passage reveals, the contradicting words of my research participant were also my point of departure in this chapter. However, during fieldwork, I understood that what I initially perceived as contradictory was not necessarily socially incompatible. Despite the competitive sentiments and considerable presence of conflicts in everyday social life, the commitment to protect one another remains; people care about each other and build relationships and communal lives with one another. Indeed, my interlocutors, such as Rana *Anne*, do not see supporting fellow community members with whom they have had rivalries and quarrels as a contradictory practice. Conflicts are instead seen as inevitable dynamics in a community with family-like relationships. As Rana *Anne* implies, these dynamics may not be unique to the trans community; natal family relationships can similarly carry some "contradictory" aspects. This chapter shows that through the organization of social and economic life, and the adherence to some shared social codes, people can navigate a diverse set of social dynamics in their relationships.

A great deal of research with marginalized groups suggests that distrust and tension arising from negotiating survival in hostile and competitive environments result in restricted, weakened, or severed social ties (Desmond 2012; Lubbers et al. 2020; Menjívar 2000). Moreover, these interpersonal dynamics may lead to the erosion of social cohesion in communities (see Furstenberg 2001; Tigges, Browne, and Green 1998; Wacquant and Wilson 1989). Again, the findings of this chapter offer another possibility: community-level responses can help prevent internal conflicts from undermining relationships and tearing apart communities. As we will see in the next section, the community-level responses have implications beyond social cohesion, and also enable mobilization for support.

Social codes emerge to address the pressing issues in local environments and this has several implications. First, the codes explored here are not unique to this community. As discussed earlier, the same codes govern the social and economic life in the markets where people struggle with similar pressures. Second, the social codes outlined in this chapter are probably not fixed, but dynamically shaped by the changing circumstances, such as laws, regulations, policing, physical threats, client demand, and so forth.

It is also worth mentioning that the social and work codes analyzed in this chapter should not be understood as deterministic or mechanical. Codes shape people's actions, but there are variations in how people adopt and deploy them. Furthermore, each topic investigated

here—community and market organization, the autonomy of houses, spaces of solicitation, and attitudes to conflict—correspond to a different set of literature and deserve further unpacking in a broader text beyond this chapter. However, this is not the place to expand my analysis of these codes and practices theoretically and empirically. Likewise, I have only discussed some local social formations that facilitate the trans community's togetherness. I have not explored the codes that may address issues arising in other areas of their social and economic lives.

Chapter 4: Support Networks

Like several of her associates Nazlı has a deeply supportive natal family with whom she kept up regular contact both during and after her transition. Yet most of the other women I spoke to had experienced ostracism and estrangement when their families became aware of their gender identity. For instance, Sevda had to leave her parental home and cut ties with her family members and has not been able to build an accepting or trusting relationship with them since, even after returning to her home city and reconnecting with them. Derya, like many others, occasionally gets in touch with her family, but only by telephone. A few others have faced challenging experiences in their communities of origin: for example, when Aslı was a teenager, she allowed an older male relative to take cross-dressed photographs of her, which he then distributed to the entire extended family. After that, she left her hometown. I have also heard of a couple of other sex workers who left home without 'coming out' to their families. Thus, some of my respondents became alienated from their natal families, whilst others were proud to tell me that they had re-established relations with them. Nevertheless, even those who had have usually been cautious about confiding their problems with and anticipating the assistance of their natal families. This is because they do not want to damage or complicate their relationships with their families. Some families have been reluctant or unable to provide support on many issues my interlocutors had. The stigma surrounding sex work, along with transgender status, has led to limited parental involvement in their adult lives.

Building on Chapter 3, which discusses the social codes and work practices that facilitated social solidarity, I now turn to the support network and community mobilization within the trans community.[55] There is a large body of research, representing a broad geographical range, on support and care networks in marginalized or disadvantaged urban communities (see Bazán Levy 1998; Bilecen 2020; González de la Rocha 1988; Hanson 2005; Hoodfar 1997; Lavee and Offer 2012; Paugam and Zoyem 1998; Safa 2018; Singerman 1995). Focusing on the economic hardships faced by immigrant families, evicted tenants, the urban working poor, and single mothers (Lubbers, Small, and García 2020:17), this line of research identifies family solidarity—particularly with the family of origin and heterosexual partners—as the primary source of support and care. Yet gender and sexual minorities tend to receive much less assistance and suffer much more strain from their natal families (Needham and

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[55] Part of this research on which this chapter is based has been published in a special issue of *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Güler, Ezgi. 2020. "A divided sisterhood: Support networks of transgender sex workers in urban Turkey". 689(1): 149-167.

Austin 2010), with transgender youth facing high-risk of family rejection (McGuire, Kuvalanka, Catalpa, and Toomey 2016). As seen in the first paragraph, most of my research participants do not have access to stable family support.

Bayat (2000:534) points to the increasing numbers of socially excluded and informally working populations not covered by state provisions in urban areas of the Global South, including trans sex workers in Turkey. The lack of formal recognition of their work deprives them of economic and social security and a safe working environment (see Chapter 2). They are also subject to criminal and administrative sanctions for engaging in unregistered sex work. Despite experiencing intersecting vulnerabilities, they also have limited access to formal support structures. On the contrary, institutions are places where trans sex workers find themselves vulnerable to harassment and exclusion. In the face of limited access to family support and formal protection mechanisms, how does the trans community address the issues of safety, security, and the means of survival?

There is anthropological and historical evidence that fictive families and friendships play a key role in providing support, care, and other resources among gender and sexual minorities in the place of their natal or legal families (see D'Emilio 1983; Muraco 2006; Weston 1991). Other marginalized groups, defined by age (Allen, Blieszner, and Roberto 2011; Johnson 1999), race (Chatters, Robert, and Jayakody 1994; Stack 1974), or country of origin (Ebaugh and Curry 2000) commonly construct their own fictive kinship networks as well.

Transgender sex workers in different cultural contexts create communal living spaces, which help them to address everyday violence (see Kulick 1998; Reddy 2005). Previous research notes that the proximity created by sharing a neighborhood or participating together in routine organizations enables continual interactions and joint activities among people, thereby producing opportunities to establish contacts and to maintain existing relationships (Small 2009). Transgender sex workers in contemporary Turkey generally congregate in urban areas where they have established communal living and working spaces (see Chapter 1), like my fieldwork neighborhood. Alongside violence and exclusion the impact of marginality on the lives of my interlocutors involves an opportunity to create common spaces and collectivities. Given the limited involvement of natal and legal families and state protection in the lives of sex workers in Turkey, I examine the role of community networks in providing practical, financial, and emotional support. In particular, I focus on friendships, the fictive family, and community relations that have flourished in their neighborhood.

I use the term 'social network' to refer to the "web of family, friends, neighbors, and so on, who can provide material, financial, informational, and emotional assistance on a regular

basis" (Menjívar 2000:2). Existing research has drawn conflicting conclusions on the extent to which social ties constitute a sustainable source of assistance for marginalized urban communities. Ethnographies carried out with such groups generally stress the vital role of mutual care and reciprocal exchanges in coping with hardships (see Adler de Lomnitz 1977; Bourgois 1998; Edin and Lein 1997; Hoodfar 1997; Jones 2004; Stack 1974). More recently, however, a number of scholars have pointed out that people living in conditions of poverty, insecurity, and precariousness may have a limited access to a reliable social network (see Edin and Kefalas 2005: 34; González de la Rocha 2007; Lubbers et al. 2020; Menjívar 2000). Even the adequacy and stability of family solidarity has been called into question by scholars of social support (see Lubbers et al. 2020). These accounts challenge earlier work that portrays the solidarity of marginalized populations in an idealized way and that interpreted the personal networks in these environments as durable and consistent support structures. They have, furthermore, provided insights into how the provision of social support may be affected by the structural conditions in which people live. Consequently, this chapter examines the extent to which the social networks of the trans community serve as practical, financial, and emotional assistance, and the impact of structural conditions on the mobilization of support in this context. Below, I review studies that have addressed these topics in different sex work environments.

Support Networks in Sex Working Communities

The literature on the informal networks of street-based sex workers—among the marginalized urban communities—in different cultural contexts, reflects the debate discussed above. Research shows that sex workers rely on each other for many issues ranging from the exchange of interpersonal resources to community mobilization—which I define as community-level activities designed to tackle a common challenge. In some contexts sex working communities come together to build economic independence, to address stigma, to enhance physical safety (see Ghose et al. 2008), and to drive legal and policy change (see Blankenship et al. 2006). In contrast, conflictual relationships and a lack of solidarity were widespread among street-based sex workers in other contexts (see Campbell 2000; Hofmann 2010; Kulick 2018). Different research findings on sex workers' support networks may mirror a diverse set of experiences of these populations in different settings. Yet, at the same time, past research can provide insights into the circumstances that drive divergent patterns of support mobilization in sex worker communities.

Some social and relational elements encourage sex workers to mobilize support in their communities in order to address their common problems. For example, Zheng (2008) notes

that in China the support networks of bar hostesses are enabled by blood relationships, a common background, place of origin, and mutual benefits. Hoang (2015:106-107) observes that in Vietnam "mommies" support bar hostesses in responding to violent clients, and the familial relationships among co-workers entail sharing clothing, tips, advice, and responsibilities. Perkins (1996) reports that in Australia the sense of common suffering occasionally brings "male-to-female transsexual" sex workers together as a community. Thus, community-based factors, such as a shared identity, social relations, and the experience of common difficulties foster supportive practices among sex workers.

On the other hand, structural constraints faced by sex workers pose a challenge to their collective efforts and create conflicts in their relationships. For instance, Perkins (1996) notes that negotiating survival in a hostile and oppressive environment undermines the support, cooperation, and a sense of community among "transsexual" sex workers and Kulick (2018) argues that stigma, legal status, and financial hardship reinforce distrust, betrayal, and violence among Brazilian migrant *travestis* working in Italy. Zheng (2008) has observed that the criminalization of sex work creates barriers for bar hostesses when organizing collective action to defend their rights.

Like other groups involved in street selling in the same locality street-based sex workers face another set of challenges. In some contexts, street-walking means competition for income, clients, and locations (see Busza and Schunter 2001; Campbell 2000; Campbell and Mzaidume 2001; Dalla 2002; Hubbard and Sanders 2003; Shannon et al. 2008; Shaver 2005). This may, in turn, give rise to tensions, weaken solidarity (Hofmann 2010), and make support networks unstable (Zheng 2008). In particular, Kulick (2018) argues that an exploitative context and excessively difficult working circumstances of Brazilian *travestis* after they migrated to Italy have created competitive relationships, leaving little room for solidarity. To sum up, this body of research suggests that violent circumstances and competitive work may complicate sex workers' support networks. In what follows, I review the broader literature on support mobilization at the urban margins.

Social Networks and Support Mobilization at the Urban Margins

Classical studies of social support argue that individuals living in disadvantaged neighborhoods rely on their personal networks of assistance in times of hardship (see Adler de Lomnitz 1977; Bourgois 1998; Domínguez and Watkins 2003; Edin and Lein 1997; Dordick 1997; Stack 1974). More specifically, these studies refer to local, extensive, and dense networks of natal and legal kin, fictive kin, and friends established on the basis of trust and

reciprocity. With thick descriptions of neighborhood life and local networks, this research presents a fruitful critique of the scholarship that makes a direct association between marginalized or disadvantaged communities and disorganization based on Lewis's theory of the "culture of poverty" (1966). On the other hand, it has partly led to an understanding that support networks are resilient and cohesive sources of assistance, and that reciprocity is the norm in such communities (see Adler de Lomnitz 1977; Dordick 1997; Stack 1974).

More recently, we have seen a growing body of research which examines how social networks are impacted by the living circumstances. Objecting to the static descriptions of social networks, Menjívar (2000:4) writes, "These networks do not exist in a social vacuum" but are affected by the structural constraints that individuals grapple with. Therefore, personal networks need to be analyzed in relation to the contexts in which they are embedded. To understand how the provision of social support may be affected by people's conditions, Lubbers and her team (2020:66) have investigated the impact of conditions of poverty on the inner workings of social networks, namely the processes which shape and mobilize these networks (see Edin and Kefalas 2005:34; González de la Rocha 2007).

In the first place, social networks facing enduring challenges may have limited social capital to exchange (Belle 1983:101). Moreover, the excessive expectations of others to buffer the effects of serious hardship may exhaust relationships and deplete the social capital that family and friends can or are willing to offer (Lubbers et al. 2020). This can be explained through the following mechanisms. Personal networks are generally governed by specific norms. Especially among people who rely on each other for daily survival, the expectation of reciprocity plays a particularly crucial role in sustaining the exchange of resources and assistance (see Dominguez and Watkins 2003; Nelson 2000; Raudenbush 2016). However, those with unstable life circumstances may repeatedly fail to return the favors they receive from their friends, family members, and acquaintances (Newman 1988:3; Offer 2012). In such situations, unmet reciprocity can produce friction and conflict in relationships, and breaches of trust may lead to their exclusion from support networks (Belle 1983; Menjívar 2000:35; Roschelle 1997). Feelings of shame and the fear of disappointing the close others also inhibit people from seeking support, especially from their better-off counterparts (Walker 2014). All these reasons limit engagement in informal exchanges in situations of need.

The relationships within communities where people are involved in street selling in the same area are characterized by an additional layer of dynamics. Given the absence of social protection informality leaves street traders with little security and high instability, creating the need to rely on others in times of crisis. People working in underground markets for a livelihood

also depend on each other to address a variety of issues concerning safety and trade, since formal channels are not generally accessible. At the same time, competition for business and space may lead to rivalries and disputes among underground traders (see Chapter 3; Venkatesh 2006:354). In some urban contexts, competition has also been noted to prevent the effective mobilization of street vendors (see Sanyal 1991:46). Finally, earlier ethnographic studies with sex workers suggest that at the intersection of neighborhoods with underground markets, people may need to collaborate for safety, security, and trade. On the other hand, social networks between street traders may be strained due to the presence of competition-related dynamics.

Recognizing both the enabling and limiting capacities of marginality, this research views urban margins as ambiguous spaces (see Oesch 2017; Woroniecka-Krzyzanowska 2019). Accordingly, marginality, which entails violence, exclusion, and discrimination for the trans community, also brings them together in shared spaces and enables the construction of relationships and social networks. Those constitute the basis for exchanging support. Rooted in this approach, I examine the construction of social networks and the mobilization of support within the trans community. Moreover, I scrutinize the roles of shared spaces in community-building and the roles of collectivities in forming the basis of supportive patterns. To examine the inner dynamics of social ties, it goes beyond the static depictions of social networks (see Lubbers et al. 2020; Menjívar 2000). By doing so, I explore the processes by which structural constraints impede support mobilization.

The methodological approach adopted here follows an ethnographic tradition that examines the connection between large politico-economic trends and the detailed everyday experiences of people based on grounded theory (see Herbert 2000). Moreover, based on an understanding of everyday life, the chapter draws conclusions about a meso-level construct, namely support networks. In particular, while focusing on how structural conditions impact on support mobilization, it does not disregard the agency of my research participants. Instead, it recognizes the severe constraints undermining community solidarity and collective struggles in this context, but without reducing people's experiences to merely structural factors. The accounts and narratives as well as the efforts of my interlocutors to overcome structural conditions have a central focus throughout this chapter, starting with an empirical analysis of community mobilization.

Community Mobilization

Considerable efforts are made at the community level to tackle urgent common challenges, starting with physical violence. Workers rely heavily on their community to remain safe; not only close friends and sisters, but also more distant associates 'watch out' for each other. The practices implemented are: staying in close contact; standing in the streets in groups; warning others about unsafe customers; coaching inexperienced peers; protesting at the police station in order to rescue a friend; and fighting back during violent events. One pressing concern shared by many workers is safety, which is treated as a collective responsibility. Research from different social contexts produces a similar description of how sex workers collaborate to address safety issues (see Hoang 2015; Sanders and Campbell 2007). Mine told me of a recent incident in which her neighbor was attacked by a client while she was working in her apartment: "Everyone went to help. I ran too when I heard the noise." Not only her close friends and co-workers, but also many of her peers who worked on the same or neighboring streets mobilized during this incident. Mine added, "When it comes to safety, we always help one another." This example shows that community-wide mobilization takes place almost immediately following violent assaults.

Among the main threats that bring the community together are violent encounters with clients or men who present themselves as clients. Chapter 2 described the remote and hazardous locations where many trans women commute to sell sex. Tuna explained why she preferred not to work in these areas:

> I work in here [the neighborhood]. I have only been out [on the motorway] for two weeks. Compared to this place, it's really dangerous out there. It's dangerous here, too, but it's even worse there. People go there to make more money. When something happens here, we can at least band together and act as one. [Out there] it's very difficult to gather together.

Like Tuna, my interviewees recognized that large-scale engagement was effective in enhancing their safety in the neighborhood. By contrast, sex workers who operate in remote areas do not have access to peer protection. Besides, the community also supports its members in less-risky ways against customer violence, for example, by sharing the identity of unsafe men who are, or who pose as, clients. They, more generally, notify each other of potential hazards, discuss strategies, and exchange tips and tactics to enhance their safety.

Law enforcement also poses barriers to work and creates vulnerabilities in the lives of my research participants. On a winter night in 2017, I was in a beauty salon in the neighborhood with several *lubunyas* who were waiting to have their hair and makeup done. All of a sudden,

Feray *Anne* pushed the door open and stormed into the salon with two younger women. This was the mother's attempt to protect her *girls* from the police. This mother, who had her working flat two blocks away from there, announced to the others that the police—whom they call *babies*—had arrived. Every night the vice squad and uniformed police officers entered the neighborhood to carry out ID checks and prevent sex workers from just soliciting on the street (see Chapter 2). The restrictions imposed varied according to the police officer in charge. Therefore, sex workers normally inform each other about the team on duty each evening, so that everyone could manage their work accordingly.

These policing practices significantly reduce the number of clients and the income of sex workers, while extending the hours of work and forcing many women to solicit in less safe areas of the city. In some of these locations, workers are also obliged to pay daily "protection money" to organized crime groups. In these ways, the deterrent and punitive measures of the authorities aggravate the living and working conditions of sex workers. To mitigate these risks, workers try to remain vigilant, alert one another, and adjust their working hours and patterns according to the practices of the police.

Among my interlocutors community mobilization is motivated by a sense of solidarity rooted in a common identity and shared experiences. A common identity has been constructed based on non-conforming gender identification or trans status and belonging to the *lubunya* subculture. For example, subcultural practices include speaking *Lubunca* (see Chapter 1). This shared and exclusive slang allows them to communicate covertly when they do not want the police or customers to fully understand. It facilitates collaboration and fosters the cohesion of their shared identity.

The most common narratives of my interlocutors to describe their collective efforts for protection were about the care they felt for their trans friends (*kendi arkadaşlarım*) and friends of the same gender (*kendi cinsim*) and friends sharing a common fate (*kader arkadaşlarım*). We can conceive this in Nazlı's words: "We have these troubles every day. We protect one another because we share a common fate. I, for one, always stand by the others." In the same way Simge said: *We rush to help whenever something happens to somebody. In the end, we all share the same fate*. Resting on a collective identity and the shared experiences of suffering attached to this identity, these sentiments encompass trans sex workers across different social classes and locations. A sense of togetherness among trans women emerges through a shared history of violence and displacement, and the resistance put up by *lubunyas* to violence (see Chapter 1). In much the same way social movement scholars hold that frequent encounters with

injustice reinforce the collective identity and motivate people to mobilize (see Gamson 1992).[56] This process describes social and cultural identities emerging as political identities (see Chapter 5).

In addition to a shared overarching *lubunya* identity, many of the women who live or work together in this neighborhood are linked to each other through dense social networks. By facilitating communication and coordination among individuals, these close-knit networks enable them to mobilize more effectively. This argument has often been reiterated by social movement scholars (see Tilly 1978). Furthermore, the personal relationships that flourish in communal living and working spaces generate reciprocal care and a commitment among community members for protection.

Rana *Anne* viewed the set of relationships in the community as a family attachment:

> When there is an outside threat, we unite. Things have always been that way. We've formed a family for ourselves, apart from our own mothers, fathers, and siblings. If I get hurt, they'll be saddened. If they get hurt, I'll be saddened. We help each other out the way family does.

Alongside blood and legal families the anthropological literature has written about alternative conceptions of family. These conceptions capture the relations among people who are not related by blood, marriage, and adoption, but who designate one another as being "like family" or as "being family." Most studies describing intimate and supportive relationships between LGBTQ+ populations conceptualize these relations as 'chosen' (see Weston 1991), 'intentional' (see Muraco 2006), or 'voluntary' (see Braithwaite et al. 2010) families. Weston notes that gay and lesbian families are formed based on "choice and creativity" as opposed to "blood and biology". While the term 'chosen' defines members of alternative families as objects of selection, Braithwaite uses the term 'voluntary kin', stressing a mutuality of selection between people (p. 390). Irrespective of the terminology used, both early and recent scholarship emphasizes the voluntarism of the alternative kinships created by LGBTQ+ populations.

In contrast, Rana's understanding of the trans family, based on a neighborhood-bound community, is far-reaching. And it is this comprehensiveness that makes the idea of the trans family distinct from the other, more nuclear-like, constructions of voluntary queer families. Instead, 'family of convenience' describes the notion of family referred to by my interlocutors more precisely. Margaret Nelson (2013) reasons that in situations of marginality, individuals, separated from their blood and legal kin, may rely on "families of convenience" for care,

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[56] The section shows that studies of social movement and community mobilization share considerable empirical insights. These research areas could benefit greatly from more explicit cross-disciplinary study.

intimacy, protection, and material assistance. Homeless youth (McCarthy et al. 2002), the isolated elderly (Hochschild 1973), Afro-American family members of homicide victims (Sharpe 2008), female street hustlers (Miller 1986), and undocumented immigrants are among the groups who commonly establish families of convenience. Nelson (2013) argues that marginality gives rise to a need to form other kinds of kin relations. Presumably, the large trans family depicted here implies less intimacy between family members than smaller chosen families reported in other contexts.[57]

Rana *Anne* made an analogy between the nature of the relationships in this large trans family and the conventional understanding of sibling dynamics in a blood family:

> We might have quarrels. Well, that'll be for a day. The next day, if anything happens, it is again her who will give a hand [...] Look, [the arguments] are forgotten instantly! Because there is no other [source of] solidarity, no place else to go. Only on our own. We can exercise solidarity here by ourselves. We may shout at one another. We may fight just like siblings in a family, but the next day, nothing happens; it is forgotten. You see, we have the same thing.

Here, Rana makes the point that, as in a natal family, fights and conflicts are common within the community. In this sense, the trans family deviates from some notions of the queer family characterized by choice and harmonious togetherness. At the same time, there is a profound commitment to protect fellow community members. She also emphasizes that not having other reliable and stable sources of support—either institutional or familial—makes this family solidarity indispensable. Although they report serious assaults to the police, there is a general reluctance to involve the police in everyday violence in the neighborhood. In addition, workers spend a great deal of time with shopkeepers, neighbors, and regular clients on the streets or in the local shops. Yet, these actors are usually absent in the streets when trans women are more likely to be targeted with violence. Consequently, in situations of violence, trans women rely largely on their own community, which is continually present in their neighborhood, and experienced in and capable of rapidly self-organizing. This is, in fact, one of the key benefits of communal living and working arrangements. Hence, Rana's reflections convey that in spite of the interpersonal conflicts in the community, the common need for safety brings them together (see Chapter 3). Hence, the understanding of trans family is closely linked to the need for a community, in the face of the relentless violence and limited access to other support structures.

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[57] Fictive kin among members of the LGBTQ+ community may also emerge for reasons other than marginality or the lack of family support, for instance, as a political act or as a form of resistance (see Weeks et al. 2001).

Derya highlights the need for collective engagement against external threats, "Unless we unite, we'll all be wiped out in the end." Support networks formed solely by those with whom they enjoy intimate ties would be too small and spatially concentrated to be effective against violence. Therefore, expanding support networks to their associates working in other houses and streets enhances the capacity of their joint efforts. In short, there is a critical need for large-scale collective action in order to stay safe.

Another subject that brings trans women together is death and funerals. On November 2017, I heard that Sevda's mother, Yasemin *Anne*, had suffered a stroke and could no longer walk or talk, making her dependent on other people for her basic needs. Sevda took care of her mother during that period, but not long afterwards, Yasemin *Anne's* condition worsened. Sevda informed the social services that she was unable to look after such a severely ill person and sought help from them. Despite her calls, no assistance arrived. Three months later, Yasemin *Anne* died. As one of the oldest members of the community, she was known and respected by many, and a number of them had worked in her house at some point in their lives. Therefore, most of the community members chipped in to organize a funeral; others met the expenses for the rituals, such as serving food to the public.[58] Although it was primarily Sevda who dealt with the financial and administrative arrangements for the funeral, she would be unable to meet all the expenses herself. A distant neighbor of Sevda, Beren, paid for Sevda's household bills. Some shop owners, who had spent considerable time with and who speak highly of Yasemin *Anne,* made contributions to express appreciation for her companionship. The community also similarly organized funerals for several other trans women who had been murdered or who had died from natural causes.

According to Turkish regulations, mainly blood families and legal spouses have access to the body of the deceased and the right to organize a funeral and burial (Zengin 2019:93). If no one claims the body, they are buried[59] by the state in the "cemetery for the poor and *kimsesiz*".[60] The dead bodies of many unidentified and unclaimed people, such as the homeless, victims of honor crimes, and unaccompanied refugees, are buried in these cemeteries (Zengin 2019:93). Some trans sex workers whose dead bodies are not claimed by their legal families also belong to those groups. Rather poignantly Meltem said: *If no one claims [your deceased*

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[58] As a local tradition, people provide a large amount of food or Turkish sweets to the public/those at the funeral to receive a blessing for the deceased.

[59] Mezarlık Yerlerinin İnşaası ile Cenaze Nakil ve Defin İşlemleri Hakkında Yönetmelik. Retrieved February 8, 2021. (https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/mevzuat?MevzuatNo=13730&MevzuatTur=7&MevzuatTertip=5)

[60] *Kimsesiz* refers to the people who do not have anybody.

body], they bury you at kimsesizler mezarlığı (the cemetery for the anonymous), as if you were an animal. So many trans people have been buried like that, like an animal. You wouldn't even know it's a grave.
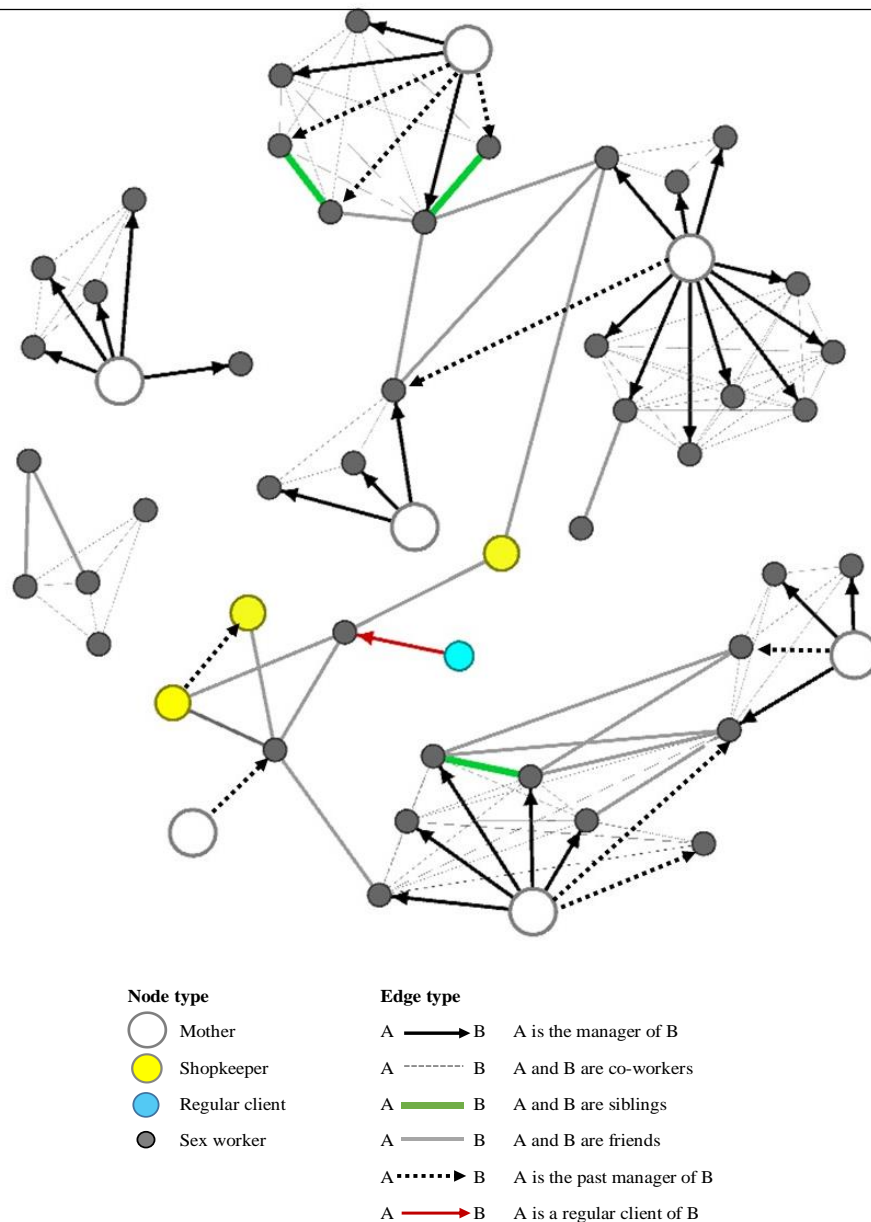
The trans family tries to adopt the body of their departed friends and organizes funerals. The care they feel towards fellow community members brings them together during the rituals of death and the practices of mourning. Moreover, the shared concerns that many of my interlocutors hold about their own death, i.e., "whether their natal family is going to abandon their body" and "who is going to claim their body and hold a funeral" generate a strong sense of solidarity following the loss of a *lubunya*. This provokes a community-wide mobilization of financial, material, and practical support among the extended trans family. The support, care, and cooperation that emerges through these practices fulfill what is usually provided by the legal family (see Zengin 2019:93). On the other hand, grieving for their loss through the rituals and funerals in this context is also a political matter. Butler (2009) argues that grievability is a presupposition for the life that matters. For the trans community, it is important to organize a proper and full-fledged funeral for the deceased and to practice all the rituals, as Sevda said for the funeral of Yasemin *Anne*: *It was just as she deserved*. They grieve for their friends, whose lives are not considered worthy, hence not grievable.

In sum, what brings the community together and mobilizes resources and energies to a large extent are violent events and moments of grief. The stories and testimonies cited here demonstrate that the severity of the violence experienced and the absence of other support structures makes community mobilization a necessity. Furthermore, a shared identity, common challenges, and a dense social network create the commitments that make large-scale community mobilization possible.

Personal Support Networks

Most of my interlocutors have limited access to formal protection mechanisms and natal family support. Some are members of or have links with local political or non-governmental organizations. These organizations, for example, assist sex workers with their legal procedures and organize public seminars in the city to raise awareness against the discrimination of the LGBTI+ population. While operating vigorously in a challenging political environment, their reach and capacity to help resolve other issues are usually limited. Therefore, workers typically turn to their community ties for physical, material, financial and emotional support.

Figure 4.1: Support Networks in the Neighborhood

Node type		Edge type		
○	Mother	A ——→ B	A is the manager of B	
● (yellow)	Shopkeeper	A ------ B	A and B are co-workers	
● (blue)	Regular client	A ━━ B (green)	A and B are siblings	
● (dark)	Sex worker	A —— B	A and B are friends	
		A •••••► B	A is the past manager of B	
		A ——→ B (red)	A is a regular client of B	

Note: Social network data was collected using participant observation and semi-structured interviews. The presented graph, constructed using Gephi 0.9.2 software, approximates the support networks within the neighborhood to the best knowledge of the author. Each node represents a network member. The color, size, and shape of the nodes and edges represent qualitative differences among actors and relationships (not quantitative comparisons).

There are differences in who is most likely to help and which circumstances tend to elicit supportive behavior. While most workers try to help in cases of severe violence, it is those operating in the same house or street who give the greatest assistance. Above all, the blood sisters in the community are extremely sensitive to the safety of one another. Aslı described, "My sister and I guard each other like angels. […] I can't let any harm come to her."

During my fieldwork, I met three pairs of biological siblings, all of whom earn their living by streetwalking in this neighborhood (see Figure 4.1). These siblings live and work in the same houses, look after one another, and offer all kinds of support. Although many workers obtain no assistance from their natal families, these sisters seem deeply committed to one another, more than anyone else in the community.

At times, depending on the urgency of an adverse situation, close friends also support each other financially, for instance, when someone needs to repay a debt to a loan shark or risks being imprisoned for unpaid fines, or when their possessions, such as a house, are seized by the authorities. For example, getting into trouble for her unpaid fine for compulsory military service, a well-known worker in the community, Handan, was taken into custody. She could be released if she paid the fine, which was nearly double her monthly rent, but she had no funds to pay it. She sought assistance from her relatively well-to-do friends who worked next-door together with a distinctly protective and disciplined mother. Two days later, these friends, one of whom was advancing towards "motherhood," paid the fine for Handan's release. While I was there, Handan was working to return small sums of money to her friends.

On another occasion, Pınar, who I consider one of the toughest women in the community, told me about an accident in which she had fallen off a balcony. While she was fortunate enough to escape without serious injuries, she damaged her feet and was unable to work for some time. During her recovery, her friends, with whom she shared a home, provided for her and took care of her. She expressed her gratitude for them as she shared the story with me. In a similar vein, workers who cannot afford to rent a flat are hosted by their peers in the working apartments. Thus, people struggling with hardships seek help from those with whom they are closely connected, namely siblings, intimate friends, and co-workers. On the other hand, financial support tends to be highly selective and is only mobilized to meet the most pressing needs of close friends.

The accounts of my interlocutors also refer to the reciprocal nature of support exchanges in the community. Kamelya, an experienced worker, explained that she would definitely assist her best friends if they were in financial trouble, adding: *They'd do the same for me*. Aslı mentioned that financial cooperation took place among her group of friends and her biological sister who lived in the same home, but not with "outsiders." Indeed, some women who have shared a house for many years have cultivated close and trusting relationships. They pool resources in times of dire need, thereby participating in a "gift-giving economy" (see Bourdieu 1996; Mauss 1954; Stack 1974). In these tight circles, when it comes to financial exchange, norms of reciprocity must be respected.

Those who have lived and worked together for an extended period tend to have close relationships. Working flats play a crucial role in the construction of these friendships. For example, referring to her best friends, Aslı said, "We are all the *girls* of the same house. We've shared a home; we've shared everything. We're like sisters. They know every little bit of me, and I know every little bit of them." These caring relationships between women who are committed to offer mutual support and assistance to each other, carry an intimate sense of sisterhood. The notion of sisterhood defines the emotionally intimate relationships built on mutual care, trust, and sharing between close friends. It signifies a distinct type of relationship which differs from the relations in the broader trans family, discussed above. On the other hand, communal living does not automatically create emotional closeness. Several of my interlocutors said that the prevalence of gossip in this close-knit community prevented them from confiding their personal affairs even to those with whom they had lasting friendships or worked in the same house for many years. Nazlı feared that, during fights, her friends could use her private information against her. Since one of her friends let her down by telling others about her personal life, Melda has not made herself open and vulnerable to any of her peers.

Work apartments also accommodate mother-daughter relationships, which are critical to the support networks within the community (see Chapter 3). One of the oldest mothers, Rana *Anne*, clarified the assistance that a mother generally offers to a newcomer:

> [The person] they call *Anne* is a boss. What's a boss? She isn't a bad person. She rents a flat and opens her doors to *lubunyas* who fled their villages and helps them acquire a livelihood. She guides them. That isn't a bad thing. . . Among many other things, they remove their body hair and get breast implants. Who does all this? A boss makes it possible. That's why they respect her. Because the boss transforms them.

Rana's account explains that managers help their *girls* to acquire the skills and assets needed to practice the profession. Here, the term, "transform" deserves to be unpacked; in my interpretation, it refers not only to altering one's body, but also to finding social connections and learning a profession, hence, helping a person to refashion herself so that she becomes embedded in the community. Mothers are primarily motivated to protect their business as the managers of their working flats, and this type of support is considered part of the management of sex labor. On the other hand, mother-daughter relationships vary considerably in this social space. For instance, Sevda lived and worked in the same house with her 'mother' for many years. Having had a warm and trusting relationship with her, she lost her greatest support when her mother died. Others who frequently change houses and work with different mothers do not

necessarily form close bonds with them. Some, especially younger, workers do not have mothers as they are reluctant to work with managers (see Figure 4.1). We also note that hierarchical community relationships foster social solidarity in the community (see Chapter 3). In particular, experienced mothers, but also other more senior workers, transmit their knowledge, advice, and guidance to younger women on a variety of topics. Thus, although they do not necessarily translate into intimacy, mother-daughter ties are an integral component of support networks of many of my interlocutors.

All steady members of the community are acquainted with and interact with one another in everyday life. I witnessed emotional support being offered to friends, friends of friends, and acquaintances, who have become a listening ear and expressed empathy, warmth, and care for each other. While preparing for their evening's work in beauty salons, many of them share food, cigarettes, pantyhose, shoes, make-up, and tips on appearance. Moreover, both close friends and distant acquaintances share useful information on a range of issues. In other words, the neighborhood is the home of these people, who care for and protect each other, and their relationships offer *some* of the resources conventionally provided by blood families, as highlighted by Zengin (2014) in her ethnographic research with the trans community in Istanbul.

Apart from the working houses and the streets of the neighborhood, local businesses extend the boundaries of social interactions and social relationships. Among them are beauty salons, cafes, restaurants, tea gardens, and a nightclub that create opportunities for interaction and socializing on a routine basis (see Small 2009). While previous research focuses mostly on workplaces, community centers, service providers, and places of worship, spontaneous encounters also take place in local businesses, for example, neighborhood bars (see Anderson 1978), coffee/tea shops (Oldenburg 1989), and hairdressing salons (see Furman 1997). These are the most visited interaction spaces in the neighborhood, which make the encounters of loosely connected people more probable and reinforce the existing links between acquaintances and neighbors. Located in the trans neighborhood, some of these local businesses have a mainly trans clientele. As well as offering services, they provide a relatively safe, discreet, and comfortable environment for sex workers who are normally excluded from or harassed by other social, cultural and commercial establishments. While spending lengthy periods of time in these spaces, trans residents meet, share news and advice, have conversations, and laugh with their associates. These establishments, which foster support exchanges among friends and acquaintances, are where I spent most of my fieldwork time. Local businesses also facilitate making agreements between mothers and workers.

While my interlocutors are heavily reliant on each other for a range of matters (see Chapter 1), the community that they form is not socially isolated. For instance, in local businesses, trans residents also meet the people who work in these establishments, some of their cis neighbors, regulars, and other people who habitually spend time in the neighborhood. Some these contacts may lend a helping hand in times of need. For instance, during a period of crisis several sex workers were served at the beauty salon in preparation for their night's work and the cost was signed up. However, this is not a consistent support. Their support networks also extend beyond this neighborhood. As seen in the opening paragraph, several of my interlocutors are in close contact with their natal families, who act as a critical source of emotional support in their lives. Finally, some workers told me about their close friends living in other large cities who they had met while working together and with whom they maintained contact despite the distance. Once Sevda dropped her phone. It was beyond repair, but soliciting in a remote area of the city meant she could not work without a cell phone. Whilst not having any savings herself, she immediately bought a new phone with the money that her best friend, living in a distant city, transferred to her. In general, most workers had previously lived and worked in other cities and therefore have ties with sex workers in these locations and may maintain close and supportive relationships with some of them.

This section demonstrates that a community and different types of social relationships within this community have been built around the shared spaces, including streets of the neighborhood, working houses, and local businesses. The ties between biological sisters, friends, neighbors, co-workers, mothers, and acquaintances constitute the basis of support networks for my interlocutors. Some women have lived and worked together for years and have built intimate, trusting, and reciprocal relationships that resemble, in their own words, sisterhood. Like blood sisters, these ties are the most durable sources of emotional and material support in the community. Mothers, who are linked to sex workers through working houses, provide guidance and knowledge for younger women within and outside the work context. Finally, all other regular members of the community are familiar with each other and share the neighborhood space. Whether they are neighbors, friends of friends, or acquaintances, they may offer protection, guidance, information, and comfort to one another.

The Limitations of Support Networks

Community solidarity is essential, and the sole source of assistance for some of my interlocutors, yet not all forms of support are uniformly available to everyone. There is a tacit understanding about who can ask for assistance from whom and for what reasons. Although

most workers are acquainted with one another, the community is divided into small groups generally based on work apartments. These groups may differ from one another in terms of income, house management, and labor mobility. As we have seen, people affiliated with different houses also work together, especially when dealing with safety issues. However, the community-wide material mobilization, for instance, to organize funerals, does not usually arise in other situations of need. Money and other material resources only tend to be exchanged within small, intimate social circles. In several houses that have had a stable composition for years, financial exchange only takes place among co-workers. Greater labor mobility between other apartments (see Figure 4.1), has led their workers to establish new connections, restructuring their social networks. In the latter cases, material and financial support is more likely to extend beyond immediate colleagues.

As already noted, while small material exchanges (such as sharing food, cosmetics, and cigarettes) occur commonly between friends and acquaintances, lending larger amounts of money or other valuable resources is infrequent in the community. Studies on support networks report that in situations of need material help is more common—and may even be considered an obligation—among families of origin; even if it is offered by friends, colleagues, neighbors, and acquaintances, it is expected that the favor will be repaid in a comparatively short time (Nelson 2000). On the other hand, material and financial assistance is also made available among the fictive kin (Nelson 2013). Yet, in this context the idea of a large trans family, which entails a duty of protection and a sense of care for one another, does not require the provision of material help.

On the other hand, there is a country-wide trans solidarity network called *Trans Melekler* (Trans Angels)[61] that helps support trans women during crises. To my knowledge, some community members are also a part of this network. In Izmir, this solidarity network organized funerals for some *lubunya*s who were rejected by their legal families. They have opened a guesthouse for trans women in need of housing.[62] However, according to my interlocutors, since there are numerous people with pressing needs, the support ties in the community have become rather strained.

Some workers who are struggling financially hardly receive any aid from their friends, colleagues, or neighbors. There are different reasons for this. First, a sense of distrust impedes

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[61] Since I do not have access to their private social media groups, my knowledge on this issue is limited.
[62] Pembe Hayat. 2015. "İzmir: Defne Hande Öncü Trans Misafirhanesi Dayanışmaya Çağırıyor". (http://www.pembehayat.org/yazarlar/yazidetay/724/izmir-defne-hande-oncu-trans-misafirhanesi-dayanismaya-cagiriyor)

the mobilization of material support. Since some of the *girls* were disappointed when their mothers did not return large sums of money handed over to them for safekeeping, there is a tendency to be wary of these mothers. Several women, such as Melike, indicated that they could give a very small amount of money or other material to their colleagues "as a donation" without demanding repayment. But she also doubted that her peers would pay her back if she loaned them a larger amount. Mine also said she was concerned about being exploited financially.

Distant peers tend to be distrusted more, but even close friends are sometimes treated with a degree of wariness. For example, recall Handan, who avoided going to prison because her friends stepped in and paid her fine. Despite having very close and constant connections with Handan for several years, her friends did not trust her to repay the debt. To make sure that she pays it back, they required her to move into their own working apartment. However, these social mechanisms only seem to function in small, close-knit groups.

Then there is the experience of Meltem, a well-liked woman in the neighborhood, which illustrates a lack of solidarity in a comparable situation. I was told that while Meltem was soliciting clients on the street, she had an argument with the attendants of a parking garage, owned and run by a group known in the neighborhood as a local mafia. As the conflict continued, they resorted to violence and beat Meltem severely. She reported them to the police by making a formal complaint. After being threatened with more violence by this local mafia she decided to alter her statement. As a result, she was charged with making "false declarations," and was fined 20,000 liras, an amount which was more than a year's rent for her. Meltem was already living in dire financial straits at the time, and was unable to pay the fine, so it was converted into a prison sentence. Her friends expressed a variety of reactions. One of them said, *I don't see why she doesn't stand up for her rights. If I were her, I'd alert the Bar Association of the city. A person must first stand up for herself.* Another suggested: *As she dropped her complaint, the car park owner can pay the fine, he has plenty of money.*

Since Meltem was already indebted to several people, her friends were not willing to mobilize financially on her behalf. As her story illustrates, workers choose who to provide with financial assistance very carefully; it is not automatically guaranteed by closeness. Most workers only support their friends who are *borcuna sadık* (loyal to their debt) or *sağlam* (reliable). For instance, Nazlı, one of Meltem's closest friends, said that she did not have much herself, so she took such decisions very carefully, and only on rare occasions. Especially since she had been disappointed by one of her friends who failed to repay a debt, Nazlı has also become far more wary of her close friends. In such situations, those who do not have much to

share have to make a difficult decision between personal interests and social obligations. While they want to help a close friend, they do not want to risk their limited resources, which may not return to them. Therefore, material support is often highly selective.

Melda made a similar reasoning when she confided in me that she usually minded her own business and preferred not to be involved in the personal troubles of the others. In fact, she was also struggling to stay afloat whilst working flat-out to pay off her mortgage. The lack of involvement and the individualistic positions of some precarious workers, like Melda, are motivated by a deep concern for themselves and the potentially drastic consequences of being let down financially by friends.

Despite being her closest friend from the community, she did not help Sevda, who was looking after her ill mother and was unable to stay away from home for long periods. So, Sevda stopped working in distant locations and visiting the houses of her regular clients. Instead, she only sought customers near her apartment. Yet, the routine presence of the police and the decrease in the number of clients in the neighborhood made it difficult for her to earn enough money to get by. As in her case, without a safety net and other means of generating income, a decline in the number of dates could immediately lead to financial distress. Consequently, Sevda's economic situation deteriorated, and during these difficult months she barely obtained the support of her associates, like Melda. On the other hand, Sevda and Melda did other favors for each other. Whenever Melda was away from home to visit her natal family, Sevda stayed in her friend's apartment to look after her pets. Also, since Sevda's unpaid fines made it impossible for her to use a bank account on her name, Melda let her friend use her account, when needed. Nevertheless, they largely refrained from exchanging money.

What makes some of them unreliable or disloyal regarding the debt? The troubles Meltem had while working at the margins of legality were disruptive. Then there are others who have, for example, taken a break from work after suffering physical aggression; had significant amounts of unpaid fines or debts; had to move to another city; or struggled with substance addiction. People whose lives are disrupted by such circumstances are materially unable to repay or reciprocate the financial favors of friends. Failing to fulfill these expectations, in turn, creates disappointment and distrust in their relations with close others. This limits their chances of getting aid from their informal networks in future situations of need, thereby worsening their economic condition. This observation is consistent with earlier research that highlights the particular importance of reciprocity in maintaining supportive exchanges in economically marginalized communities (see Dominguez and Watkins 2003; Nelson 2000; Raudenbush 2016).

Moreover, when she was struggling to make ends meet Sevda did not receive material assistance from her friends who are more financially stable either. One day she told me about her disappointment with her peers working next door, *they know my circumstances. Why don't they offer help?* Earnings in this business vary depending on many factors, such as age, work capacity, and social skills, but also the manager and the location of the working flats. I met a number of women who were well-off—who could save money and purchase hard assets such as property—whereas others had difficulty getting by. The unpaid fines meant that some could not open bank accounts, thereby limiting their means to create financial stability. In short, there are significant economic disparities among workers; vulnerability to financial hardship, therefore, varies from one person to another. Consequently, material struggle, unlike violence, is not generally regarded as a common challenge.

Several women in dire financial stress were held responsible for their own circumstances. Melike, for instance, attributed her friends' misfortunes to individual failings, such as a tendency to squander money. In agreement, Hilal said, "No one would assist those who are young and able to work." Though working intensively does not ensure a steady and adequate income for everyone in such a precarious work arrangement, some of my respondents claimed that those with financial problems should simply work harder. Despite having the capacity to be of assistance, these better-off workers are seldom involved in helping others struggling with poverty.

Similar expressions of individualistic sentiment have been recorded among kin and fictive kin in other contexts (see Desmond 2012). However, for my interlocutors, these sentiments are aggravated due to working as individual sellers in an informal and competitive market. The shared residential space, the neighborhood, also serves as a work space, which is the market on which they depend for their survival (see Chapter 3). Neighbors and friends are also fellow workers. As with street-based sex trade in other contexts, the way in which the business is organized induces competition in this concentrated urban space, where everyone must find their own customers. Although sex workers in this community still largely depend on and assist each other also with regard to business, increasing competition diminishes the income they gain as individual traders. Bähre (2007) has noted that for those who are precariously situated in the market economy the struggle for survival creates conflicts between personal interests and social obligations. Among those who are linked to one another through their involvement in an informal trade, as in this community, competition increases the tension between personal interests and social considerations.

My conclusions support Menjívar's (2000:5) broad argument that the structural constraints, which condition the lives of people living under marginality, have a profound effect on their social networks. The legally ambiguous status of unregistered sex work and the frequent presence of police patrols in the neighborhood restrict their capacity to generate a sufficient and stable income; their lives and livelihoods are disrupted by criminal and administrative sanctions; transphobia limits their access to institutional and natal family support and restricts employment options. The unstable life circumstances resulting from these processes also hinder the mobilization of support in this community, especially with respect to the exchange of money and other material resources. Some workers may lack the means to return the favors of friends, which creates distrust and disappointment even in close relationships. This in turn limits their future participation in informal exchanges and access to resources in their close social networks. On the other hand, those already living in strained conditions may refuse to assist their friends, as the consequences of not being repaid may simply be too high. This observation is consistent with past research that highlights the vital role of reciprocity in maintaining the support exchanges in communities where people depend on one another for their daily survival (see Menjívar 2000; Nelson 2000).

On the other hand, there are large economic disparities between workers, and most financial adversities are not considered as shared problems that the community feels it must address together. Better-off colleagues use individualistic arguments to justify their refusal to provide financial support. These sentiments are deepened, especially due to the competition created by operating in the street-based sex market. While it is important to note that there is a large trans solidarity network that helps trans women in times of crisis, it does not have the capacity to support everyone in need. Consequently, the exchange of money and other material resources within the community is irregular and highly selective.

Discussion

Trans sex workers in Turkey have limited access to state provisions and natal family support. In urban spaces, where they typically form communities, the extent to which their community ties serve as a reliable source of support and protection was the central question of this chapter. I have particularly examined how social ties in the trans community have been constructed and when they provide or fail to provide practical, financial, and emotional support. To do so, I have built on the perspective that recognizes both constraining and enabling capacities of urban margins (Oesch 2017; Woroniecka-Krzyzanowska 2019). Accordingly, marginality, while provoking different forms of violence and exclusion, has also enabled the

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construction of a communal living and working space, and relationships and support networks formed in this space. In particular, the shared spaces, such as the neighborhood streets, small businesses, and working apartments, play key functions in community-building. Emerging around these spaces, a community and the relationships between colleagues, neighbors, friends, and sisters form the bases of support exchanges. Given the limited access to other support structures, my interlocutors rely on their community ties for a range of resources and assistance. In particular, blood sisters are particularly committed to lending all kinds of support to each other. Some of the women who have shared a living and working space for years have also established sister-like relationships. These intimate friends make considerable efforts to assist each other in times of need.

Shared threats and concerns in the neighborhood, such as violence and death, bring the wider community together, in spite of competition and disputes they may have in other areas. Here, integrating the insights of social movement studies helps us comprehend the solidarities established at the neighborhood level. I argue that this commitment to protect one another is based on both a necessity to collectively address common pressing issues, and a sense of togetherness arising from a collective identity, a shared fate, and the bonds among my interlocutors. In other words, the community-level engagements to address common challenges are seen as a responsibility of the trans family to one another. The notion of extended trans family resembles a family of convenience (see Nelson 2013), deviating from nuclear-like formulations of queer families created based on choice (see Braithwaite et al. 2010; Weston 1991). Similar fictive family constructions exist, for example, among the elderly (see Hochschild 1973) and homeless (see Miller 1986). The lack of other support mechanisms makes this alignment a necessity. At the same time, these family ties are not without tensions (see Chapter 3). Yet, quarrels and rivalries, common among community members, are seen by some of my interlocutors as inevitable dynamics in family relationships. These observations help us understand the alignments and commitments in other gender non-conforming or same-sex desiring communities who may also be cut off from traditional support channels.

On the other hand, lives rendered precarious and unstable under the conditions of legal obstacles, societal discrimination, and economic marginalization makes it difficult for some workers to form reciprocal exchanges. This link is largely mediated by a sense of distrust towards fellow community members. But also, given the large economic inequalities, financial struggles are viewed not necessarily as shared but as individuals' own problems. The individualistic sentiments are exacerbated particularly by the embeddedness of the community in a competitive market. In fact, individualistic sentiments and a sense of distrust concern and

deter mainly financial cooperation. Support, protection, and guidance are still prevalent in other areas of life, especially to address common problems.

Earlier research tends to portray neighborhood ties in minority or disadvantaged communities as stable and durable support structures (see Adler de Lomnitz 1977; Stack 1974). More recent research has cast doubt on the validity of this thesis. Some argue that it is an outdated argument (see Hogan, Eggebeen, and Clogg 1993:1454), and others express skepticism about the "idealization" of ties within a disadvantaged context (see Bähre 2007). The same critique can be made against some accounts of queer families (see Weston 1991). To reiterate Menjívar's (2000) claim, "These networks do not exist in a social vacuum"; what we see in my research context is that social ties are also affected by the structural conditions in which people live. While their community ties serving simultaneously as market ties may aggravate the tensions, a growing body of research from other cultural settings shows that negotiating survival under conditions of marginality also makes material solidarity precarious (see Desmond 2012; Lubbers et al. 2020). Thus, the very conditions around which individuals come together also pose challenges to collective efforts and create interpersonal conflicts. Whilst critically important, solidarities emerging at the urban margins may be fragile and precarious.

Chapter 5: An Unlikely Resistance

On June 2, 1975, more than one hundred sex workers occupied the Church of St. Nizier in Lyon, France, to protest against police harassment, fines, arrests, and social stigma.[63] They blocked entry to St. Nizier, "allowing only friends and journalists inside". On the following days, five other churches across France—Paris, Marseille, Grenoble, Saint-Étienne, and Montpellier—were also occupied by sex workers. The occupations provoked a nationwide strike with the participation of 20,000–30,000 sex workers across the country (Aroney 2020). Although the events ended eight days later with sex workers' forced removal by riot police, there were some gains. Following the occupation, sex workers were no longer fined and threatened with imprisonment for soliciting. The protestors knew that organizing this action at a major church would get the attention of the press. One of the movement's leaders said, "We wanted to strike a decisive blow [so] that the whole world would listen to us" (Barbara and de Coninck 1977:59, cited in Aroney 2020:74). Indeed, the occupation made headline news in France and internationally. It was a remarkable and daring collective action self-organized by sex workers. While it was not the first time that sex workers in the world had organized a collective resistance, it was exceptional for the time. June 2—the date of the Lyon occupation— is today celebrated as the International Whores' Day.[64]

This concerted rebellion of a marginalized and stigmatized population with almost no political experience and no history of mobilization took the mass media by surprise. Also, major theories in social movement and resistance studies assume that a lack of resources, social network, deliberate coordination, and prior experience (see McCarthy and Zald 1977) together with the threat of force and coercion (Scott 1989) make the direct resistance of economically and politically marginalized groups improbable. Street workers are one such marginalized population. How then did the street workers in France—and elsewhere—create such large-scale resistance? Scholarly positions would predict that economic precarity, social exclusion, and political repression make resistance by trans sex workers implausible, although there is little empirical research investigating struggles of this population. In this chapter, based on the case of trans feminine sex workers in Turkey, I explore whether and how this social group enacts direct and visible resistance against violence and marginalization.

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[63] Farnsworth, Clyde. (1975). "200 Prostitutes of Lyons in Siege at Church". Retrieved January 18, 2022 (https://www.nytimes.com/1975/06/07/archives/200-prostitutes-of-lyons-in-siege-at-church.html)
[64] International Whores Day. Retrieved January 18, 2022 (https://www.internationalwhoresday.com/history)

The previous chapter explained the commitments of the trans sex working community in supporting and protecting one another, and the impact of structural conditions on their collective efforts. This chapter focuses on how sex workers directly challenge the violence and marginalization which mark their day-to-day experiences. In other words, it explores their overt resistance, which refers to visible opposition, encompassing large-scale and community-based movements as well as individual acts of fighting back and refusal (see Hollander and Einwohner 2004). Below, I outline the studies that discuss overt resistance of sex workers in different social contexts.

Sex Workers' Overt Resistance

Alongside the remarkable event cited in the opening paragraph, there have also been more recent instances of sex workers' resistance to violence, detention, and discrimination through both individual confrontation and collective organizing. For example, Amy Ritterbusch (2016) reports that transgender sex workers in Bogotá self-inflict violence in order to scare away the police and continue to work. This strategy has proven effective due to the HIV phobia associated with blood and the bodies of trans sex workers. They also occupied the public buses and affluent areas of the city in order to protest against urban segregation. Scorgie and colleagues (2013) explain that the direct resistance of sex workers (both cis and transgender women) in Zimbabwe against abusers and police helped them to avoid arrest or to escape dangerous situations. However, especially resisting the police was not common and in most cases street workers had to comply with police officers' requests for money or free sex (Scorgie et al. 2013). Given their economic and legal vulnerability, individual acts of resistance can put street-based sex workers at risk of violence, arrest, and further harassment (Weitzer 2018).

This social group has also carried out resistance on a larger-scale. In different parts of the world, sex workers organize to demonstrate against the persistent violation of their rights and to unionize in order to improve their working conditions (Kempadoo 2003). In her ethnography, Pamela Downe (1999) explains how a large group of sex workers in Costa Rica protested in front of the National Assembly against a new health-card policy that introduced compulsory medical examinations for sex workers. More recently, in 2015, hundreds of sex workers took part in a public protest in Paris against planned legislation to criminalize their clients.[65]

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[65] NSWP. 2015. "Sex Workers Protest France's Proposal to Criminalise Clients" Retrieved January 23, 2022 (https://d8dev.nswp.org/news/sex-workers-protest-frances-proposal-criminalise-clients

Prostitutes' rights groups and associations play an important role in their collective organizing. For example, the English Collective of Prostitutes, set up in 1975, followed in the footsteps of sex workers in France to occupy the Holy Cross Church in London for 12 days in 1982 to protest against police harassment and crackdowns on street workers.[66] In the mid-1990s, assembling to resist the persecution and violence of the police, streetwalkers in Argentina established their own union of sex workers—*La Asociación de Mujeres Meretrices de Argentina* (AMMAR).[67] In their political action they effectively cooperated with other trade unions in Argentina, whose representatives, for instance, called the police station when women were unlawfully detained for practicing sex work (Hardy 2010).

While overt resistance is a crucial aspect of sex workers' individual and collective struggles, previous research also showed that it was discouraged by a variety of structural factors. For instance, stigma can deter sex workers from getting involved in sex work activism (Weitzer 2018). The lack of solidarity in a highly hierarchical sector, as a whole, the temporary engagements in sex work, and the perceptions of limited benefit in organizing lead to reluctance among sex workers to organize (see Gall 2010; van der Poel 1992). The absence of means, skills, and knowledge may impede the mobilization of sex workers and sex work organizations (Mathieu 2001). All these structural factors potentially hinder sex workers from participating in public resistance. Building on these works, this chapter examines the extent to which trans sex workers in Turkey engage in overt resistance to violence and marginalization, and the impact of structural factors on these practices.

Overt Resistance at the Urban Margins

Classical approaches to urban marginality have prioritized the study of the structural conditions that constrain urban dwellers and the social processes leading to marginality (Lancione 2016:4). Some research that has taken this approach, however, tends to overlook the articulation of the political agency of urban dwellers and their resistance to the condition of marginality (Woroniecka-Krzyzanowska 2019:3). In other words, it is not considered likely that economically or politically marginalized groups create localized struggles and challenge or transform their oppressive or exploitative conditions. This view has partially been informed by influential theories in the fields of social movement and resistance studies.

For example, the Resource Mobilization (RM) Theory (McCarthy and Zald 1977), a major perspective on social movements, argues that the emergence of collective action depends

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[66] English Collective of Prostitutes. "Occupation of Holy Cross Church, King's Cross 1982". Retrieved January 23, 2022 (https://prostitutescollective.net/church-occupation-1982/)
[67] AMMAR. Retrieved January 23, 2022 (http://www.ammar.org.ar/-Quienes-somos-.html)

on the available material, informational, social, and political resources. According to this theory, given their limited resources, people at the urban margins usually do not have the capacity to mobilize against their disadvantaged conditions. There is a parallel debate in resistance studies where prominent resistance scholars claim that economically and politically marginalized groups are unlikely to resist domination in direct and visible ways due to a realistic risk of coercion and physical harm (see Scott 1989:35). While helpful in highlighting the difficulties and risks associated with practicing resistance under conditions of marginality, these positions have also received substantial criticism (see Buechler 1993; Vinthagen and Johansson 2013). For instance, Bayat (2000) has pointed out that, contrary to common theoretical projections, those at the margins, including, the unemployed, slum-dwellers, and the urban poor around the world, do openly challenge their condition.

Focusing primarily on urban agency, a growing body of scholarship has explored how urban dwellers actively contest their economic, political, and social marginalization (see Castells 1989). For instance, Arias (2004) has described the incidents in which residents of Brazilian favelas marched or rioted against police violence. Karaman (2014) has recorded the grass-roots resistance of the Roma community against their evictions from the poor neighborhoods of Istanbul. These examples represent only a small portion of numerous mobilizations taking place in shantytowns, temporary shelters, favelas, and barracas around the world occupied by immigrants, squatters, or Roma all struggling for access to the basic needs of housing and paid work, or against violence (Butler 2016:13).

Yet some of the research exploring urban agency has been blind to the structural constraints that pose significant limits to people's actions (Aceska et al. 2019; Lancione 2016), resulting in a romanticized representation of the struggles at the fringes of society (see Neuwirth 2007; Saunders 2012). Especially the writings that theorize the urban margins as sites of resistance tend to read too much into the political agency of those living in challenging circumstances, and overemphasize their capacity to change their material and political conditions (Bayat 2010).

While some research has concentrated on the constraints, others have prioritized the enabling capacity of the urban margins. How do margins enable or limit overt resistance? In *Vulnerability in Resistance*, Judith Butler (2016) proposes that the vulnerability engendered by precarity generates resistance. This means that people at the margins assert their existence, claim the right to public spaces, and oppose violence. They thus demand to end to precarity by means of direct resistance. Butler (2016) continues that the very act of resistance, in turn, renders people vulnerable, exposing them to potential harm. Hence, though she claims that

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vulnerability is an integral aspect of resistance that provokes resistance and is produced by it, we also recall Scott's (1989) argument that the risk of harm or coercion may discourage the subordinated, marginalized, or dispossessed from enacting direct and visible forms of opposition. Together, these theses point to a complex relationship between overt resistance and marginality.

In this chapter I analyze trans feminine sex workers' overt resistance, both individual confrontations and organized movements, against violence and marginalization. I also examine the structural conditions that affect the emergence of overt resistance in this context. Finally, I ask what these insights tell us about overt resistance emerging at the urban margins more broadly. This chapter examines both the enabling and the disabling capacities of the urban margins. It is informed by the theoretical debates outlined above, it recognizes that urban margins motivate people to mobilize and to create a range of oppositional practices. At the same time, the chapter examines how different forms of precarity that permeate the urban margins discourage the direct contestation of domination, exploitation, or violence. It considers both the lack of resources (McCarthy and Zald 1977) and the risk of harm or coercion (Scott 1989) at the margins that may create barriers to the emergence of confrontational resistance.

The chapter combines a grounded investigation with historical observation. Both sections rely on an understanding of resistance as a process, instead of a single isolated act. The grounded observation with the trans community scrutinizes how resistance is carried out in daily practice and different social dynamics this process entails. Considering resistance as a socially emerging process also allows us to explore how this practice is shaped by the conditions of marginality. More specifically, this section explains the tensions and difficulties entailed in carrying out overt resistance in a marginalized context, and the conditions that encourage or discourage its emergence.

Moreover, based on an understanding of resistance as a historically emerging process (see Aroney 2020; Meyer 2009; Vinthagen and Johansson 2013), I discuss how the resistance of trans sex workers has appeared and evolved in recent decades. Vinthagen and Johansson (2013:14) write that "new forms of resistance connect to old forms by using them as a stepping stone, translating existing hegemonic elements, dislodging and recombining that which is available." In other words, resistance has a historical continuity and a connected trajectory. Therefore, to comprehend present commitments, it is important to study the oppositional practices that have developed over a large time span. In this sense, a historical perspective contextualizes the grounded observation, and provides a better understanding and a more

accurate interpretation of the resistance by the sex working community. This approach also helps us to trace how overt resistance evolves in relation to the structural dynamics.

Based on the definition of overt resistance by Hollander and Einwohner (2004), I study large-scale and community-based movements and individual acts. Among the practices discussed are material means of organizing, physical confrontation, and verbal and non-verbal opposition. What organized resistance and individual confrontations have in common is the visibility and recognition of the act by others. Furthermore, arising from a sense of injustice, both are somewhat intentional, i.e., intended to be recognized as resistance. On the other hand, these collective and individual actions are different in scale; require different degrees of coordination; and pose differential risks to the resistor. Although I bring them together in this section, I touch on the diverse circumstances under which these practices may be deployed and the disparate risks they may pose to their agents, acknowledging their analytically distinct aspects.

As previously stated, the chapter is divided into two main sections. The first discusses the engagement of trans sex workers in overt resistance in Turkey in recent decades based on the data from oral histories—written and video forms—and other online sources, such as newspaper articles and journal reports, legal codes, and NGO websites. These sources shed light on the conditions in which trans sex workers lived and the forms of overt resistance they organized in different decades. The second section analyzes the overt resistance practiced by the trans community of my fieldwork. All the data forming the basis of this section come from the participant observation and interviews that I conducted during my fieldwork. The analyses in both sections are informed by the grounded theory approach.

The 1970s to the Present: The Overt Resistance of *Lubunyas* in Contemporary Turkey

This section discusses how *lubunyas'* overt resistance, including protests, parades, other forms of bodily resistance, combined with legal action, political pressure, and contentious collaborations, has unfolded in recent decades. It addresses the practices of resistance chronologically and analyzes them within the framework of historical continuity. It pays particular attention to how the structural constraints and opportunities arising in different periods have shaped overt resistance of this population. Finally, it locates the ethnography examining the practices of overt resistance in the trans sex working community within the broader historical landscape of trans resistance in Turkey.

The emerging identity categories have had a close link to the political coalitions. What we observe in the oral history sources is that the term *eşcinsel* (homosexual) was used in the

1980s and 1990s—and is still being used today by some of my interlocutors—as an umbrella term to refer to people self-identifying as transvestite and transsexual as well as lesbian, gay, and bisexual, as in some other contexts (see Kulick 1996). Furthermore, as Chapter 1 described, the limited livelihood options led an overwhelming majority of (visibly) trans women to depend on sex work, permanently or temporarily. Therefore, we cannot draw clear distinctions between these identity categories, while discussing the resistance of sexual dissidents in earlier decades. Especially since feminine gay men and trans feminine people coexisted socially for a long time, as the term *lubunya* suggests (Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2012:12), they were also together in the homosexual movement of earlier periods. Yet, it is important to note that trans men were not part of this political scene until the late 1990s and the early 2000s.

Chapter 1 summarizes the lives of *lubunyas* in contemporary Turkey, for example, where they have taken refuge and how they supported themselves. As explained, beginning from the mid-1970s, with a change in the political landscape, *lubunyas* living in large cities of Turkey faced an increasingly repressive climate (Çetin 2016:7-8). Their employment options were restricted; some brothels and clubs where they worked closed down (Çetin 2016). The earlier chapters have already dealt with the period of the military junta (1980-1983). During this time, martial law was in force; the Parliament and the government were taken over; the Constitution was suspended; and all political parties and trade unions were banned (Akıncı 2013). In the early 1980s, the military regime violently repressed political dissidents, ethnic and sexual minorities, and other groups of social 'deviants'. For *lubunyas*, it was a period of prohibition, normalized and institutionalized violence, and exclusion from social and economic life. It led to a struggle for survival. Oral history accounts of trans women describe the police raids, violence, and rape that commonly threatened them in this period (Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2012:15). Yıldız recounted a particular event that took place in 1981, when 50 to 60 *lubunyas* were 'deported' by train from large cities:

> They put us on a train at the Haydarpaşa Railway Station. It the winter. It was snowing. They dumped us at the *Bolu Mountain*, in a valley between the two hills. It was winter, snowing, at night. We reached the main road by finding our way by the light of the snow. They had abandoned us to die in the mountains. We've also gone through these things (Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2012:197)

Though non-existent in the collective memory of the nation, such harrowing events show that trans sex workers are among the groups that suffered the most from the military regime.

Against this background, we see that in the late 1970s and the 1980s, *lubunyas* protested against police brutality, organized demonstrations against discrimination at the unemployment office, and collected signatures for the introduction of new laws to legalize gender reassignment surgery (Çetin 2016:9). In particular, the Radical Democratic Green Party, in which a number of trans people were also involved, campaigned for the rights of homosexuals, alongside other minorities. In 1987, with the support of this political party, a group of mostly trans women went on a 10-day hunger strike to protest against persistent police violence and other injustices against their community (see Figure 6) (Yılmaz 1998:183). This is the best-known *lubunya* collective action of the 1980s.

Figure 6: "Homosexuals" start a hunger strike to protest against police repression on 29 April 1987 in Gezi Park, Istanbul. Source: *Milliyet* of 01.05.1987

In such events, *lubunyas* came together to claim their right to live, work and to protest against violence and repression, in Butler's (2016) words, demanding to end precarity by direct resistance. These examples demonstrate how the urban margins motivate people to self-organize in order to actively contest their economic, political, and social conditions (Aceska et al. 2019). On the other hand, while there were some remarkable collective protests, it is difficult to talk about an organized trans movement in this period. Overall, their numbers were not large, and the movements were rather scattered and transitory. This was partly because whenever they resisted, they were violently repressed, which put them at risk of losing their jobs and homes (Demishhevich 2008). In line with Scott's (1989) argument, the high risk of bodily and material harm limited their engagement in overt resistance. In fact, the 1970s and 1980s were significant for other reasons. During this period, when *lubunyas* were in a deep struggle for

survival, they got in touch with others who were "like them."[68] Moreover, in part as a result of being collectively targeted with violence and exclusion, *lubunyas* were acquiring a political identity (Çetin 2016:8). Considering that resistance is a historically emerging process (see Vinthagen and Johansson 2013:14), we can interpret the scattered examples of mobilization in this period as the seeds of the larger resistance movements that would appear in subsequent years.

The 1990s witnessed new modes of organizing among sexual dissidents. They established collectives and print media outlets, only a few of which are mentioned here. These exciting developments brought into existence shared institutional and social spaces, which accelerated their organization. In 1993, an influential collective called Lambda Istanbul[69] was founded, which combatted violence against LGBT groups with a weekly radio program, holding symposiums at the universities, and setting up homosexual support lines. It also published political statements and raised awareness about AIDS and sexual health in general. However, at the time only a few "transvestite" and "transsexual" individuals were involved in this collective (Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2013:141).

In 1994, another LGBT network published an assertive call at all bus stations in Ankara, with an address, encouraging people to contact to them:

> A call for gays, lesbians, and anti-heterosexists. If you think you are alone, you are wrong. We have always been present in all segments and areas of the society. But with the identity available and dictated to us by heterosexism is not with our true identity. Isn't it time to change that?

Several months later, they published their first queer magazine, Kaos GL.[70] This long-lived magazine still offers the most comprehensive documentation of the LGBTI+ lives and culture in Turkey.[71]

LGBTs organizing around collectives and print media channels, however discreetly, enlarged the queer network and debate. For people with non-conforming gender and sexual identities, these groups had a vital community-building function, provided physical or imagined spaces, facilitated affirmation of their identity, and produced platforms for politics and intellectual and cultural production. These developments prepared the ground for the open rebellions of the 2000s. While we can talk about an organized *LGBT movement* in this period,

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[68] KaosGL. 2013. "Lubunya Olmanın Kitabı Bu Kez 90'larda". Retrieved February 1, 2022 (https://web.archive.org/web/20150201191756/http://kaosgl.org/sayfa.php?id=13952)

[69] LambdaIstanbul. "Özetle; Lambdaistanbul Ne Yaptı?" Retrieved from February 4, 2022. (http://www.lambdaistanbul.org/s/hakkinda/ozetle-lambdaistanbul-ne-yapti

[70] Retrieved from February 4, 2022 (http://www.kaosglderneghi.org/anasayfa.php)

[71] Retrieved from February 4, 2022 (http://www.kaosgldergi.com/dergi.php)

it was largely dominated by gay men. John D'Emilio (1983:108) explains the "homophile movement" of the 1950s in the United States, which similarly pursued a "quest for legitimacy." Seen as less respectable and less legible by mainstream society, trans women, especially trans sex workers, were occasionally excluded from homosexuals' activities in Turkey (Çetin 2016; Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2013:144). The fragmentation started to take place at around the time when more narrowly defined identity categories were becoming popularized in the language. This gain echoes D'Emilio (1983:5) who stresses the links between the experiences of oppression, the articulation of sexual identities, and the growth of the LGBT politics. Furthermore, trans feminine sex workers had their own unique, for example, visibility- and work-related vulnerabilities. To address their specific challenges, in this period they mobilized locally in their neighborhoods and crafted particularly street resistance.[72]

As noted in Chapter 1, trans feminine sex workers formed their own neighborhoods, where they cohabited, protected each other, and made a living by selling sex. As Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 explain, sharing a space facilitated the construction of relationships and communities, which are the bases of *lubunyas*' support networks. Space was also important for collective resistance. In one of the trans neighborhoods in Istanbul, Ülker Street, forced evictions were carried out in 1996 by the state authorities (Selek 2007; see Chapter 2). Some of the dwellers refused to move out and resisted the police for some time, but they were unable to prevent the eviction. Şevval, one of the ex-residents of the street, reasoned that:

> Perhaps, through this experience, we had been taking the first steps of trans organizing. We had started assembling in our homes to discuss what to do against state and police violence. My house was known by everyone as a 'safe house' (*hücre evi*), everyone used to come to my house… We had been trying to create alternatives and meet our allies (Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2013:254-255).

During this devastating event, trans sex workers carried out collective bodily resistance to the police to stop the evictions and police violence in their neighborhood. After that, a group of evicted trans women, who called themselves the *Deniz Kızları* (Mermaids), carried on meeting regularly and discussed the prospect of establishing the first trans association in the country (Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2013:148). In subsequent years, we see the attempts of direct contestation through legal and political channels. In 2001, a group of trans sex workers sued a police commander who had been involved in torturing community members during the evictions. One of the residents, Demet Demir, who long resisted police violence in this street,

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[72] https://www.bantmag.com/magazine/issue/post/31/303

participated in local elections in 1999, and stood as a parliamentary candidate in the 2007 general elections (İnce 2014). While sex workers' resistance did not stop the evictions, both the communal living and resistance experiences of Ülker Street have left an imprint in the collective memory and had important roles in social and political organizing of *lubunyas*. This highlights the historical continuity of resistance. To reiterate the point made in Chapter 1, the struggle that *lubunyas* cultivated in this space—and in several other neighborhoods—has been vital for the emergence of their political subjectivities. In this process the development of community consciousness and political subjectivities are intertwined. Within the context of gay liberation movement in the United States, John D'Emilio (1983:4) argues that for a political movement to emerge there needs to be a cohesive community with a shared understanding of their experiences of injustice. My research exemplifies the close ties between the emergence of the urban subculture and the urban politics of trans sex workers, but I do not necessarily conceptualize community prior to political mobilization; instead, the two may form in simultaneous and complex ways.

Trans sex workers, who self-organized locally to address their immediate problems, however, had connections with the broader LGBT movement in the city. The activists from Lambda Istanbul demonstrated against the police violence and displacement that took place in Ülker Street. As a member of ILGA (The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association), this collective also focused the attention of the international media and civil society on the rights violations committed against trans sex workers. On the whole, while these LGBT collectives and networks were not known by the broader public in the 1990s, some of their activities were direct and visible opposition to the violent treatment by the state authorities.

Another key event during this period (1996) is the formation of a sex worker-led group, *Kadın Kapısı* (Women's Gate). The group provided consultations for sex workers on health and legal issues and published a magazine, *Gacı* for several years, which functioned as a communication bulletin for sex workers (Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2013:147). This was the first time that *lubunyas* had assembled around 'sex worker' identity. This made it possible to address the kinds of safety, health, or legal issues that sex workers had in common. Unfortunately, the group interrupted its activities between 1999 and 2004 due to a lack of resources. Such interruptions exemplify how the lack of resources impedes the mobilization at the margins in line with RM (Resource Mobilization) theory (McCarthy and Zald 1977).

The crucial steps taken in the 1990s meant that the LGBT movement gained momentum in the 2000s (Yılmaz 2013:135). It has become more visible, and more inclusive of trans

women, and trans men had also started taking part in the organized struggle (Öğüt 2013:49). In 1999, as Turkey was officially recognized as a candidate for EU membership, the adaptations expected of Turkey triggered a series of legal and constitutional developments which gave civil society the leverage necessary to push forward with demands for equality. In this more moderate political climate, collectives, such as Kaos GL and Lambda Istanbul, were registered as official associations, in 2005 and 2006, respectively. In 2006, the first trans rights defender organization, Pink Life LGBTT Solidarity Association, was set up in Ankara. Since then it has struggled against discrimination, hate crimes, and societal exclusion of "trans people and sex workers."[73] Institutional organizing has opened up new opportunities; for instance, it made access to legal help more accessible for trans sex workers. The streets have, however, remained a critical site of struggle for this group given the persistent attacks that they face in their co-living and working spaces. The next section expands on this point further. We observe that gradually new modes of resistance have been added to the repertoire of the struggle of trans sex workers.

Shortly after these progressive developments, Turkey entered a dramatic democratic decline with growing tensions between the government and civil society. For example, in 2008, the Lambda Istanbul was disbanded on the grounds that it "violates public morals and contravenes Turkish family structures." Activists from the association mobilized their national and international civil society networks and as a result, the order was openly disputed by a number of European politicians and LGBT associations.[74] Finally, a legal appeal that the association filed against the closure led to the cancellation of the ban. This mobilization exemplifies an opposition demonstrated by the community around the association by means of a legal action and political pressure. More generally, during the repressive attempts of these years, we observe an acceleration of the politicization of the LGBTs.

In Spring 2013, a protest held by several dozen people against the planned demolition of Gezi Park in Istanbul turned into a massive popular uprising, which spread throughout Turkey (Ertür 2016:98). A less discussed aspect of Gezi Park is that it has historically been a queer space where LGBTs cruise to seek companionship and sex and (trans) sex workers cruise to seek clients. This was one of the reasons why it was important for the LGBTs to join the occupation in Taksim Square and the large area surrounding it, where they formed an 'LGBT Blok' (Çetin 2016:15). LGBs and trans sex workers who had been self-organizing for decades

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[73] Retrieved January 6, 2022 (http://www.pembehayat.org/hakkimizda/detay/3/biz-kimiz)
[74] Retrieved January 6, 2022 (https://kaosgl.org/haber/lambdaya-kapatma-avrupada-yankilandi)

became a visible and integral part of the resistance in Taksim Square. In this collective demand for social justice, LGBTs made new allies and strengthened their existing contacts with associations and social movements working on other social justice issues (SPOD 2014:9). The popularity of the Pride Marches in Istanbul, with the participation of more than 60,000 people in 2013 and over 100,000 in 2014 is a proof of this.[75] This meant tens of thousands more marchers than the previous year. Attracting thousands of people, the fourth Istanbul Trans Parade in 2013 also witnessed a turnout far exceeding previous years. These protests and parades are part of the collective physical resistance of LGBTs and trans sex workers in recent history, during which contentious collaborations have been established.

To borrow Tilly's (1998) term, despite the growing "repertoires of contention" used by this population, trans sex workers continue to be victims of hate crime and murder. For instance, in 2016, the burned body of an LGBTI+ activist and trans woman sex worker, Hande Kader, was found on the outskirts of Istanbul.[76] This provoked a protest with hundreds of people, including several Turkish MPs, in Istanbul. Demonstrations against this murder also took place in several other cities. The bridges built with other social movements and political parties materialized in these demonstrations.

Following the global anti-gender trend the political environment in Turkey has become increasingly hostile towards people with non-conforming gender and sexual identities (Özkazanç 2019). The intensifying restrictions and prohibitions of the past years towards sexual minorities, such as concerning public gatherings, which I have illustrated in Chapter 2, have given way to new modes of resistance. In particular, both individuals and associations have started to use social media more effectively in their advocacy. For instance, Pink Life LGBTT Solidarity Association frequently uses "video activism" to reach out to *lubunyas*.[77] These examples show how the repertoire of resistance of this group changes with the evolving risks and opportunities. While their activities may be hindered in some areas due to the risk of harm or coercion, the movements use emerging methods and platforms to carry on with their politics in other spaces.

This section observes different modes of overt resistance that trans sex workers have developed in recent decades: protests, parades, other collective forms of bodily resistance, legal

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[75] Retrieved January 6, 2022 (https://meclistelgbti.wordpress.com/siyasette-lgbtiler/turkiyede-lgbti-hareketi-ve-siyaset/)

[76] BBC News. 2016. "Hande Kader: Outcry in Turkey over transgender woman's murder". Retrieved August 5, 2020. (https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37143879)

[77] Pembe Hayat. 2018. "İlk video yayında: Ah Sosyal Medya!" Retrieved February 2, 2022. (http://www.pembehayat.org/haberler/detay/1959/index.html)

action, political pressure, and contentious coalitions. Some of them self-organized spontaneously at street level, whereas others coordinated around collectives and associations. Furthermore, the relationship between marginality and resistance does not follow any single logic in this context; urban margins both enabled and constrained the overt mobilization of trans sex workers.

Collective experiences of police violence, economic marginalization, and evictions have stimulated the need to self-organize, increased the visibility of *lubunyas*, formed a political identity, and created opportunities to establish connections with other movements. In other words, by forming political subjectivities, but also by creating resources, such as social networks, knowledge, and experiences, structural conditions in which *lubunyas* lived facilitated the emergence of their overt resistance. Hence, in line with Butler (2016)'s reasoning, the vulnerability of this marginalized population provokes oppositional practices against these conditions.

At the same time, the risk of harm discourages them from engaging in open contestation, for example, during the period of the military junta. Harm took different forms in this context: not only injury, pain, confinement/imprisonment, exposure to physical aggression, torture, and detention, but also the loss of both home and livelihood. In addition, the lack of resources creates obstacles to some forms of resistance, such as the activities organized by the sex worker-led collective. This finding supports the RM theory's proposal of when social movements can form (see McCarthy and Zald 1977). Thus, both the lack of resources and the threat of harm at times discouraged trans sex workers' engagement in open contestation.

However, considering resistance as a historically emerging process instead of an individual act (see Vinthagen and Johansson 2013:14) produces a more complete analysis of overt resistance emerging at the margins. What we observe in this context is that even when trans feminine sex workers were severely policed, excluded, and dispossessed, attempts were still made to openly resist violence and marginalization, be it more or less effective. Indeed, navigating through diverse risks and opportunities, the means of organizing and practices of resistance they deployed in their struggles have evolved and diversified. While street resistance has remained, new repertoires emerged in later periods. For instance, the use of associations, or traditional and social media. Finally, relatively scattered and short-lived acts of resistance, for example, holding meetings and collecting signatures, laid the foundation for larger and more decisive movements that would be established in subsequent decades. For this reason, the observations made in this section also guide us through the ethnography examining resistance in the trans neighborhood, which will be explored in the next section.

Overt Resistance in the Trans Neighborhood

Building on the previous section with its description of how trans resistance has evolved over decades, this section examines the practices of resistance that emerge in the trans neighborhood. In particular, focusing on the socially emerging aspect of resistance, it reveals the tensions, difficulties, and dilemmas entailed in carrying out overt resistance in a marginalized context, and the structural conditions that encourage or discourage its emergence.

In January 2019, a gruesome event took place in the heart of the neighborhood and my fieldwork area where I had spent months. A young sex worker, Hande Buse Şeker, was shot dead by an off-duty male police officer in one of the working houses. I visited the beauty salon and found Ada, a co-worker of the murdered woman, sitting on the sofa. Her wounded arm was camouflaged with a black shawl placed around her shoulders. She had got injured during the same night. Having witnessed the entire incident, Ada was frightened and anxious; her voice trembled, and her hands shook as she told me what had happened. The police officer, who had visited the apartment as a client, had shot her friend repeatedly. The newspapers later reported that the lifeless body of the trans woman had been battered and sexually abused.[78] A lawsuit was filed against the murderer, who was immediately taken into custody.

Despite a strong presence of LGBTI+ activism and the increasing visibility of trans women, as described in the previous section, trans sex workers often become victims of violence and lack safe environments in which to live and work. The aftermath of this incident tells us about how some members of the community protested against the murder in collaboration with a group of activists, and what discouraged others from joining them. In particular, we see that the tensions, disagreements, and dilemmas overt resistance may entail in this context.

The day after the shooting, a part of the community together with some members of the Young LGBTI+ Association gathered in the city center adjacent to their neighborhood. Holding trans flags, a large photograph of their murdered friend, and a banner reading, "Trans Murders Are Political," the crowd disclosed what had happened in a public statement. They condemned Turkish mass media's inadequate coverage and biased portrayal of the incident. Indeed, some media reports wrote off the murder on the grounds that the victim is a trans woman sex worker. The protestors held the state accountable for not providing their community with safe working

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[78] Bianet. 2020. Retrieved July 10, 2020. (http://bianet.org/bianet/lgbti/221981-hande-buse-seker-davasi-korona-nedeniyle-erken-goruldu)

conditions and legal protection.[79] The discourses in their public statement were sophisticated; they presented links between a number of themes, such as constitutional rights, societal peace, and structural violence. Although it was an impromptu demonstration, a megaphone had been brought to amplify their voices; banners had been printed; and a public statement had been drafted and was read out. This sort of collaboration between the sex worker community and organized LGBTI+ activism shows the common objectives, interactions, and links between these two groups, which are often treated as disconnected. In fact, some of the sex workers from the community are members of LGBTI+ associations. Others may contact them to seek assistance such as legal support. As the previous section has detailed, alongside community-based struggles, trans sex workers have also become involved in or formed ties with some associations and collectives. Such connections have particularly informed them about and facilitated their access to the legal channels.

There were several other immediate reactions from civil society to this brutal murder. Upon the call of the Lambda Istanbul Association, introduced earlier, the rights defenders in Istanbul came together to demonstrate against the murder. A public statement, signed by 43 LGBTI+ and feminist organizations, called attention to the systematic violence faced by the trans population in Turkey and the legal misconduct involved in the criminal cases against trans people. Making references to the Istanbul Convention,[80] they called on the government to safeguard the rights of this population.[81] The murder was also condemned by other human rights associations, bar associations, doctors' and lawyers' unions and student collectives in different cities.[82] Denouncing the murder of a trans woman by a police officer, one MP pointed out that the lack of antidiscrimination and equality legislation to protect the rights of LGBTIs leaves these populations vulnerable to violence, discrimination and exploitation. Indeed, the government refuses to adopt legal mechanisms to protect the LGBTI+ citizens by making explicit reference in the laws to sexual orientation (see Chapter 2). While these expressions of solidarity were crucial, no practical change happened in the lives of my interlocutors; the threat of violence is still very much part of their daily existence.

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[79] Genç LGBTİ Derneği. 2019. Retrieved July 10, 2020.
(http://www.findglocal.com/TR/Konak/1552077665086026/Gen%C3%A7-LGBT%C4%B0-Derne%C4%9Fi-%C4%B0zmir/videos/2360876690810918)
[80] A human rights treaty of the Council of Europe against violence against women and domestic violence which was opened for signature on 11 May 2011 in Istanbul. (https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/home?)
[81] Kaos GL. 2019. "Birlikte güçlüyüz, yaşasın dayanışma!" Retrieved July 10, 2020
(https://www.kaosgl.org/haber/birlikte-gucluyuz-yasasin-dayanisma)
[82] Izmir Barosu. 2019. "Nefret Suçu Mağduru Transları Anma Günü". Retrieved July 10, 2020
(https://www.izmirbarosu.org.tr/HaberDetay/1797/nefret-sucu-magduru-translari-anma-gunu)

The hearings held were closed to the public for one year,[83] and this fact received a great deal of criticism. One year after the incident, the lawyers of the murdered woman started a social media campaign to have the hearings made public. They argued that in order to effectively combat hate crimes, the public needed to be informed about the legal cases and to have the opportunity to express their views.[84] The campaign led to more media coverage of the issue and the court finally lifted the decision of closure.[85] This is one example of how social media, a new mode of resistance, has been used effectively in their struggle. In 2020, the court rejected the reduced sentence that the defense had called for on the basis of "unjust provocation and good behavior". This is a common (and effective) strategy used by perpetrators of hate crimes against trans sex workers.[86] The murderer of Şeker has now been sentenced to life imprisonment for intentional murder.

In such examples, some sections of institutional activism at the local and national level protested the hate crimes committed against trans sex workers and stood in solidarity with the local community. Events of this sort make the historical continuity of resistance apparent (see Vinthagen and Johansson 2013:14). As explained in the previous section, these alignments have gradually been achieved thanks to the efforts of earlier struggles: the connections created between different segments of the civil society and with some political parties and more inclusive social justice discourses within the LGBTI+ and feminist movements. Despite the noteworthy mobilization that took place in the aftermath of this murder, the community had to fend for itself.

One week after the incident, life was back to its normal rush in the town, or perhaps it had never even stopped. Shops were open, there were bustling crowds, relatively well-dressed, returning from work or heading off to their Friday night's plans. In sharp contrast to the rest of the center, the streets of this neighborhood appeared uneventful, even a little spiritless, as if they were exhausted, which gave me a bitter feeling. There were some familiar faces, hanging around in their casual clothes, with no sign of getting ready for work. No one seemed to be in the mood of Friday evening, which used to be the liveliest time of the week.

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[83] Amnesty International. 2019. "Hande Buse Şeker Davası". Retrieved July 10, 2020. (https://www.amnesty.org.tr/icerik/hande-buse-seker-davasi)
[84] Kaos GL. 2020. "Hande Buse Şeker'in Avukatları: Davadaki kapalılık kararı kaldırılsın". Retrieved July 10, 2020 (https://www.kaosgl.org/haber/hande-buse-seker-in-avukatlari-davadaki-kapalilik-karari-kaldirilsin)
[85] Kaos GL. 2020. "Hande Şeker davası 18 Haziran'a ertelendi". Retrieved July 13, 2020 (https://www.kaosgl.org/haber/hande-seker-davasi-18-haziran-a-ertelendi)
[86] Tar, Yildiz. 2020. "Volkan Hicret, the murderer of Hande Şeker is sentenced for life". Retrieved May 18, 2021 (https://kaosgl.org/en/single-news/volkan-hicret-the-murderer-of-hande-seker-is-sentenced-for-life)

In particular, those who were close to the murdered woman were devastated, but a mix of grief, anger, and despair pervaded the entire neighborhood. The residents reached out to their neighbors and friends to offer their condolences. They also collected money and organized and practiced death rituals, such as reading *Mevlid* (spiritual poems)—a common ritual practiced during condolence visits in Turkey. Some of them frequently checked in on the flatmates of the murdered woman and offered help with practical matters; for instance, they visited Ada to bring clean clothes when she was in the hospital. Hence, in general, there was a supportive environment in the community after this tragic event, similar to the aftermath of other cases of loss described in Chapter 4.

However, the flat where the murder was committed was inevitably abandoned. Physically or psychologically incapacitated, Ada and her flatmates were unable to work for some time and soon ran into financial trouble. Yet, they were not the only ones in the community whose livelihoods deteriorated during these weeks. For example, Meltem said she did not feel like working because she was grieving; and since the business was very slow, it would be a waste of time. Unable to pay her rent, she moved out of her private apartment and started sleeping in one of the working flats in the neighborhood. The streets were, in fact, largely quiet; the murder discouraged clients from visiting the neighborhood. Neither sex workers nor markets, hair salons, and cafes were doing well. Every time I was around in these weeks, I heard people complaining about the lack of customers and the financial strain it caused.

The stagnation led to the emergence of quiet controversy in the neighborhood. Several women argued that drawing more media attention through organizing a protest might not be the most sensible response, as it might hinder clients from coming to the neighborhood in the longer term. Undoubtedly, they grieved over the loss of their peer, and their dignity was hurt in the face of the very limited public attention to the murder, hence, in Butler's (2004) words, the "ungrievable" nature of a trans sex worker's life. They also feared for their lives. But what threatened their lives, in addition to the risk of physical assault, was the sheer lack of sustenance. They simply had to get back to work and to their routine. For instance, after the violent incident, lacking social security and health insurance, Ada had to pay a large amount of money at a hospital for medical treatment and went back to work even before she fully recovered so as to cover her living expenses. Thus, the material vulnerability induced by their precarious working conditions discouraged sex workers from making further protests. Nevertheless, there was a palpable tension between the need to resist and the demands of economic survival, though the two were also interlocked.

In addition to economic survival, there were also concerns about anonymity. Some of my interlocutors are not open about their gender identity to their natal families and communities of origin. So they worry that taking part in demonstrations or marches may expose their real identity, for example, through the visual media, which could provoke violence or harassment to themselves or their loved ones. They may also choose not to appear in public protests for other safety or personal reasons. All these risks create fragmented support among the community for the sort of high-visibility protests that would catch the public's attention. As this case demonstrates, the risk of harm faced at the urban margins discourages some sex workers from participating in public opposition, in line with Scott's (1989) rationale. Going beyond Butler's (2016) understanding of 'harm', which largely focuses on 'injury', resistance may also entail physical, economic, and psychological forms for my interlocutors.

While some manifestations of collective protest took place in collaboration with official associations, community-based resistance on their streets remain the most prevalent form of resistance. The streets of the neighborhood are the living and working spaces of trans workers, and are where they are often threatened with violence and coercion. Therefore, resistance primarily arises in these spaces. At the neighborhood level, trans sex workers present direct resistance—both individually and collectively—against the police, clients, and passers-by. In exceptional cases, they engaged in physical resistance in the neighborhood to repel the police or went to the police station to demonstrate their defiance against police conduct. Similar acts of direct resistance to the police also take place among street-based sex workers in other cultural contexts (see Scorgie et al. 2013). Yet they are rare, given that these kinds of resistance entail high risks. What is more commonly deployed against the police is verbal defiance. For instance, I witnessed loud quarrels in which some sex workers verbally defied the hostile or humiliating language or acts of the police.

Once, a shout came from one of the streets surrounded by police patrols: *Do you think I am going to be deterred by you?* Exasperated, Pınar's voice grew louder, as she roared out how she muddled through everything in all these years, and that she was not frightened by their threats either. Doubtless, this escalated the tension, about which many of them had reservations. At the same time, though, it left the police somewhat dubious, not knowing exactly how to respond. On some occasions, Pınar and several others who live in the same street assertively confront the police in order to draw limits to the ways in which the police interfere with their neighborhood, work, and lives in general. These unruly practices may lead to an immediate intensification of the control in the neighborhood. On the other hand, they may also make the police approach them with a certain wariness, and more mindful of their actions. Yet again,

resisting the police can lead to fines, arrests, or more intense police scrutiny on the streets. In line with Scott's reasoning these risks discourage most sex workers from engaging in visible resistance against the police.

Much more frequently, resistance is demonstrated against clients and passers-by who target sex workers with physical assault, verbal harassment, and other acts of everyday aggression. As illustrated in Chapter 4, as a response to physical aggression, my interlocutors usually put up physical resistance, individually or collectively. Aslı said, "If we feel we'll get hurt, like someone holds a knife, we take up our sticks … It's just that simple. The harsh reality." Such community mobilization as Aslı described serves primarily as protection from harm. These collective efforts, however, also help them to challenge or subvert the conditions of violence. In particular, through a consistent commitment to collective action, *lubunyas* have built a reputation for ferocity that appears, to some extent, to discourage violence against the community. Mine believes that their efforts have been effective: *The wicked people can't mess with us much because they know us. [They know that] when an incident occurs, we help each other out.* As Mine argued, community efforts are believed to be a major deterrent to attacks against them. This argument, proudly repeated in the words of other sex workers, gives the community a feeling of empowerment. As we saw in Chapter 4, strong community mobilization takes place in the streets of the trans community to protect one another against physical assault. However, community networks are mobilized not merely for defensive reasons; workers also show active physical or verbal resistance against clients, passer-by, or the police to challenge or change their circumstances. In other words, solidarity networks that serve to enhance the safety of the workers and the neighborhood also enact a resistance to the conditions of violence. This shows that solidarity and resistance intermingle in everyday practice.

Furthermore, sex workers also openly challenge the insults, mockery, and contemptuous laughter that they are commonly subject to. For instance, Sevda told me how annoyed she was by her regular customer who had underestimated the difficulty of her occupation by calling it "easy money." In response, she suggested that he try to perform sex work: *Why don't you work on the highway for one hour, dressed like me?* His answer was evasive: *Don't talk nonsense.* Sevda put a firm end to the argument: *Then you'd have to shut up, stop making these comments.* An outspoken worker, Banu said she verbally confronted and in her own words, "embarrassed," those who discredited, ridiculed, dismissed, or glared at in banks, public transports, and other public spaces. Like Banu, some others also explicitly claim their right to occupy the public space. Furthermore, they express defiance in other ways than

physical and verbal channels. For instance, when they felt irritated or endangered by the people in the vicinity at different places, some of my interlocutors looked them directly in the eyes. Aslı explained that if she caught someone staring at her disturbingly, she did not turn her gaze away from the person until he or she glanced away. Their unblinking and stubborn gaze serves to challenge the harassers. Though the community enacts a wide range of oppositional practices, these verbal and non-verbal expressions constitute the least risky, therefore the most prevalent, forms of resistance.

Some of my interlocutors also experience exploitation and abuse from the people with whom they have close relationships, such as natal family members or partners. I was told that in some cases, they verbally challenged their boyfriends who refused to appear with them in public or exploited them financially, though this was a delicate matter. There are also examples in which they resisted their families of origin. After living in different cities for many years, Sevda returned to her hometown. Revealing her true identity, she confronted her natal family: *You should either completely close your doors to me or keep them wide open and accept me as I am.* On another occasion, Sevda also challenged the relatives of a deceased member of the community. One of her closest friends, Azra, had been murdered in 2011. Her natal family, who had disowned her, also refused to organize a funeral for her. Therefore, her trans family took care of the funeral as they did for the other trans women who passed away (see Chapter 4). However, on one of the days following the funeral, while Sevda was home with a friend, the doorbell rang. There was a man at her door who introduced himself as Azra's uncle along with Azra's younger sisters. They said they were there to collect Azra's car. Shocked and outraged, Sevda and her friend refused to hand over the keys of her friend's car and sent them away: *Fuck off! You abandoned her when she was alive. You also abandoned her when she died.* When Sevda told me about this, she asked me to take particular note of such exploitative and humiliating treatment by the some families of sex workers. As my other interviewees said, *You learn what exclusion means first from your own family.* The natal family may seek economic benefits from trans women when they are alive or even when they are dead. This is how Azra's friends responded to the grasping behavior of their friend's natal family.

At the same time, my research participants disclosed that openly resisting their natal family was a complicated matter. Most of those who were in contact with their natal families did not want to upset them or break their ties with them. Given the high risk of social isolation involved, which I discussed in Chapter 4, severing or undermining the ties with those with whom they have close relationships was something that many of my interlocutors wanted to

avoid. Thus, the risks that deterred them from practicing visible opposition were not only physical or economic, but also involved social and emotional harm.

As in the previous section, here too we observed that the marginalized conditions in which the trans community lives, namely the risk of violence, repressive policing, social and economic exclusion, or financial exploitation, provoke overt resistance to these conditions (see Butler 2016). Workers openly challenge the violent treatment they experience in their everyday lives from clients, strangers, law enforcement officers, and people with whom they have close ties. To counter this, they use an array of individual and collective methods, including community organizing, physical confrontation, verbal opposition, or non-verbal expressions of refusal or defiance.

Through grounded observation, this section investigates the processes through which resistance is carried out and the structural constraints that impede its emergence at the urban margins. It also reveals the fragmentation, disagreement, and friction that some manifestations of resistance can give rise to in the community. These observations are partially consistent with Scott's (1989) argument that the threat of harm and coercion discourages people from engaging in visible and direct articulation of resistance.

Butler (2016) stresses that the very act of resistance makes people vulnerable to potential harm, by which she refers to the risk of being injured heightened during bodily defiance and public assemblies. This section shows that the harm that overt resistance entails for the trans community goes beyond this conceptualization and takes other forms, including material, physical, social, and emotional. In particular, there are concerns about personal safety and anonymity among my interlocutors. For these reasons, some direct contestations, for instance, protesting a hate crime or resisting the police, are not supported by all sections of the community. Moreover, the material precarity in which my interlocutors live and work hinders the deployment of confrontational methods. Given a history of displacement, state violence, and anti-prostitution attacks against trans communities in urban areas, explained in Chapter 2, there is an understanding that their communal living and working spaces are not secure. Furthermore, their labour is precarious (see Chapter 4). In the face of severely limited social security and the lack of other employment options, more stringent policing or a drop in the number of clients immediately puts many of them in financial distress. Finally, the fear of losing ties with and emotional support of family and partners also discourages their open defiance against the people with whom they have close relationships. In sum, even though they continue making rigorous efforts to display open and visible resistance, the threat of harm to themselves, their natal families, community, neighbourhood, or place of work tends to

fragment support for risky forms of resistance. These findings support the thesis that precarious conditions at the urban margins both provoke and limit the emergence of overt forms of resistance.

Discussion

This chapter has examined how trans feminine sex workers in Turkey put up open resistance to the conditions of violence and marginalization encircling their lives, and in what ways structural conditions affect their practices of resistance. Focusing on the collective agency in a manner informed by structural constraints, this research considers both the enabling and limiting impacts of urban margins on the overt resistance of trans feminine sex workers. Combining historical and grounded observation, the chapter suggests that the relationship between marginality and overt resistance does not follow any single path. Urban margins both provoke and constrain the overt mobilization of this group. The analyses in both sections support Butler's argument (2016) that vulnerability engendered by the precarious conditions gives rise to resistance to those same conditions. To contest violence, economic marginalization, repressive policing, and social and economic exclusion, trans sex workers in this context enact an array of overt forms of resistance—individual, community-based, through organizations, or in collaboration with other social movements. At the same time, the chapter shows that precarity sometimes deters the emergence of overt resistance. Limited material means and a lack of effective social networks and insufficient political experience can create barriers to collective action, which is partly consistent with the predictions of the Resource Mobilization Theory (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Furthermore, the observation that the risk of harm limits the emergence of relatively risky forms of public resistance supports Scott's (1989) argument.

Conceptualizing resistance as a socially emerging process, the grounded observation sheds light on how acts of resistance are realized and shaped by structural dynamics. More specifically, ethnography reveals the precarity of the lives, living spaces, labor, and relationships and how these discourage trans feminine sex workers from engaging in open confrontation. Putting up resistance can cause potential material, physical, social, and emotional harm to my interlocutors. This finding extends Butler's (2016) conceptualization of vulnerability that resistance at the margins might entail. The threat of harm also produces disagreement and fragmentation within the community concerning risky forms of protests. As this case demonstrates, the harm that the socially, economically, or politically marginalized

may encounter during visible oppositional actions can be substantial and multifaceted. And these risks could render the overt resistance emerging at the margins challenging and fragile.

Based on an understanding of resistance as a connected trajectory rather than a single act (see Vinthagen and Johansson 2013:14), the historical section has analyzed how resistance by this social group has evolved over time. It has found that navigating through different risks and opportunities, trans sex workers have changed and diversified the methods they used to contest violence and marginalization. But this is not meant to say that trans resistance had not existed before the 2000s when lubunyas became more integrated within the LGBTI+ activism. On the contrary, *lubunyas* have always been vital to the queer struggle, especially, at the street-level, where they have been vulnerable, yet also visible, dynamic, and forceful. While the deterrent impact of precarious conditions is also visible in the historical section, these risks do not preclude the emergence of overt resistance. Even during the periods when they were severely policed, excluded, and dispossessed, trans sex workers still made efforts to openly challenge these conditions.

By most scholarly accounts, resistance at the margins was either not considered possible or was romanticized. In other words, while structural accounts of urban marginality tend to overlook the articulations of the political agency of urban dwellers, some agency-oriented perspectives in this subfield overestimate the potential of their resistance (Aceska et al. 2019; Woroniecka-Krzyzanowska 2019). What the two sections of this chapter together suggest is that there are severe structural constraints that tend to deter overt resistance at the urban margins. On the other hand, these constraints do not eliminate the practice of resistance. The evidence from different contexts shows that like trans sex workers, populations at the margins, including, the unemployed, slum-dwellers, and the urban poor around the world, actively contest their conditions (Bayat 2016). Taken together, neither the constraining, nor the enabling view of urban margins can adequately explain the overt resistance emerging at the fringes of society.

Combining participant observation and historical sources helps us explore different aspects of overt resistance. In this research, the grounded observation has unveiled the social dynamics, for example, tensions and difficulties, entailed in carrying out overt resistance in a marginalized context, but which are not usually narrated in the records of social movements. The historical scope has made possible to trace the practices of resistance that have taken place over a broader time span and to see beyond the immediate effects of the lack of resources and the threat of harm. In this sense, the two methods employed in this research complement each other.

This section has brought together dissimilar acts of resistance, namely, participating in public assemblies, performing individual confrontations, and taking legal action as an association. The choice to examine them together is motivated by the idea that they all are visible and recognizable acts of resistance and may pose some kind of non-negligible risk to their agents; therefore, they are relevant to the questions asked in this chapter. Nevertheless, as specified throughout the chapter, the type and degree of risks involved in these practices depend on the form, target, and scale of an act of resistance, which I have tried to specify throughout the chapter.

This local sexuality-based group undergoes material precarity, lack of employment options, spatial marginalization, and violence in the urban space that they occupy. This means that their struggle is for housing, subsistence, safety, and space. While being among the most marginalized groups in the city, trans feminine sex workers have been largely neglected by the urban literature. This chapter demonstrates that gender and sexuality are relevant and significant analytical categories for both urban subordination and politics, which is one of the main arguments of this dissertation. Studying their conditions and struggles can provide valuable insights into the urban literature.

Chapter 6: Humor, Joy, and Laughter

In the summer of 2017, on one of my very first days in the trans neighborhood, I witnessed the following scene with astonishment. In the company of sex workers, regular clients, and other frequent visitors to the tea garden, Hayat, seemingly irritated, started to shriek at the man sitting next to her. *I'm a married woman, ayol.*[87] *How dare you treat a married woman like this!* Laughing, the man placed his arm on Hayat's shoulder in an affectionate way. She immediately disentangled herself and resumed her play-acting. Then she stood up, walking around the tables to join another group, and repeating to herself: *While I'm married to one, I'm having it off with all*, which sounded like a song in repetition. This time, with a terrified expression on her face, she called out to me: *Hey girl, you've seen that he's coming on to me, haven't you?* The audience, including me, joined her in complicit laughter.

Chapter 5 discusses how trans sex workers resist the violence, harassment, and humiliation they experience in their day-to-day lives in an open and direct way. It also explains the situations in which collective mobilization and individual confrontation are too risky to undertake, and consequently far less likely to occur. How can we describe the moments in which open defiance is avoided? What does everyday life look like when resistance is "quietened down"? Does the community also fall quiet? The incident described above suggests that this may not be the case. In her performance, Hayat makes a number of moves. She mocks a married woman, makes fun of herself as a sex worker, catches the attention of her public, and makes them laugh. Later I understood that this sort of plays permeate the social life of the neighborhood. Even in the darkest times, humor is part of the daily interactions of my interlocutors. But what do humor, laughter, and joy mean in a context of pervasive violence and marginalization?

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the mass media in Turkey invariably portrays trans sex workers as people with violent and criminal tendencies (Tar and Güner 2014:17).[88] These same views are prevalent among the general public. Some cisgender neighborhood actors that I talked to during my fieldwork told me how aggressive and unstable *travestis* can be and attributed their comical displays to their alleged unpredictable moods and temperament. These stereotypical perceptions are firmly embedded in narratives that pathologize and exoticize this population (Stryker 2008).

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[87] *'Ayol'* is an affectionate feminine and informal way of addressing someone.
[88] Similar stereotyped images of prostitutes exist in other cultural settings (Bell 1994:59).

Despite the prevalence of humorous interactions in sex work environments (Sanders 2004), sex workers' humor has been largely overlooked in academic literature, especially the kind of humor that challenges the oppressive or discriminatory conditions of their lives (Downe 1999:70). Hence, in both public and academic debate, there is little understanding of the humor created by this social group. More generally, there is limited research on how the humor created by politically and economically marginalized groups can defy power (Bayat 2010; Khalili 2016). This chapter[89] addresses such gaps and biases. I argue that humorous play-acting and everyday amusement of *lubunyas* that may at times seem "out of place," whilst not necessarily oppositional, can have a defiant quality. I claim that these expressions and affective gestures also play a vital community-building role amongst sex workers.

The Humor of Sex Workers

While the research on the humor of sex workers is scarce, there are a few remarkable exceptions. These studies argue that humor is a prominent characteristic in sex workers' interactions, and explain the different meanings and functions of humor in sex work environments. Based on her ethnography with streetwalkers in the UK, Sanders (2004) claims that humor is an important aspect of strong female friendships across all sex markets globally. She also notes that humor contributes to everyday support networks, community cohesion, and a sense of camaraderie between workers. Downe (1999) has shown that sex workers' humor in Costa Rica reinforces their sense of community and fosters group identity and self-esteem.

These works also suggest that alongside serving as a connector, sex workers' humor also has a potential for defiance. Sanders (2004) describes how streetwalkers adopt a rhetoric of comedy in order to resist harassment and stigma. Downe (1999) reveals how the use of raucous humor and self-mockery make the bodies and performances of sex workers sites of resistance. Based on the biting comedy performances presented by sex workers, Bell (1994) argues that prostitute performance art can criticize and potentially undermine the hegemonic narratives on prostitution. In sum, according to this literature, which my chapter builds on, sex workers' humor can express critique and dissent during protests, performances, and daily interactions. Humor can also create a sense of community and solidarity amongst sex workers. Such humor produced especially by street-based sex workers have profound links to violence, stigma, and marginalization, which are integral parts of this group's everyday existence.

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[89] Part of this research on which this chapter is based has been published as a book chapter. "The defiant potential of sex workers' humour". In T. Sanders, K. McGarry and P. Ryan (eds.), *Sex Work, Labour and Relations*. Palgrave Macmillan.

The Politics of Humor and Joy at the Urban Margins

In the study of subaltern politics and resistance, social scientists generally privilege struggles that have a clear political or oppositional intentions (Vinthagen and Johansson 2013:38). Some of the practices discussed in Chapter 5 are among them. Such celebrated forms of political commitment tend to have a self-sacrificing nature or articulated ideals and goals. On the other hand, there are many other expressions of defiance practiced at the margins. For example, humor, fun, and even pleasure play a subversive role by disturbing the rigid structures of moral and political authority (Bayat 2010). However, as Laleh Khalili (2016) has pointed out, there is a tendency to dismiss how the practice of fun and pleasure may serve a political end. The political work that humor and fun can do has been most commonly accepted as an art form. Satire is recognized as a particularly powerful form of social commentary (Speier 1998). Yet, the critique of power provided by the humor of the marginalized in everyday interaction has not received the same degree of attention.

Beyond that, fun is largely viewed as a diversion from and a threat to political commitment (Bayat 2010; Khalili 2016). This perception is historically present in both the religious and secular, bourgeois and communist, regimes and social movements (Bayat 2010). Pursuing public joy and everyday pleasures of life has been also read by some scholars as merely the entanglement in capitalist consumption and de-politicization (see Abu-Lughod 1990). However, these views ignore a common way in which the marginalized—especially queers, sex workers, and disenfranchised youth—engage in politics: by means of humor, fun, and laughter. Yet, these practices promise a different—and more subtle—kind of politics from those offered by social movements and open political confrontation. What is at stake here may not be mobilization, opposition, or resistance; but could instead be transgression, refusal, and disavowal, which I deal with below.

Humor, Laughter, and Joy as Refusal

A number of ethnographic studies recognize the political meanings of humor and pleasure for the marginalized. One way in which these affective gestures and practices are enmeshed in politics is through refusal. Humor, laughter, and joy can indicate refusal in a number of ways, though the kinds of refusal I refer to here are conceptually different from direct opposition and resistance, such as the acts explained in Chapter 5.

First, humor can refuse or destabilize the dominant script. For example, Taylor, Rupp, and Gamson (2004) found that drag queens combine entertainment and humor with politics, and in so doing they contest heteronormativity and rigid sexual and gender categories. Bing

and Heller (2003) observe that 'lesbian jokes' contest the dominant discourses, in particular the reduction of the lesbian to a mere sexual actor, the binary hetero/homo essentialism, and 'male superiority'. These studies suggest that humor can defy the normative scripts and the social hierarchies that they endorse, reminiscent of the social corrective interpretation of humor (Bergson 2005 [1911]). In other words, it makes a practice that is otherwise taken for granted, laughable.

It has been argued that humor signifies refusal among other groups that are politically and economically marginalized. In her inspiring ethnography, Diane Goldstein (2003:10) asserts that the humor produced by women living in the shantytowns of Brazil "opens up a discursive space within which it becomes possible to speak about matters that are otherwise naturalized, unquestioned, or silenced." In her work on contemporary Syria, Lisa Wedeen (2013:864), shows that comedy exposes the absurdities of everyday life, which in turn opens up possibilities for something different. Lisa Bhungalia (2020) conceptualizes humor as a way to point at the absurdities of the conditions imposed on the Palestinians in the occupied territories, namely war, occupation, and precarity. Focusing on authoritarian regimes, Asef Bayat (2010:155) explains that the spontaneity, openness, and critique that fun embraces, especially among young people in the Middle East, offer a way to exit the dominant paradigm of the religious and political authorities. What these works have in common is a belief that humor, fun, and laughter of marginalized populations can crack open the normative script and *refuse the naturalization of the dominant social discourse.*

Second, the embodiment of joy and laughter at the urban margins can also function as an act of refusal. Khalili (2016) argues that collective pleasure and conviviality offer an escape from the gridlock of control and discipline governing the lives of for young Palestinian women living in Lebanon's refugee camps. She interprets this as a refusal to accept enforced invisibility. Bhungalia (2020:399) describes the refusal of the marginalized woman who "laughs or smiles when she is expected to cower, to be mute, to be overtaken with fear." She conceptualizes the jovial display under the conditions of subjugation as the politics of disavowal. Drawing on Bakhtin's (1984) 'carnivalesque laughter', which offers temporary liberation from the prevailing social order, the ritualized practices of joy can be understood as an embodied *refusal of the effects of domination and control.* In what follows, we see that shared humor and joy that emerge at the margins have implications beyond those of mere refusal.

Humor and Laughter as Connectors

The social and shared nature of humor means that humor is closely related to the key sociological concept of social cohesion. Generally speaking, and as Coser (1959:172) notes, "to laugh, or to occasion laughter through humor and wit, is to invite those present to come closer." Joining in the joke and provoking laughter are considered signs of closeness and social understanding (Collins 2004; Katz 1996). Thus, humor works as a connector, fostering social relationships, establishing a shared understanding and intimacy, and playing a community-building role among those who share this common experience (Crawford 2003:1421; for a review see, Kuipers 2008).

Considering that humor addresses shared experiences, attitudes, and values (Downe 1999), it is a way to address the common experiences of violence, stigma, and exclusion for those who are socially, politically, or economically marginalized. In particular, humor, joy, and laughter act as vital connectors among those in queer subcultures. Bing and Heller (2003) explain that the humor created by the lesbian community in the United States draws on customary stereotypes about lesbians. This, in turn, plays a significant role in creating and preserving a shared culture within the lesbian community by affirming its values, beliefs, and politics. As explained earlier, there is evidence that humor serves similar functions in sex worker communities. For instance, Sanders (2004) notes that the humor of streetwalkers, which is typically related to their common experiences of violence and marginality, creates a sense of community belonging, solidarity, and collectivity.

In this chapter, I investigate what shared humor and joy mean in a context of violence and marginalization. In particular, I analyze my interlocutors' humorous play-acting, jovial interactions, and laughter and interrogate the ways in which they serve as a mode of refusal. Furthermore, I follow the anthropologist Carole McGranahan (2016) and argue that to refuse does not only mean disengagement. Like humor, refusal has a myriad of social and affiliative implications in this context. Building on the theoretical insights outlined above on the meanings and functions of humor in conditions of marginality, I reason that the humor that expresses refusal also generates a sense of collectiveness among trans sex workers. Conversely, creating a community characterized by humor and joy in the face of violence and marginalization acts as defiance to these conditions. Thus, the defying and community-building roles of humor are intertwined in my research context. On the one hand, this chapter contributes to the academic debate on the meanings of humor emerging at the urban margins and, in particular, to challenge the perspectives that leave the practices of humor, joy, and pleasure outside the realm of politics. On the other hand, it disputes the stereotypical characterizations of trans sex workers'

humor. In what follows, I start with the transgressive play-acting customary in the trans sex working community.

Transgressive Plays

> Performance is one of the most effective means for those who have been constructed by others as objects of desire and undesirable objects to enter into the discourse and create an immediate subject position from which to address the social.
>
> —Shannon Bell (1994:138).

One evening, while I was interviewing Meltem at the salon, she used the word "dick" in her response to one of my questions. Interrupting us, the hairdresser scolded her and asked her to have some decency: *Say 'my genitals'. Speak politely! Or 'my penis', instead.* In these situations, shopkeepers and waiters working in the neighborhood and some sex workers tended to treat me in a paternalistic way. As in this incident, the hairdresser of the salon where I spent most of my time, despite my objections, sometimes reprimanded her trans clients who swore when I was present: *Watch your mouth, there's a normal lady over here!* Unapologetic and defiant as usual, Meltem once replied: *Why would it matter, darling?* Then she raised her voice to an exaggerated pitch and adopted a traditionally feminine manner, swinging her body softly and fluttering her eyelashes rapidly, in a perfect self-parody, *my peeee-nis!* After laughing at herself for a few seconds, she immediately contrasted this with a strikingly masculine presentation and a deep voice, *my cock!* In this incident, Meltem mockingly defied the hairdresser who drew boundaries between the *lubunyas* and me and asked Meltem to comply with some "courtesy norms," which are inherently linked to these boundaries. By performing her queerness she had transgressed the rigid gender binary, mocking and rejecting such norms.

Expanding on Bell's (1994) words, my interlocutors incorporate brief and improvised plays into their social interactions. In these plays, they sometimes humorously 'announce' their stigmatized identities, both prostitute and *travesti*. For instance, when I asked Hayat what she had been doing after not seeing her for a while, she would often reply almost offhand: *just rubbing off honey, nothing new* or *I just keep on slutting around*. The dominant societal view that sex work is a reprehensible activity and that those who perform it must feel ashamed about it. Stigma and shame are, indeed, closely linked constructs. Psychological research demonstrates that internalizing stigma by seeing oneself negatively through the eyes of others leads to feelings of shame (Scheff 2011). But by announcing her job to others—whether they are sex workers or not—in an amusing and exaggerated way, Hayat's humor rejects the shame

of the normative scripts around sex work. I also heard other women using obscene or humorous language to describe the awkward incidents that they experienced whilst performing their job. They sometimes use reclaimed terms and expressions, such as 'slut' or 'whore', to refer to themselves or their colleagues. Reclaiming the language originally used to insult their own community is a common practice among marginalized groups (see Fasoli 2017). In the trans community, these terms are mostly used in witty and jocular ways. What is also important is that these humorous plays and interactions do not fit the stereotypical 'happy hooker' image; their exaggeration is what makes them transgressive.

Instead of masking, Meltem, Hayat, and other *lubunyas* "announced" their stigmatized identities in an entertaining and exaggerated way. I interpret this as a refusal of the shame inherent in societal preconceptions of prostitution and gender transgression. As Goldstein (2003) reasoned in the case of humor of marginalized women, this habitual play-acting opens up a discursive space in which gender norms and hierarchies are questioned and rendered absurd. By refusing shame, the humorous plays and interactions of *lubunyas* also redefine meanings associated to and help affirm their collective identity, and enhance their self-esteem. These observations are linked to the community-building role of humor (Kuipers 2008; Sanders 2004).

I do not believe that the social stigma surrounding the lives of my interlocutors has not been internalized at all, or that it never induces feelings of embarrassment or guilt. On the contrary, during interviews, some of my respondents told me that they feel ambivalent about sex work; a few of them even find it repugnant. Thus, different narratives exist alongside each other in this space. Neither do I claim that the refusal that humor serves in these cases is always intentional. This form of humor is quite habitual, yet, as noted in other marginalized contexts (see Bhungalia 2020; Wedeen 2013), it has a political meaning precisely because it cracks open the official narratives that support social hierarchies. In other words, the said humor creates an alternative discursive space that makes possible to bring into question the dominant narrative. The political meaning embedded in sex workers' humorous performances also strengthens their collective identity and creates a shared understanding.

Another common element of play-acting presented by my interlocutors is reversal; most commonly, they impersonate cis hetero, married, or virginal women in playful ways. For example, with a shocked face, Hayat sometimes spontaneously shriek: *I can't believe they're calling me a whore.* In her unanticipated pronouncements, Meltem often asked: *Have you heard that I'm virgin?* And Banu challenged her friends during fictitious quarrels: *You can't pick me up, I'm a virgin.* Through spontaneous and habitual proclamations or rhetorical questions, these

workers make a show of denying their identities and perform parodied reversals. We can interpret this play-acting using a Bakhtinian lens. According to Mikhail Bakhtin (1984), 'carnival' is an act of rebellion; a playful mockery that violates the hierarchical order. In his interpretation of carnival, the reversed performances integrated into the everyday life of the trans community allow for the exchange of roles and the inversion of hierarchy in ways that contradict the actual social order. Even if short-lived, this play-acting, which belongs to "the borderline between art and life" (Bakhtin 1984:86), creates a space for freedom. Taking this interpretation, laughter also offers a temporary liberation from the prevailing social order (Bakhtin 1984). What's more, acts of role reversal presented by *lubunyas* parody serious and venerated elements of the social order, for example, heterosexuality, marriage, and chastity. Thus, these reversals create a discursive space where gendered social roles or hierarchies are denied for a brief moment, which supports the potential of humor to refuse the naturalization of domination (Bhungalia 2020; Wedeen 2013).

In some cases, this play-acting brings together the glorified and the uncelebrated constructions of women. The two techniques described here, namely, the announcement of stigmatized identities and their denial, coincide in such performances. For instance, in the opening paragraph, Hayat had parodied a married woman, unyielding her modesty and fidelity, before rapidly moving on to perform a transgender prostitute, a promiscuous woman. In doing so, she crosses the line between these constructions of a woman and ridicules and defies the distinction created between these characters by gendered and sexualized hierarchies in general.

The humorous play-acting explained in this section consists of sophisticated, lively, and alluring presentations. They are reminiscent of a rhetorical technique[90] found in Ottoman literature; namely, sex workers feign ignorance in their dialogues, which make their play-acting more tantalizing and vivacious. Expressed under the pretense of being shocked, terrified, furious, irritated, or annoyed, their humor always captures the audience's attention. The exaggeration is palpable in their voices, gestures, language, and laughter. Obscenities, swearing and shrieks are commonplace episodes in the neighborhood. They take up space using their voices and their bodies; they are witty and loud; all performed skillfully. The elements integrated into these presentations are dealt with in more detail in the next section.

Jovial Interactions

During our interview, Aslı complained of how the media generally portrays trans sex workers as aggressive and indiscriminately associates them with criminality (see Chapter 2).

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[90] This sort of rhetorical question is known as *Tecâhül-i ârif*.

Then she described the cheerful atmosphere they always had in their house. "They should come to our house, film our lives, listen to our conversations. I'm confident they'll all want to stop by our place for a chat," she said. Despite layers of aluminum foil covering half of her head, an older cis-woman whose hair was being dyed turned around to interject, "Their conversations are delightful!" Pleased to find support, Aslı replied, "Exactly so, *abla*,[91] there's nothing but peals of laughter in our house!" Humor, wit, and laughter not only accompany the play-acting described earlier, but, as Aslı explained, they are also qualities of everyday sociality in the trans neighborhood. Although this dissertation has largely discussed grim topics, such as physical and structural violence (see Chapter 2), my interlocutors have a jovial demeanor, and my fieldwork was full of cheerful and light-hearted daily chats woven through friendly banter.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the linguist, Rusty Barrett (2018), who examined queer slang varieties in nine countries around the world, argues that these languages share an important feature: displays of humor. Indeed, the prevalence of humor and the playfulness of this subculture are evident in their slang. For instance, one *Lubunca* word I often heard during my fieldwork is *gullüm*,[92] which means joyous gatherings with lots of talking, fun, laughter, and banter among *lubunyas*. Scholars studying the social functions of slang varieties highlight the connections between social practice and language. According to Barrett (2018:236), "Queers have a history of enjoying each other's company, laughing at themselves, and relishing in the breaking cracks in the hegemonic discourse of heteronormative society". Here, he points at both the community-building role and the political meaning of humor and joy in queer subcultures.

Joking about each other's early days in the neighborhood, two experienced workers, Mine and Kamelya, were pretending to quarrel. Mine started: *You'll always remain a man, just as you [were when you] arrived.*[93] Mine teasingly reminded Kamelya of one of her very first days in the neighborhood when she used to exaggeratedly swing her hips while swanning around in white hot pants. In these playful conversations, they sometimes tease one another, or someone in the group is made the butt of the joke. Usually seen as amateurish or clumsy by their colleagues, *kezban* workers (see Chapter 3) tend to be teased for their attire, posture, and presentation. Those who are considered to have an excessively masculine presentation or who tend to 'over-perform' (conventional) femininity are frequently made fun of, too. Most of these

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[91] *Abla* means elder sister in Turkish and is commonly used when addressing an older woman with respect.
[92] Kaos GL. 2017. "En Sevdiğin Lubunca Kelime ne?" Retrieved February 20, 2019. (https://kaosgl.org/haber/en-sevdigin-lubunca-kelime-ne)
[93] "Adam geldin, adam gideceksin," in Turkish.

seemingly critical comments in close-knit groups are not meant in an antagonistic way. For example, the dialogue reported above is a fictitious quarrel common among friends. Chapter 3 has argued that quarrel-like interactions among *lubunyas* move the interpersonal tensions to different—less threatening and more manageable—areas of life. The above anecdote suggests that one of the areas in which tensions are expressed without damaging relationships in the community is humor. In this way, the humor that permeates everyday interactions helps foster community cohesion, which is indicated as a major social function of humor and laughter (Kuipers 2008).

Mine too was often teased by her younger colleagues. On one occasion, while Melda was chasing Mine in the beauty salon and threatening to pluck out her hair extensions, Mine complained almost in a whine: *Why is everyone joking around with me?* Melda gave a sarcastic answer: *Mine abla, everyone's teasing you because you're our elder sister. We all envy you.* Being an esteemed senior worker, however, with a modest income, Mine was used to hearing this kind of jokes, and immediately recognized the irony when responding: *Well, I hope you'll all look this good when you're my age*. This sort of banter signals a shared understanding and close relationships between workers. Like the jocular interactions common in other sex work environments (Sanders 2004), the kind of banter illustrated here also strengthens the bonds between workers and reinforces the sense of community belonging.

The creation of a community characterized by wittiness, conviviality and laughter has further significance in my research context. Drawing on the politics of pleasure articulated by Khalili (2016), I suggest that the embodiment and expression of joy by trans sex workers also have a political meaning. This meaning is embedded in the potential of shared joy and laughter to act as a refusal. Similar arguments have been made in contexts of violence (Bhungalia 2020). Contextualizing the described affective gestures helps clarify this argument. Throughout the dissertation, we have witnessed the pervasiveness of violence and exclusion that this population faces in different areas of life. Not only do they face a high risk of physical harm in their day-to-day lives, but also the treatment that they receive in social and institutional contexts is deeply dehumanizing. Besides, as explained in Chapters 2 and 3, moral denigration towards this social group shapes the spatial policies affecting their lives in urban areas. More specifically, the institutional practices of collective displacements and policing are aimed at making them invisible in public spaces.

In the face of these conditions, my interlocutors persist in being cheerful, loud, expressive, and visible both through humorous play-acting and everyday witty and playful interactions among themselves. They do so against the institutional attempts to render their

bodies invisible. They share laughter and joyful moments, despite relentless violence and humiliation. I am not suggesting that all these expressions of joyfulness are necessarily transgressive or oppositional. But they are defiant since they are a way for my interlocutors to refuse being reduced to the effects of violence, marginalization, and exclusion. As in Bakhtin's (1984) carnivalesque laughter, the refusal constituted by such affective gestures offers temporary release from the confines of the prevailing social order.

Humor and laughter have long been conceptualized as a psychological tool; a means of coping with adverse conditions. For instance, in dangerous or stressful work environments humor offers a psychological escape and distances people from the negative emotions caused by traumatic, difficult, or awkward experiences (Gouin 2004; Sanders 2004; Smith and Kleinman 1989). As with sex workers in other cultural contexts, jokes are used to share bitter stories with friends, and serve as an individual and collective coping strategy among my research participants. My argument is that jovial interactions have meanings that go beyond these functions.

Sociological theories of humor argue that humor is also used as a means to signal superiority, hostility, and exclusion (Kuipers 2008:382). This sort of humor reduces the barriers to the expression of negative emotions. I also witnessed this kind of humor during my fieldwork. For example, some of the quarrel-like interactions stemming from rivalries between sex workers, illustrated in Chapter 3, incorporate elements of humor. So, it is crucial to acknowledge that humor is occasionally used to denigrate fellow community members for their appearance, clothing, makeup, or plastic surgery. However, the central focus of this chapter is how humor expresses refusal and how it plays a community-building role.

The Researcher as an Object of Ridicule

After spending considerable time in the neighborhood, as my interlocutors became more accustomed to my presence, I sometimes became the object of ridicule myself; for instance, in a conversation with Şeyda who had kept her distance and been skeptical of me and my work for almost a year. When Şeyda eventually started a conversation with me, it was through a joke. She saw me hanging around the tea garden with a group of residents, and asked me across from the street: *What's up, Televole?*[94] Since *Televole* is a gossip TV program, I immediately felt disconcerted with this greeting. The joke implied that my role as an ethnographer was to scrutinize and publicize people's private lives in the same way as a gossip

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[94] Televole was a popular program on Turkish TV in the 1990s and 2000s. Since then, Televole is used as a generic term for gossip programs that reveal the private lives of famous figures (Doruk 2014:165).

columnist. Reflecting on my feelings of discomfort made me realize that this was, in part, our shared understanding. Her comment implied that while I was observing them, they were observing me. This dented the rigidity of the roles of observer and observed. With this jocular greeting, she made sure that her observations of me and her opinion of my fieldwork hit home. Since this encounter, Şeyda and I have had conversations every once in a while, and, despite my ongoing role as a researcher in the neighborhood, I now feel more accepted by her.

One late night in August 2018, while I was hoping to gather information about one of my research topics, Mine appeared at the beauty salon. With her elegant black dress, which she combined with dazzling vermillion nail polish, she looked stunning. But she said she was actually feeling weary. Just as she moved to put on some makeup, I sought help from her. First, she sighed. Imaginably, she was not so eager to answer my questions at that moment. And then, injecting a touch of humor, she posed a rhetorical question: *Ay, am I responsible for putting you through your education?* Here, she was also referring to the first time that she had patiently answered my interview questions. Despite her initial protest, she eventually agreed to have a brief chat with me while putting on her makeup, for which I felt eternally grateful. On this occasion, though with jest, Mine's remark pointed at the unequal relations between researchers and research participants in the field and touched on the questions of "whose efforts make this research possible?" and "who benefits from it?"

On another occasion, Hayat approached me out of the blue with a serious facial expression to interrogate whether I spoke Russian. Taken aback, I gave her a blank look. She then came closer, and, as if she was testing me, articulated something in a language I could not make sense of. Laughing at us, her co-workers explained that what Hayat said, in a fictitious accent, was actually Kurdish, not Russian. Proud of and amused by her little trick, Hayat winked at me and walked away giggling. Here, Hayat made fun of me, a person with relatively high level of education but who, nevertheless, did not understand Kurdish, a language that she spoke fluently. In this sense, her banter was a social corrective. Moreover, jokes reveal things about the relationship between the joker and the butt of their humor. Hayat claimed her place as a social agent who teased me in order to entertain her friends. The fact that her joke, based on my lack of knowledge, was intelligible to her close colleagues retains ingroup/outgroup distinction.

As much as I tried to build reciprocal, equal, and collaborative relationships endorsed by a feminist approach, these anecdotes demonstrate that power dynamics were still part of my fieldwork experience. My interlocutors' jokes were mostly related to my researcher role and the unequal power relations between us. Making me the butt of the joke did not eliminate power

issues, but their jokes exposed the inequality inherent in the "researcher-researched" relationship, clarified what this relationship entailed, and called into question the rigidity of these roles. Humor and laughter acted as a social corrector and a refusal of the normalization of social hierarchies, this time between my research participants and myself (see Bhungalia 2020). On the other hand, the comical interactions also had implications for my relationship with my interlocutors. I have been exposed to these jokes after we achieved a degree of familiarity and closeness. Humor was not only a sign of intimacy, but also what brought us closer. Most importantly, we shared laughter; I laughed at their jokes, myself, and the interview questions that sometimes seemed absurd, which indicated a common understanding of my work and our relationship. As a result of these partly uncomfortable, partly cheerful interactions, I developed close relationships with some of my research participants and felt more welcome in the neighborhood. By establishing a shared understanding, this practice of humor also served as a connector between us (see Crawford 2003; Sanders 2004).

Discussion

I had not considered writing about humor until I completed my fieldwork. I found the idea intimidating. First, writing about humor and laughter seemed a complex endeavor due to the fugitive and fragile nature of these forms of expressions (Macpherson 2008). We may not be fully aware of why we laugh at something. What seems funny and evokes laughter in one moment may not be amusing in the next, making it hard to explain and analyze. This is related to the fact that humor and laughter emerge from the intricate interplay of social, cultural, linguistic, and cognitive determinants. Second, humor takes its meaning from its the specific context, time, and place (Bergson 2005 [1911]). It is historically relative. Each group or community has its own style and form of humor, and this carries the deepest elements of its culture (Kuipers 2008). Therefore, exploring, recording, and grasping the humor of a social group calls for immersion in the 'field' and familiarity with the major aspects of its everyday life, interactions, emotions, play, leisure, and language. The contextuality of humor becomes particularly relevant when studying the humor of a subculture of which the researcher is not a member. In these cases research on humor requires a concerted effort to avoid contributing to the misrepresentation of a stigmatized group.

Given these difficulties, humor is not a theme that I had intended to pursue. Yet, it is such an integral aspect of my research participants' social interactions and relationships that leaving it out would misrepresent the jovial and sharp wit inherent in their everyday lives. At the same time, their humor, laughter, and joy have a social and political role that functions in

ways and in situations that other acts and expressions do not. Therefore, without an analysis of these expressions and affective gestures, my dissertation would have been incomplete. Nonetheless, writing about humor has been exceedingly difficult, fraught with uncertainties and doubt, both conceptual and ethical.

Despite its widespread presence, there has been little understanding of the humor created by trans sex workers in both public and academic debate. The common images of this social group disseminated by the mass media are of erotic, aggressive, criminal, or murdered *travestis*. In these presentations, as my interlocutors also claimed, there is no mention of joyous gatherings and witty conversations that fill their days. For the general public, their jovial display and the unrestrained laughter have been commonly attributed to the supposedly unpredictable mood and temperamental character of *travestis*. In other words, trans sex workers are not seen as the agents of humor.

In this chapter, drawing on humorous play-acting, jovial interactions, and laughter in the trans community, I examined the meaning of humor and joy in a context of violence and marginalization. While the literature tends to emphasize the individualized and psychological functions of humor (Bhungalia 2020:398; Billig 2005:195), I instead paid attention to the social and political meanings of humor emerging at the urban margins. Based on the politics of pleasure (Khalili 2016) and the corrective function of humor and laughter (Bergson 2005 [1911]), I analyzed the transgressive play-acting and jovial interactions in the trans community and argued that such affective gestures and performances signify refusal, though in different forms. Moreover, based on the interpretations of humor as a social connector (Crawford 2003; Sanders 2004), I argued that humor, joy, and laughter also have a community-building role among *lubunyas*. Finally, I considered the links between these social and political works in which humor engages in this context.

Bakhtin's (1984) interpretation of carnivals has been particularly helpful for explaining the humorous play-acting that relies on role reversal. By reversing roles, sex workers can ridicule the respectability attached to the notions of marriage, decency, and virginity in heterosexual mainstream culture. My interlocutors also 'announce' their stigmatized identities through entertaining and exaggerated plays and refuse the shame that societal preconceptions on prostitution and transgenderism try to impose on them. The humorous play-acting and laughter that they elicit open up a discursive space that reveals hypocrisy of and, by so doing, refuse to naturalize the gendered and sexualized social hierarchies that stigmatize *lubunyas* (see Goldstein 2003). On the other hand, McGranahan (2016) argues that refusal does not only refer to disengagement, but is also a generative process. The refusal inherent in the humorous play-

acting described here redefines the meanings associated with and affirms their shared identity, thereby playing a significant community-building role among *lubunyas*. The fact that I was teased by some of my interlocutors exposes the absurdity of the role of researcher and clarifies the power issues that this role entails in my fieldwork. This kind of humor also helped establish a shared understanding and intimacy in our relationships.

In addition, the shared joy and laughter permeate and strengthen everyday bonds and the sense of community belonging among sex workers. The creation of a community characterized by wittiness, joy, and laughter has further significance. Both humorous play-acting and jovial interactions in the neighborhood represent an embodied refusal, in other words, rejection of being reduced to the effects of exclusion, marginalization, and stigmatization. I follow Khalili's (2016) reasoning to define these affective gestures as the politics of pleasure or the politics of joy. Here, it is important to examine under what circumstances these practices and expressions appear. The visibility, loudness, vividness, expressiveness of my interlocutors, in other words, their highly conspicuous presence, emerge in a context where the dominant narrative tries to make their bodies invisible. Cheerful interactions, jovial display, and unrestrained laughter persist in the face of prevailing violence and dehumanization.

The humor, laughter, and joy ingrained in the everyday life of my interlocutors serve a political end; refusal. What these habitual expressions entail is, however, a different mode of politics from those shared by social movements or acts of resistance. The refusal that they promise is playful, indirect, spontaneous, and, at times, transitory. Considering this, the practices of humor and joy explained here suggest that politics is not constituted only by self-sacrificing acts with clear commitments and ideals. In agreement with Khalili (2016) and Bayat (2010), this interpretation challenges the theoretical and political perspectives that perceive humor and joy as a political betrayal or a sign of depoliticization. As this chapter exemplifies, humor and joy are crucial aspects of the politics of marginalized groups, such as queers, sex workers, and disenfranchised youth.

Analyzing queer slang varieties around the world, Barrett (2018) highlights the prevalence of humor and joy in queer subcultures. These qualities are also evident among the trans sex working community I have got to know. This chapter contends that humorous play-acting and jocular interactions have important community-building roles and political meanings among *lubunyas*. These two processes are interlocked. The political meaning entailed in sex workers' humor also creates a shared understanding and fosters a sense of collectivity.

Conversely, the creation of a community characterized by wittiness, joy, and laughter acts as the refusal of the effects of power.

In this chapter I am not suggesting, however, that humor is only deployed when other modes of politics are not feasible, or that humor is located at the opposite end of the continuum of political commitment. Indeed, humor is also commonly deployed by my research participants in their direct or visible articulations of resistance (see Chapter 5). For instance, they sometimes use raucous humor and mockery when they confront harassers directly. The intertwining of humor and resistance also exists in the politics of the broader trans and LGBTI+ communities in Turkey. The Pride and the Trans Pride Marches take place in several major Turkish cities, despite the bans imposed by local governors in recent years. These marches usually end with the crowds being dispersed by the police firing tear gas and making violent arrests. Under the shadow of a strong and antagonistic police presence and the use of force, Pride events, which are treated as a celebration in many other contexts, also resemble political demonstrations in this setting. At the same time, they are filled with humor, irony, singing and dancing and color.[95] In these events, joy and mobilizational politics are inseparable.

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[95] Istanbul Pride March in 2019. Medyascope. 2019. 27. "İstanbul Onur Haftası'nda en az 3 gözaltı." Retrieved September 10, 2021 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=luFAZXRs8sc&ab_channel=Medyascope)

Conclusions and Discussion

This thesis was motivated by a desire to understand how trans sex workers in Turkey make persistent efforts to counter the relentless violence, discrimination, and stigma which encircles their lives. Grounding my research in a neighborhood where a community of trans sex workers lives and works, I set out to study the articulations of everyday life in this space, in particular, by exploring their day-to-day experiences, practices, subjectivities, and aspirations. During my fieldwork, I encountered material, relational, and discursive possibilities created under marginality. Yet, at the same time, I observed how structural constraints create obstacles to these possibilities.

Revisiting the Chapters

Chapter 1 presented the history of prostitution and non-heteronormative customs of entertainment in Turkey and described the physical, spatial, and demographic aspects of the neighborhood and the organization of sex work where I carried out my fieldwork. Using the framework of structural violence, Chapter 2 explained the processes by which the legal, political, and economic practices of the state create violence, discrimination, and stigmatization for trans feminine sex workers. These processes, which work on a 'logic of disposability' of this population, operate in invisible and normalized ways, for example, through the instrumentalization of the law against them.

Most research on life at the urban margins considers marginality as either constraining or enabling. While structural accounts of urban marginality tend to overlook the articulations of the agency of urban dwellers, some agency-oriented perspectives in this subfield have neglected the overwhelming influence of structural constraints (Aceska et al. 2019; Woroniecka-Krzyzanowska 2019). Although marginality severely limits the actions of my interlocutors, the urban margin I explored in this research is not solely a space of control and exclusion. Instead, it is an in-between space of legality and illegality; integration and segregation; opportunity and deprivation. These ambiguities allow my interlocutors to create possibilities by establishing a multiplicity of relations and practices. In particular, Chapter 3 examined how sex workers have generated a local order—consisting of a social and spatial organization, shared codes, and work practices—that governs their everyday life. In a context where the protection and regulation provided by formal channels are limited, business activities and market and community relations are self-organized. The shared codes that regulate economic activity penetrate the community life. In much the same way, the organization of

community life also shapes the way in which labor is structured. The insights drawn from the social and economic organization explored here contribute to the knowledge of self-governance in socially excluded communities, on the one hand; and markets operating outside the formal (or legal) economy, on the other. This chapter suggests that through the organization of social and economic life, and the adherence to shared social codes, marginalized communities can navigate a diverse set of social dynamics in their relationships. While internal conflicts and rivalries remain among sex workers, community mechanisms foster social cohesion and facilitate community togetherness.

Chapter 4 explored the shared spaces, relationships, and support networks of the community. Providing the ground for their support exchanges and community mobilization, these community structures help sex workers to address their shared challenges. This chapter informs us of research on informal support mechanisms in gender non-conforming or same-sex desiring communities with limited access to state protection and family support. For instance, one noteworthy construct is the extended trans family, which is distinct from the nuclear formulations of queer families created on the basis of choice (see Braithwaite et al. 2010; Weston 1991). The trans family sees community-level engagements, especially in situations of severe violence and death, as part of its collective responsibility. While the community makes considerable efforts to support its members, we also find that the conditions of marginality tend to disrupt support mobilization and create interpersonal conflicts. These sorts of dynamics may render the solidarity which emerges at urban margins precarious. Chapters 3 and 4 reflect the complexity of social life for one of the most marginalized communities; in particular, they show how trans sex workers create a social world around themselves in the face of severe structural constraints and how solidarity perseveres despite interpersonal conflicts in this social world.

Another struggle investigated in this thesis is the overt resistance created by trans sex workers in recent Turkish history and the community that I have met. Chapter 5 observed that the condition of marginality both provokes and discourages resistance, namely, collective protest and individual confrontations. At times the precarity of their lives, living spaces, and labor discourages their engagement in oppositional practices to these conditions. These observations are partially consistent with the prevailing arguments in social movement and resistance studies that the lack of resources (McCarthy and Zald 1977) and the risk of harm or coercion (Scott 1989) create barriers to the emergence of open contestation. However, structural challenges inhibit, but do not preclude, the resistance of this population. To navigate through different risks and opportunities emerging in their contexts, sex workers also alter and

diversify the methods used to contest violence and marginalization. This chapter also demonstrates that *lubunyas* have historically been at the forefront of the queer struggle, whilst being one of the most targeted and socially marginalized of all.

In addition to these more concerted and deliberate efforts of resistance, I also witnessed indirect and playful means of defiance. As Chapter 6 demonstrated, the humor, laughter, and joy, which imbue the everyday life of my interlocutors, refuse the gendered and sexualized social hierarchies that stigmatize them. Humor and joy also play crucial community-building role in the sex working community. Following Bayat (2010) and Khalili (2016), these observations challenge the perspectives that leave the practice of humor and joy outside of the realm of politics. It also disputes the stereotyped characterizations of trans sex workers by the mass media and the general public. Together, all the alignments, practices, and commitments explored in this thesis help my interlocutors cope with, resist, persist, and thrive, in the face of excessively hostile circumstances in which they live and work.

Revisiting the Research Objectives

Based on the examination of different community practices, this thesis constructs the following argument: The urban margins, while facilitating alignments and informal means of organizing among people, are also the spaces where tension and rifts can form, and where struggles can become very fragile. As outlined above, my interlocutors engage in a rich repertoire of struggle. On the other hand, the precarity they face in different areas of their daily lives exacerbates feelings of competition, provokes conflict, destabilizes social support networks, and discourages visible acts of resistance against violence. Given the difficulties, disagreements, and dilemmas entailed in life at the margins, the commitments I have written about in this thesis go beyond the unequivocal solidarity or political agency with which marginalized urban communities are commonly associated. In short, informed by both the constraining and enabling capacities of margins, I offer a nuanced account of the urban agency emerging in this context by explaining both the possibilities such agency can create and the complexities and ambivalence it can involve. The profound ambiguities that shape urban marginality in this context generate both solidarity and conflict; not only does it facilitate, but it also impedes resistance.

Internal politics, rivalry, and conflict among the marginalized have a relatively minor presence in ethnographic accounts, which Sherry Ortner (1995) describes as "ethnographic refusal." I also struggled to write about these dynamics and was concerned about how my research output might portray an already stigmatized group. This was of a particular concern

because I was an outsider both to the sex working community and to the trans struggle, and my positionality as a cis woman meant large power asymmetries between my research participants and myself. Therefore, I had not only methodological, but also ethical preoccupations when it came to representation. However, I eventually came to agree with Ortner (1995) that the incomplete description of research subjects and local realities is a romanticizing tendency and denies the full humanity and subjectivity to those we study.

Does the complexity entailed in my interlocutors' struggles mean that their relationships are corrupt; that their efforts are futile; or that they are compliant? Quite the opposite; they engage in a variety of practices, some of which are, though fragile and scattered, transformative. For instance, they support and protect one another against external threats. In some cases, their acts and expressions of resistance to the violence, harassment, and humiliation in their day-to-day lives reduce the perpetuation of these treatments against them.

Besides, the collective practices detailed in this thesis enable my research participants to earn their living, claim visibility, establish friendships and communities, and look after one another. However momentarily and indirectly, they refuse shame and despair through humor, laughter, and joy. All this takes place against the structural forces that seek to dispose of, conceal, and dehumanize them. In their demonstrations, transgender community in Turkey often chant, "*Transız— buradayız—alışın—gitmiyoruz*" (We are trans—we are here—get used to it—we're not leaving). This persistence, as an everyday embodied, material practice, resembles what Aedo (2019) refers to as the "politics of presence" of migrant-settlers in a place denied to them. Its political meaning lies in its defiant potential. To be clear, the kind of agency involved in most of the everyday practices discussed here differs from the agency entailed in commitments with a clear political intention. Yet, the possibilities brought about by these everyday actions should also be recognized. Laleh Khalili's (2016) remarks are particularly insightful in this regard: "My concern is that I, we, write in scholarly journals and books, adjudicating the lives of others, measuring them against impossibly heroic indices of struggle, exhorting them towards grand utopias, demanding an austerity in commitment [that] we ourselves do not observe." Most of the practices I have explained in this thesis are not dramatic expressions of political commitment. But considering how hard it is to sustain this material and social persistence on a day-to-day basis, and the currents that my interlocutors go against in doing so, this persistence itself could be read as a defiance of the structures that marginalize them. What is at stake is not just mere survival. The collective practices discussed here have also generated new possibilities, namely, an alternative family, ways of organizing the community, and means of subsistence. In sum, the thesis recognizes and explains sex workers'

persistence and the possibilities generated by their collective practices, despite the structural obstacles that complicate them.

How has a focus on the urban margins enhanced the knowledge about trans sex workers' experiences in Turkey? To date, the central preoccupation in the literature has been how state practices and legal structures make trans women sex workers vulnerable to violence or cause them harm. My thesis instead considers their experiences as *a community* living at the urban margins. Through a street-level analysis, it interrogates the links between the local problems that this community encounters and the broader politico-legal and economic structures. Moreover, the thesis addresses how the urban margins provide this community with relational and material opportunities, which is a less explored aspect of trans sex workers' lives in Turkey. For example, it enables them to meet one another and to establish links with other economically or politically marginalized groups, political organizations, and LGBTI+ associations. Urban space and the dynamics that unfold in that space have also helped them to establish a street market which provides them with a living. Finally, the urban margins also facilitate the construction of relationships and collective practices. My thesis thus shows that urban marginality is a significant component of the lives of trans feminine sex workers in Turkey.

How has my research contributed to the broader body of scholarly literature at the intersection of sexuality and the urban margins? Trans feminine sex workers are among the most marginalized groups in the city, yet their experiences have been largely neglected by urban literature. More generally, gender and sexuality have not been considered relevant and significant analytical categories when it comes to understanding urban subordination and politics (Seitz 2015). Throughout this thesis, we have seen that the marginalization of this social group, which results from stigma towards their gender identity and sexual practices, has also meant the lack of alternative employment options, material precarity, spatial exclusion, and violence. Therefore, based on their community practices and localized struggles, trans sex workers strive not only for recognition of, and respect for, their gender identities and cultural differences but also for space, housing, livelihood, and safety. In other words, this local sexuality-based group has not come together to address identity-based concerns alone; their demand is also to exist in the city, to be emplaced and to enjoy basic social rights. Thus, my research maintains that gender and sexuality are among the categories based on which urban order is created and contested. Such observations highlight the commonalities between the experiences of some sexual dissidents and those of other groups living on the fringes of cities.

Methodological Reflections

Employing different research methods, namely, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and online sources, allowed me to examine different aspects of my research topic. While participant observation informed me about the day-to-day activities and conversations of my interlocutors, the interviews revealed their past experiences. Finally, the analyses of online sources made possible to scrutinize the social, economic, legal, and political forces shaping their lives. Instead of considering the knowledge that each of these methods offers separately, I tried to synthesize their insights in order to obtain a more complete understanding of the lives and struggles of trans sex workers in Turkey. Making use of different methods broadened the scope of my research geographically and historically, hence taking continuity and change into account. For instance, I looked at the everyday practices of my research participants in the light of the conditions of structural violence and the broader history of trans mobilization in Turkey. Clearly, combining different approaches is not unique to my research; the historical reflections are increasingly integrated into ethnographic writings that aim to shed light onto the present.

While constituting distinct methods, what is common in my employment of all these methods is my reliance on the grounded theory approach. This lets me shape my research based on the lived experiences of trans sex workers, rather than imposing pre-constituted academic/political positions onto their lives. Open coding, in which researchers diligently explore the data with an open mind without any restrictions, was my central strategy in grounded theorizing. This step was followed by identifying relationships between some of the codes and regrouping them into broader categories, whilst eliminating others, which led to the emergence of conceptual categories.

Limitations and Future Trajectories

This study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, it should be considered in the light of the limitations caused by my positionality. Although I have found common grounds and established close relationships with some of my interlocutors, my partial outsider status and the power imbalances caused by this led some community members to treat me with a degree of distance and wariness. As a result, there have been topics that I have not managed to explore and people with whom I have not spoken. For example, I have not gained access to the private social media groups of my research participants. All this may have created gaps and biases in my research findings.

The topics explored in this thesis, despite their commonalities, correspond to different bodies of literature. While bringing together diverse modes of struggles and practices is one of the strengths of the thesis, this broad scope has also limited the space that I could dedicate to each central topic explored. In order to delve deeper into the questions examined in this text, future work could take up and discuss further some of these themes separately. For instance, there are interesting questions that have emerged from my analyses in Chapter 3, which deserve further attention. In particular, the discussions on the roles of socio-spatial practices and the conflicts in the community could be fruitfully extended.

While this thesis has discussed a diverse set of practices, it by no means offers an exhaustive list of the struggles engaged in by trans sex workers. For example, one crucial site of trans struggle is the body (Spade 2006). While I touched on the topic of body modification in parts of the text, I have not written extensively about it as a mode of struggle. Related questions are what categories are used for self-identification, how gender is performed, and what sexual practices exist in this subcultural context. Although I have discussed some of these themes, for instance, to introduce the sex worker community, the sexual practices of my interlocutors did not occupy a central place in this thesis. What queer theory can learn from the local genders and sexual practices in this context should be a topic for future work.

Although this thesis predominantly addresses the structural and everyday violence encompassing the lives of trans sex workers, the violence that this population faces in Turkey and elsewhere takes myriad forms. For instance, a deeply-rooted and normalized transphobia in this cultural context, whilst exemplified in different parts of the thesis, was not discussed systematically. There is a need for a more thorough elaboration of the cultural aspect of the violence perpetuated against trans sex workers.

I should also highlight that since I completed my fieldwork, the lives of my interlocutors have changed significantly, and certainly not for the better. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has increased their vulnerability. Excluded from government relief programs and social protection schemes, many trans sex workers in Turkey—as in many other countries (Lam 2020)—have continued to work, despite the health hazards involved.[96] They did so in a context of more repressive policing and surveillance on the streets as part of the government measures to clamp down on the spread of the pandemic. Another recent development that has impacted

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[96] Çabuk, İrem Ece. 2021. "Pandeminin görünmeyen yüzü: Seks işçileri anlatıyor." Retrieved March 3, 2022. (https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/pandeminin-gorunmeyen-yuzu-seks-iscileri-anlatiyor-1853815)

sex workers' lives is Turkey's "currency and debt crisis" ongoing since 2018.[97] The reflection of the deteriorating economy was observable in the sex market while I was conducting my fieldwork. Yet the situation has accelerated recently during the pandemic, with soaring inflation, rising poverty, and increasing numbers of unemployed.[98] Like other precarious working groups, trans sex workers have suffered to a disproportionate extent as a result of these crises.

Recent years have also seen a surge in anti-gender discourse and policies globally (Korolczuk 2020). Resisting all forms of gender equality, these movements also attack the rights of trans people. For example, in 2020, Hungary ended the legal recognition of transgender and intersex people and banned the dissemination of information about homosexuality, gender identification, and sex reassignment in schools.[99] In 2021, and despite alarming rates of violence against women, Turkey withdrew from the Istanbul Convention—a treaty designed by the Council of Europe to prevent and combat violence against women (including trans women). Given that violations against trans sex workers frequently go unpunished, this legally binding treaty was reassuring as it overrides contradictory national law and rules that honor, customs, and traditions cannot be regarded as grounds for violence. Hence, the political environment is once again becoming more hostile against this population. The potential reflections of these recent political, economic, and legal changes on trans sex workers' lives, which are not included in this text, provide a direction for future research. At the same time, youth queer activism in Turkey's larger cities has been thriving in recent years, for example, the Genç LGBTİ+ Association in Izmir that works in solidarity with the trans sex working community. Future research discussing trans politics should incorporate their efforts and direct voices more attentively.

Social and Political Significance

The relevance of this study goes beyond the scholarly debate. It documents the violence, abuse, and discrimination perpetrated against trans feminine sex workers by specific social actors. It explains these social realities through the narratives of my interlocutors and without downplaying the realities of violence and injustice. By investigating how violence is

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[97] O'Brien, Matt. 2018. "Turkey's economy looks like it's headed for a big crash". Retrieved March 3, 2022. (https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2018/07/13/turkeys-economy-looks-like-its-headed-big-crash/)
[98] Cohen, Patricia. 2021. "How Did Turkey's Economy Go So Wrong?" Retrieved March 3, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/14/business/economy/turkey-inflation-economy-lira.html
[99] Knight, Kyle and Lydia Gall. 2020. Hungary Ends Legal Recognition for Transgender and Intersex People. Retrieved March 1, 2022. (https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/21/hungary-ends-legal-recognition-transgender-and-intersex-people)

recurrently practiced, justified, and normalized, this research also underscores the structural aspects of violence, which individual-level accounts tend to neglect. The study also shows that the policing faced by trans sex workers in inner city districts forces them to conduct their trade in remote areas, which in turn increases their vulnerability. Another finding is that marginalizing sex workers in the moral discourse and geographical space are interconnected processes, which are reinforced through the collaboration between groups of urban residents and the police in order to remove manifestations of street prostitution in the inner neighborhood.

Some of my findings also challenge the mass media's stereotyped representations of, and the general public's misperceptions of, trans sex workers. Reviewing how LGBTIs are depicted by the Turkish media, Tar and Güner (2014:17) argue that the assaults committed against trans sex workers do not get much same media coverage. In media narratives, trans sex workers are often constructed as individuals with violent tendencies who are aggressive to the general public without reason. The short documentary, entitled, *Travesti Terörü* (Atasay 2005) reviews a variety of TV and newspaper reports released in the early 2000s and demonstrates that "transvestites and transsexuals" are portrayed by the Turkish media as "terrorists", "monsters", and "filth". Esmeray, a well-known trans woman who features in the documentary, contends that the true lives and demands of this group do not have coverage in the same mass media. A journalist, Tuğrul Eryılmaz, who also contributed to the documentary, argues that the sensational discourses of the mass media 'legitimize' the incidents victimizing trans sex workers, intensify animosity in society, and even provoke police repression against this group. My thesis disputes the hegemonic knowledges perpetuated against this population and demonstrates that the physical resistance that the trans community engages in emerges as a response to the violence that pervasively targets them.

The political relevance of this thesis also concerns the questions of voice and visibility. Ethnography is potentially helpful in understanding the lives and locations that are silenced or made invisible by power. To prioritize the voice of my research participants, I tried to remain as close as possible to the empirical data and the exact accounts I recorded. Some of my interlocutors played an active role in interpreting the events, relations, and conversations, which made the research process more collaborative. More generally, grounded and relational theorizing have allowed for lived experiences and accounts of the community to guide the research process.

Although there are a few notable oral histories (see Siyah Pembe Üçgen 2012, 2013) and other academic research (see Selek 2011; Zengin 2014), systematic documentation of the

past and present lives of this social group has been largely absent. For example, the horrific treatment and persecution that *lubunyas* underwent during the military regime are non-existent in the collective memory of the nation. By documenting a small portion of their long-enduring social practices and struggles, the thesis records a social history that has had little visibility in academic texts. Addressing the issues around voice and visibility has implications for the knowledge produced. These attempts reveal alternative forms of knowledge, meaning, and modes of existence, which are, in part, excluded from and defiant of the dominant national/urban narratives.

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