ÖZGÜR PROJE

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PROJECT NAME: BREAKING THE PREJUDICE AROUND TRANSSEXUAL IDENTITY AND RECLAIMING THEM IN MAINSTREAM ECONOMIC ACTIVITY- CAN ART BE A WAY FOR THIS?

Our main focus is sexual identity in Turkey and the ties it has to economics and culture. Transsexuals have been prone to discrimination and are percieved uni-dimensionally and negatively in the eyes of the public. Our question is how to break this prejudice and represent transsexual identity in a multi-dimensional way, to normalize it and break the dehumanization around it, and if it is possible to achive this through art practices.

 Turkey has been a country where the area of culture has been determined by the state. There has been a change from the Ottoman Empire into the Turkish Republic. The gender roles and conception of sexuality were different in the Ottoman times as it is now. The current conception and mistreatment of transsexuals are products of the unique history of Turkey and this will form the basis of our study. We will position our arguments on a social-science basis.

 We think that the discrimination against any group based on their sexual identity or orientation is a violation of basic human rights. The way transvestites and transsexuals are pushed under society and forced to do illegal work is not something to be silently watched. We feel it is our responsibility to search ways and do our contribution to change this situation. Because we are in the Cultural Studies Programme, we are trained to locate undercurrent ties between culture, gender and class relations and the issue of transsexuals in Turkey is an area where all of these seemingly irrelevent problems get crossed. So we are asking the question, what place can art play in this challenge? Because the sphere of art is relatively free of codes, we think the chance of it being utilized by the transsexual identities to avoid sex work is higher. Also, because art has a transformative power, it can also empower the transsexual identities and help them see themselves in a new light and refuse to adhere to the place left to them by the system. In conclusion, art can empower them both economically and symbolically.

EXECUTION PLAN

 Our project will mostly depend on anthropological expeditions and interviews with transsexuals from various backgrounds and professions. We will not only speak with sex workers, but also with transsexuals who have somehow managed to escape this system-imposed “destiny” and are working in other spheres. This is actually our aim, to break the stereotype and show Turkey that transsexuals are multidimensional humans. Esmeray, a transsexual woman who has started off as a sex worker but was introduced to theater through a sociological project and then moved on to write and perform her own plays, will occupy a central place in our study. Not only was she able to leave the sex work and become an actress, she also became a writer of an editorial in the newspaper Taraf and thus entered popular culture. We will interview her as well as numerous other transsexuals as mentioned above, and take photos and video shootings. The visual aspect of our project will be as prominent as our textual.

 Other than field work, we will do readings on relations between state, economy and sexuality. Our findings will be considered through the lens of what we read and will be processed based on theory. Also we will do research on comparative cultures such as how transsexuals are represented in Western media and popular culture.