



Q&A: Maria Binder

“The urban redevelopment is strongly connected with the trans* community.”

Interview: Ceyda Aşar - IKS

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Thousands of trans* women live in the big cities of Turkey. Since 2009 there has been an increase in the murder of trans* but the perpetrators can usually rely on being exempted from prosecution. Ebru K., a trans* woman from Istanbul, fights against the displacement and murder of her companions. For 25 years, she has been active in defending human rights and the rights of LGBTIQ. She wants to change the Turkish society with humour, self-irony and political acumen with *Trans X İstanbul*. Director Maria Binder has answered our questions.



Let's begin with your story. Why did you choose to live in Turkey? How did you decide to make *Trans X İstanbul* which is on transgender people?

I came to Turkey in 2001 for the first time to make a film about women who were sexually tortured by police and military and accused by the state for talking about it. So together with my film colleague Verena Franke we wanted to make a film about their situation in their own country to create awareness in Germany and the other European countries for women- specific asylum reasons. In the context of this shooting I met Ebru for the first time. I learned about her situation, about trans* in Turkey, how our film's issue with women was connected to gender roles and gender construction, and how the state and its institutions use this against women and trans* people. Ebru and I became close friends, lovers. One day I got a flood of email messages that Ebru was killed, together with the news was her picture, also on different Internet platforms. But it was a mistake in the surname, however a trans* friend was killed. And the reality was: every week a trans* was killed, mostly by cutting her throat. What kind of expression is killing like that? It seemed to be the best way to make a film about and raise awareness to this issue.

Was it easy to find the budget?

It took a long time to find money for this project. No one cared about trans*. I also did not want to make just a film and that's it. So I also created a concept for crossmedia and an educational project in

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connection with Istanbul LGBTTT organization. When we received funding for the film from European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights through the help of IKGV, I moved to Turkey to make the film and to implement the project together with Ebru. And my mother joined me.

It would be so simple to say that film's is about trans-gender people. It is also about urban redevelopment agenda. Starting from Tarlabaşı you reach to Gezi Parkı protests. The city they live in also shapes their living circumstances and future. But apart from that, why did you want to focus on the urban redevelopment projects in your film?

The urban redevelopment is strongly connected with the trans* community. In the 1990s they lived in Cihangir as a big community and were persecuted and tortured by the chief of police "Hortum" Süleyman and dispelled of their neighborhoods by their neighbours. Before that they had the same experience in Pürtelas and Kazancı Yokuşu. Today it happens in Tarlabasi and in Avcılar. Economic interests and prejudices work strongly together.

We are talking about hate crimes. In the film I wanted to show it works like a system, a structure connected with different components which are producing and reproducing, feeding and using each other; family, media, judges, police, hospitals, doctors, prejudices, economical interests, gender roles... the connection between social gender roles and structural violence. Urban redevelopment is one component of it.



Once you began shooting this documentary what was on your mind? And how things had changed? I guess you didn't know that huge protests would begin in the streets on May-June 2013. How did you adapt your screenplay or plans to it?

Of course we did not know how it came. We have been at Gezi in the very beginning when there were only about 40 tents and no other camera. No media talked about it. Gezi Parkı was always an important area for trans * and gay people as a cruising and working area. Ebru suggested to go there and film. Later we were involved with Gezi like everyone was involved.

The film has two different parts. On one part, which is ¾ of the film, you focus on Ebru and her friends, their problems in the city. Istanbul is also a character on that part. The other part takes place in Zonguldak. Although we are still following Ebru, these scenes has another rhythm, very intimate and hard to swallow. Why did you want to get so close to the family members?

I knew Ebru's story with her family and how she was still suffering from their exclusion even such a long time ago. I think I forced her a bit to realise this journey to Zonguldak. In the film it is important to understand what it means to be excluded. To be excluded by state and society is one thing. But to be expelled by your own family is very hard to cope with. In the film we get to know Ebru from the beginning as a very strong, self-confident and courageous woman. She listens to all the problems of

her friends gives actively support and shows ways how to cope and to fight with discrimination. But this strong woman has her own wounds, too. That is what we see and feel in Zonguldak.

You introduce us two people, we learn their story from them, and then we learn about their death. You make them alive and as time goes by the documentary lives the effects of real-life...This makes the documentary living and changing all the time

As the reason for the film was already the increasing number of murdered trans*people, I wanted to tell about the hate crimes and how they develop. It is incredible: you research and analyze the mechanisms of hate crimes and murders and it happens just as the trans* people stated in the beginning against their opponents: you are staging a lynch event, you are engaging hate crimes with your speech. And then it really happens.

This film is part of multi-platform projects about transgender people in Turkey. What are the other projects? Are you also involved in them?

I'm a lesbian. I always wanted to combine the film with a benefit for the community and outreach campaign. The projects contain the following activities you can also follow on our [website](#) and on Facebook.

How do you feel about being in the FACE Human Rights Competition of the Festival?

It is the world premiere of the film and I'm happy that the issue is on the right place.