TRAILS

Hacking the Official History
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PREFACE:
What does one miss the most?

We have various yearnings as different as our existences. But there are longings that we can all share as one. The longing in the meaning of need. The person needs to be heard because it is already hard to make a sound. We wish to be able to entrust our story. To be able to abide under this sky as more than a pleasant echo...

Official narratives are not created only by the states. Just as fascism is not only found in macro politics. In fact, it’s like Ingeborg Bachmann, the one that never is quoted enough, said: “Fascism doesn’t begin whit the first bombs that are dropped, nor with the terror that can be written about in every newspaper. It begins in the relationship between people. Fascism is the first thing in the relationship between two people.” As such, in order to break down the memorized discourses in the memory of society, one has to look at the unique human stories, at the truth that is leaking out of the crack.

This is exactly what “Trails: Hacking the Official History” does.

What is meant by trail is a rugged goat path. What’s more, it’s not a known, well-built road. It’s formed by the erosion of your persistent footprints. Everyone we hear in this book is one of those who build that path individually and cooperatively. Ignored, moreover distorted or pontificated story of LGBTI+’s.

The very subjects are here. Those who have to fight against discrimination, ignorance, and prejudice for their own existence are saying, “Let’s start if you’re ready”. These stories will reach their destinations as much as you pay attention, as much as you learn to listen to them. So it’s imperative that you aspire to absorb not only the narrative, but also the sayings like “cutie”, “I mean”, “actually”, “the thing is”; to the exclamation points, the sighs, the pauses, and triple dots too.

Seventeen people who have looked and made us look at our last thirty years by tearing apart the makeshift narratives weaved in their absence... Seventeen people who share the grand details of their small lives, even when describing events that are turning points of the movement’s history, present a brand-new history and archive woven from voices in this way... And of course, the whole team that set off due to the necessity for a completely different perspective on
memory, history, and archive, including Yıldız Tar who prepared the book for publication and gave birth to the project... I’m grateful to them all individually.

There are memories of places and people here. The strange encounters and coincidences of life. Childhood and early youth loneliness. The authenticity of those who can’t fit in the roles that are imposed on themselves as the norm. Have you ever found an encyclopedia description and rejoiced that there were others other than you? Have you ever searched for your tribe almost by smelling for it like an animal? Happiness and suffering, enthusiasm and anger, frustration and hope are intertwined.

Svetlana Alexievich had a purpose while creating a whole new genre and language by blurring the boundaries of oral history and literature: “History only deals with facts, emotions are not taken on board. They’re not included in the history. I am already looking at the world as a human, not as a historian... I’m a historian of the soul. On the one hand, I study a particular person, yes, but on the other hand, I need to be able to see the eternal personality in them. The vibration of eternity. The thing that is always present in human beings. I build shrines from our emotions... From the things that have been experienced through our desires, our disappointments, but that can slip away.”

I can’t help but wonder how would Svetlana Alexievich be impressed if she read this book. I want to leave this book on the streets, in waiting rooms, in restaurants, university canteens, bus stops, like fanzines replicated from hand to hand at a time when the narrators shared with the enthusiasm of youth.

The voices speak to each other and to us. Those who remember, while clearing their memories from the beginning, are creating today with years of experience. We see the cyclicality of time once again. What we’ve been through back and forth. Those that we came together despite the ones that separate us.

What does one miss the most? Having no obligation to explain, to defend yourself. To be understood outright. To be stitched to other stories. To be one with life. And, of course, not to compromise your existence.

Sometimes the narratives sound like mutant stories. Those who discover that everything that is different from the state of not knowing what to do with oneself is, in fact, the power itself... They tell it all without mincing words. So it’s a test to be able to listen now.

These stories also show just in the middle of transfeminism and HIV+ debates, what an embarrassment it is to pontificate on the lives you don’t know; of course to those who want to see it.
This book is a slap to the face for those who reproduce fascism while claiming they are against it. I would like it to embarrass some people. The ones that suffered the most from the language of hate, the ones that targeted, killed in the middle of the street, with their funerals unclaimed; the ones that have paid the price believing all that are parts of life, understand every aspect of a person. They laugh away your rudeness after all. They narrate gently, gracefully and pause into a deep silence. Then waits for the interlocutor to listen.

Are you the interlocutor of these stories? If you’re ready, let’s get on with it.

Karin Karakaşlı
PROLOGUE: Fractured and fragmented history is beautiful

The entry of the memory issue into my agenda coincides with the days when we talked about oral history at Kaos GL. We were able to conduct the oral history study in 2018, which we started talking about in 2014. We’ve been studying oral history for two years. With each new interview, we participate in the story of a singular life. Each story opens a new door and invites us to a new world. And when we accept that invitation, it takes us for a stroll through the unknown geographies of that world. At each interview, I feel like we’re listening to songs about heartbeats, headaches, hand tremors, first thrills, dreams, disappointments, shame, embarrassment, pride, anger, compassion, compassion.

As we set out for oral history, we had a goal of bridging the singular and personal stories. By building bridges, we wished to go from personal memory to collective. But on the way, we changed, transformed, and the boundary between the personal and the collective got blurred. With the boundary becoming chaotic, we began to move away from the bridge metaphor. Bridges have become emotional bonds. Emotions set their sights on the field of the rationality and regained that space. So how did this happen?

Heteronormativity not only shapes the actuality but also presents a narrative of history. In the narrative it presents, there is a state of eternal heterosexuality with the company of cisgenderism. The relationship of history and heteronormativity as a contemporary, hierarchical ideology of discrimination, lies precisely in the desire to establish itself as a functional, regulatory, controlling, disciplinary ideology. Heteronormativity, with its fantasy of eternal normative sexuality and gender, breaks the history of queers. It pushes you out of grand narratives. Like any exclusion strategy, it runs an accompanying inclusion strategy. Although it varies according to time, space, culture and society; the inclusion strategy becomes an important tool for subjugating sexuality and gender. When it comes to historical narratives, this inclusion strategy transforms into the element of comedy that develops in moments of panic, into the history of strangeness, extraordinary lives, marginal experiences. The concept of “gay panic”, first proposed by
psychiatrist Edward J. Kempf in 1920 through “Spending copious amounts of
time with members of the same sex in a confined or limited atmosphere” in a
very narrow sense, may be useful in understanding the reflexes of history writing
and historical perception. When we take the homosexual panic, which Kempf
describes as “a clinical-level panic”, from the field of psychology to the sociologi-
cal plane, we encounter this: simultaneous, synchronic and chronic exclusion and
inclusion mechanisms, sees no harm in using this panic as a mean and an end.
The LGBTI+ panic is a tool because phrases such as “faggots that stroll in Beyoğlu”,
“male voice in women’s clothing” used in the ‘80s media for transwomen turn
into phrases used to describe an entire identity. This definition creates LGBTI+
panic, instrumentalizes it, and it feeds on panic to justify torture. This panic is
also the goal. It indicates a stage that must be reached. LGBTI+ panic is the target
in this sense.

The first question we asked ourselves by feeding on this background was:
How can we put together a history that was torn apart in panic?

In Illuminations, Walter Benjamin looks at Paul Klee’s Angelus Novus, the
angel of history. His eyes, mouth, and wings are open; The angel of history, who
has turned his face to the past, said, “Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees
one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it
in front of his feet.” Benjamin speaks of the angel’s desire to stay there, to resur-
rect the dead, to reunite the smashed. Maybe not to stay there glow that oozes
from the gaps, from the debris…

We searched for the glow in the eyes of each other, in public baths, parks,
dormitory rooms, bars, coffee shops, streets, excavation areas, archives, cinemas.

With 25 years behind, we decided to look at our traces. We wanted to talk
about the history that we created by knitting the traces together; what we re-
member; what we’ve forgotten; our history that is broken, that is divided into
pathways, sometimes flowing like a river, sometimes still like a lake.

Our second question was about the archives. The archive is often illustrated
as a rational, consistent, reasonable heap. An overlapping, accumulated, chronolo-
gical stack. Is the queer archive like this? Where the life stories and archives of
history that heteronormativity shattered apart are hidden? A short movie, filmed
Pink Life Queerfest in 2016 could open a new door to answering these questions.
In the film, the archive is discussed around a round table. And the possibility of
a fugitive archive, the function of evidentiality of the archive, and moreover, the
tendency to permanently demolish the archive is on the foreground. Onur Çimen
reiterates this question and the contradictions in the quest of queer history writ-
ing for sources in both their article on K24 and at Kaos GL's Memory and History Conference: Is a fugitive archive possible?

The answer to these questions in our work, with inspiration from Sara Ahmed, was to treat the archive and history as an emotional process. It was impossible to listen to the narratives of LGBTI+’s we interviewed with a classical archivist and historian approach. Moreover, it was not in line with our attempt to re-establish-
ment of what is personal. For this reason, we chose the method of oral history and again, for this reason, we listened to the life stories instead of focusing on an era, event or theme.

Another thing we tried to do was to look at the feelings that those facts and crossroads call, rather than focusing on facts and historical crossroads them-

selves. For example, on the Symposium on The Problems of Lesbians and Gays and The Search for Solutions for Social Peace what is essential for us was the nar-

rative of Oya Burcu Ersoy’s of opening up to their family in that conference, the shaking of Oya Burcu’s hands during giving the keynote speech, the excitement and how that excitement was carried to this day rather than the sheer historical importance of the symposium, which is one of the first public events of the LGB-

TI+ movement in Turkey

Our intention to bridge between all these fragmented narratives of history has changed and transformed along the way. Instead of bridges, we evolved into feelings that called each other. So much that Mine Yanat’s narrative of their expe-

riences in a girls’ highschool in 80’s started to conversate with Umut Güner’s feel-
ings when they have found the word “homosexual” in the encyclopedia. Again Umut Güner’s closed curtains while having sex with the neighbor’s son in the house in Yozgat and consequential thoughts on the “necessity of creating other curtains” complemented each other with Yasemin Öz’s question “Is there some-
one like me?” and the hidden story in a book of Murathan Mungan.

During this study, we searched for the traces in a girls’ high school in the ‘70s, in newspapers that riddled the bodies of trans women in the ‘80s, in Guvenpark, in the passion at a bathhouse corner in the ‘90s, in house meetings and in many other places. The echoes of our quest were different in each narrative, and we realized that: Broken and fragmented history is beautiful. Narratives are history by themselves. History is a whole of feelings, and what we remember calls what we forgot, and what we forgot calls what we remember. Collective history is not found grand narratives but hidden in feelings that talk with each other.
As a product of these questions and searches, this book that is in your hands has emerged. You can start reading this book, which you can see as a stop in our ongoing oral history study, from any page you like. In each passage, you will come up with a story that will address you and share your voice. The book contains the story of 17 people who crossed paths with Kaos GL and Lambdaistanbul in the ‘90s and early 2000s. We have limited our work to these two organizations, which were established in the early 90s and are still operational, but we hope to expand further in the incoming process.

We have no intention of telling the history of the LGBTI+ movement in this book. We are aware of the limitations of a book. This book is a collection of stories that glide through the memories of the people who lived that history. In the coming period, we intend to diversify the work, reach out to people we could not reach before and continue our memory journey with new videos, interviews, and books.

We chose to divide the interviews into thematic sections rather than publish them as interviews. In this way, we hope to give back the value it deserves to broken and fragmented history. It was another choice not to get in the way of our interviewees stories as an outside voice. We wanted to leave you completely alone with our interviewees.

We would like to thank Gülay Kayacan, who has shared their knowledge and experience with us since the beginning of this study, and all of our interviewees who have agreed to meet with us and shared their stories sincerely.

With longing for all our friends who are no longer among us, and with respect to all our interviewers who agreed to meet with us…

Yıldız Tar

Kaos GL Media and Communication Program Coordinator
ONCE UPON A TIME…

Umut Güner: The curtains that closed against the forest in Yozgat

I was born in Yozgat. I lived in Yozgat until 1994. That’s where I finished high school. My parents were teachers. I’m the child of a family of teachers. Because of this situation, I grew up in the sweet opportunities as well as the ‘beauty’ where education continues at home. There was a class benefit to being a teacher’s child in the country. Of course, you don’t feel it when you’re a kid, but you feel so strong. My parents were sweet people. (Laughter) But they were people from different worlds. My mother was very strict. She was a woman with standards and a like-to-live with those standards and norms. My father was a man who preferred to position himself outside of my mother’s favorite norms and be happy there. Naturally, we were always experiencing that tension. On the one hand, there was a beauty too, created by the fact that the two of them could not reconcile in our development, our education. You could free yourself.

My mother, for example, was thinking that my father should track some things as the norm. But my dad didn’t want to play this game. My mom thought my dad was tracking them. That area has become a field of incredible freedom. Things like homecoming times, exit times and so on, the concrete plan of everyday life. And until I was 14, 15, I didn’t realize there was a difference between my mother’s father norms and my real father. I pretended the things my mother said, “Your father’s mad, your father won’t let you do that, you have to ask your father about this,” are actually in our lives. But after a certain age, I realized that norms did not have any value for my father too. After that I acted in such a sweet manner like “ok I’m asking my father about this”, “I’ll get it done with my father”… For example, when I plan everyday life at home, when daily entry and exit hours are a problem, the issues like homecoming, exit times, what I was doing with whom, where I was, I’m out and it’s dark stopped being problems in summer when my uncles came, or when I stay with my grandmom in the city or in the village.

Yozgat is close to Ankara. That’s why we used to go to the movies in Ankara. We’d go four hours to Ankara watch a movie, and come back again for four hours. There was only one bookstore in Yozgat. When I ordered one book from that bookstore, in the evening my father was saying, “You wanted a book like this.”

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1 A small Anatolian city close to Ankara, capital of Turkey
mean, that little countryside was a place where everyone knew everyone, everyone knew what everyone was doing, and snitched. There was a program called “As I Read” at TRT2. They introduced Tezer Özlü. Then I probably ordered the bookstore on the same day. It would take for two and a half months for the book to arrive. I forgot it away; who was Tezer Özlü, why I wanted it. That evening, my father said, “The book you wanted has arrived”. It was overwhelming that this information suddenly surfaced.

The other thing is that my father was, not kind but firm, he was too firm. I had to hide my homosexuality from my father because of his sternness. I wasn’t supposed to get caught by my dad. It’s so clearly etched in my mind. But on the other hand, no one could attack me over my father, and it was an incredible shield of protection for me. I know I was wearing short shorts that I’m not going to wear right now, walking down the street in, and no one dared to catcall. Oh, there were people I wish they’d catcalled me. Whom I wished to feel looking at me, catcalling me, but they did not.

When you live in that conservative city, you do... We closed the curtains when we had sex at home with our neighbor’s son. Because when you have sex, the curtains should be closed. By the way, if you see our house in Yozgat, it’s against a forested land. Why are the curtains are closed in a place like that? Of course, my mother understood me through the codes she memorized. There was an intervention about I should have kept it a secret in the next process, that I shouldn’t have experienced it, that it shouldn’t happen. She made a nice speech when I was eleven, twelve years old, without visiting a psychiatrist too. She spoke sweetly about I must not go through this, that this is a situation that shouldn’t have happened. That’s where I figured it out. Oh, and if I’m going through this, I’m not supposed to close the curtains, but I have to create other curtains. After that, I kept playing that game for a long time.

My childhood coincides with the post-coup period of September 12th... The thing I remember most after September 12th is that I had to be afraid of the police. My father was constantly taken into custody and released. We saw him tortured. But on the other hand, there’s a family that’s the opposite, and there’s life in the family, and I remember the transition from single-channel black-and-white television, to color television. On the one hand, the family was a place where homosexuality wasn’t much talked about. I know, for example, when I was a kid, there was Semih of Galatasaray Football Club, I was in love with him. That’s why

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2 An existentialist Turkish author
I was cheering for Galatasaray. I was always hanging posters of him. I found the word homosexual in Meydan Larousse. That said homosexuality was a disease. Such a thing, black Meydan Larousse… It was fourteen volumes. When I found that homosexual word, I was incredibly relieved for myself. Because there was something that described me. You know, it was saying disease, it says this, it says that but… It’s a two-paragraph thing. I was telling to my self, “Oh, that’s me”. By the way, when my parents aren’t home, sometimes I open it up and read it. I was saying, “Oh, yes, that’s who I am” and closing it back off. Then in case, my mother finds out that always the same page of the encyclopedia is opened due to her being a control freak, I was reading other articles from other pages too. Just because my mother doesn’t understand. It was a time that I spent with such sweetness.

My grandmother had a garden. I had a bike. Going to my grandmoms garden and flirting with boys there instead of flirting with boys from our neighborhood was keeping me from my mother’s sight. It provides you such beauty. When my grandmother and I were alone, I realized my grandmother didn’t care much about who comes to the house. My grandmother didn’t mind me walking into the room and locking up with someone and leaving the room two hours later. I guess she said they are studying, to herself.

My grandmother was a sweet person. My parents are cousins. Through that relationship of being a cousin, my grandmother was not only my mother’s mother, but also my father’s aunt at our house, and she made me feel it. And my dad was saying, “She’s my aunt.” My grandmother was a despotic mother. But she was a sweet grandmother to us. She’s got 24 grandchildren, she raised four of them. When you asked her how many grandchildren she had, she was replying as four, and she counted me as one of them. My grandmother spontaneously intervened and disrupted all my mother’s surveillance, over-control, and supervision interventions. My grandmother didn’t know what house I slept in, where I woke up, where I’d been all day. It just made me feel like I was there for her. And she gave me an incredible amount of confidence too. They used to fight with my mom all the time while I was thirteen, fourteen. In one of those fights, I said, “Grandma, I’m going to live with you when I get married.” And she said something like, “Oh, you’ll get married.” I was shocked there, you know. On the one hand, I was scared. It’s like someone else knows my secret… I think that complicity is like a process that develops that way. Because I think I was more comfortable with her after that.

I also have a big brother, and my relationship with my brother was a bit… It’s strained by the fact that he’s the first child and him being spoiled as the first child.
The most fundamental break with my brother probably came from exposing me in a way that wouldn’t be sweet at a large family dinner. Our neighbor had a son. We were making out with him. He probably noticed that, too. And in the middle of the dinner, he said these beautiful words, “Mom, Umut is getting fucked in the ass”... For example, it’s very interesting. I don’t remember anything, even though I have a very good memory. After that meal, what happened after my brother said that at that dinner, how did we get home, what kind of day was the next day, what kind of day was a week later... I don’t have it. I mean, I don’t remember it at all. I wish my mother were alive and we could talk to her... In the process, I must have put it pretty deep in my mind. Because in my twenties, I opened up to my parents, by saying “I’m gay”.

Mine Yanat: Hide and seek in the Girls’ Highschool

I was born in ‘63. I was born in Istanbul, Kâşımpaşa³. I am a native of Istanbul because my ancestors were of Fatih origin. I went to high school at a girls’ high school in Nişantaşı. I didn’t last long there, of course. When I failed the class in the second grade, I moved to Mecidiyeköy High School. Istanbul wasn’t so crowded back then. From a sexual orientation point of view, it wasn’t comfortable of course. It wasn’t comfortable at all, everything was secret. My thing was actually even before college years, it was in the Nişantaşı Girls’ High School. I’d already left girls’ high school because of my sexual orientation. They were all around me, there was nothing else to do. You shy away, acting as everyone knows about you. They had already learned, the class teacher had already found out. Think about it, you’re among the girls, you don’t know what to do. I was wondering if I do the wrong move and they’ll find out. I wonder if any of my actions would be perceived wrong. You’re acting like that instinctively. Then I fell in love with a girl there. We were caught kissing in the bathroom. So, of course, since the girl’s parents were all-powerful, I had to go. I left school quietly. I said I’m leaving anyway. I moved to a mixed school in Mecidiyeköy. I was rather relieved. At least I could hide myself if I wanted to.

Oya Burcu Ersoy: Freedom of a military base child

I was born on January 30, 1980. I was born in Diyarbakır. We were there for five months. My father was in the military. That’s why we’ve traveled around so much. We moved to Bartin five months later. I lived in Bartin for four years.

³ A conservative province of Istanbul close to Taksim
Then Ankara for six years. Then Balikesir, three years. When my father retired, we came back to Ankara. I’ve been in Ankara since ’93. I was a lodging child. You can say it’s pretty like living in a box. We lived without knowing much about the outside. And when you’re in the base, it’s safer, so you go out whenever you want. It’s okay to go out at night in the base. You spend time with your friends whenever you want. You can do anything in the base. You can exercise, travel with your friends as you like. There are casinos and stuff. You’re going out there having fun. It was like a resort. That’s why it was fun. The only negative thing was the rules. For example, stepping on the grass was forbidden in the flag garrison. When you step on the grass, the military police were chasing you while blowing the whistle. We were running away from them. But even that was fun. It was fun to be breaking the rules. We could even make that into a game. It was forbidden to ride a bike in the base. That’s what I’m most upset about, and I’ve longed for a bike, but it was forbidden to ride in the flag garrison until we moved to Balikesir. Because - here’s the military logic, it was banned because a kid on a bicycle killed by a car in the base. When you live in a lodging, you’re a little isolated. We didn’t talk about politics at home. My mother is an Atatürk nationalist, a teacher. The father is a soldier. My mother was a CHP voter, but my father never spoke about politics. We never knew. I noticed that after my dad retired. I grew up really isolated. I grew up a little oblivious to the world. Maybe that’s what it was meant to be.

There’s been no talk of sexual orientation or gender identity in the family. For example, I said I was a boy until I was four. That my name was Ali, and I’ve got a little penis. After that, my parents, of course, were telling others about it with a laugh. That’s why my father came up with a radical solution and took me to a circumcision ceremony. Because they take me to a psychologist first. The psychologist says them it’s your fault. I mean, act her like a girl, dress her up in a skirt, then she’s going to say that she is a girl. But it’s impossible because I was crying when they wanted me to wear skirts. When they say “girl,” I was yelling, “I’m not a girl, I’m a boy, my name is Ali.” In fact, if it’s up to me to I was blonde too. Not just sexual orientation. So there’s a case of rejection and rebellion. After that, father showed me the whole circumcision thing. He says if you’re a man, that’s what’s going to happen to you. After that, I did not say I’m a man again. But my tomboyism continued, of course. I’ve rebelled against everything since I knew myself. I have a big brother. So when my brother told me to bring water, I was replying as, “Get up, why am I bringing it? Take it yourself.” I remember being aware of the inequality and being in such a rebellion about it.
When I started to menstruate, when my breasts came out, I started to realize that I loved my body. I even remember this. I had my first period on January 17th. I’ve recorded the date on the calendar because it’s the first time I became a woman, and it’s a big day for me. And then when they said, “Are you a man, this is a man’s thing” for my behavior, I started to get angry. Why would a man do it? Girls can do it, too. That’s how a man sits. No, that’s how girls sit. Do I become a man when I do that? That’s how you talk, why do you talk like that? That’s not how girls talk. Who says girls don’t talk like that? I used to have stuff like that. But I remember I was feared among my friends, that boys were afraid of me, naturally.

Yasemin Öz: The hierarchy of ages in the boarding school

I was born in 1974 in a village in Afyon. I was in the village until I was three. It’s an age period I don’t remember much. Then it passed in the districts of Denizli. Where my parents are appointed. After I was 11 years old, I spent seven years at boarding school in Uşak... I spent my summers in Manisa Salihli. I moved to Ankara when I got into university, and then it was Ankara and İstanbul for me... The neighborhoods in which I lived were where conservatism and social life lived in the simplest and most stereotypical form. But since they are Aegean cities, I’ve lived in places where a relatively liberal, open life can be sustained. The places I lived were conservative cities in terms of political preferences. But they weren’t cities that lived on the suppression of the women on the street in everyday life. I could only live in these cities in the summers because I was always in boarding schools. At boarding school, I lived talking about a lot of things with people at my own age, expressing myself a little more.

My mother’s side is from Zonguldak, we used to go there on vacation to grandmothers in the summer. And there I met the first real-life gays. Because there were two openly gay men and they were known in the city. They were being caricatured. But apart from being caricatured, there was no exclusion, no disconnection. They were working as tradesmen, they were known, and their stores were busy, and they were having conversations with others. I have not encountered a similar situation in the Aegean cities that I’ve lived in. I never knew what was going on around there, but boarding school was a challenging experience for me as a lesbian on certain levels. Because I was a boarder girl, and I was mostly with heterosexual girls. Other than me, there were a couple of people who were showing clues of being LGBT. The hierarchy at boarding school is too strict. A year older is a big sister, and if you’re a year older, you are the big sister. A friendship or communication with those who are not your age is not easily
strengthened, everyone hangs in their own era... There’s a system of organization. And I think I’ve received a lot of love from my friends, and I’ve hardly ever met evil. I even had a school life where the competition was very minimal. Friendship relationships were so strong and well-based... I was an LGBT kid, but I didn’t have the terminology or knowledge to name it. But I was expressing it somehow. I wasn’t a classic girl. When I was very young, I had a lot of objections to what boys and girls couldn’t do, so I thought I could do anything that men could do, and I thought I was entitled to it. I was walking around a little bit like a boy because I didn’t know any other way. Since I refuse to be treated like a girl...

I realized I was an LGBT kid when I was six. But it was impossible to tell. There’s no way you can tell why and how different you are from the other kids at that age. One of the main distinguishing things for me was that girls like boys, but I don’t like them. I didn’t feel that way. It was very clear to me when I was 11. It was so clear to fall in love with a woman, to feel love. But it was a very scary thing. It was unacceptable. It’s made some of my teachers very uncomfortable at the school board. They took me to a psychiatrist, doing things my parents didn’t do, citing some justification that I was overly naughty, disorderly, unruly. There’s never been anyone I could share my teenage crises with. I’ve never had anyone to share my search for identity, my desire to define myself. I think I’ve had a period of depression in my teenage years. It was a serious interrogation, a collision, and a fear. I realized I wasn’t the right person for this system. And I got so scared. I even tried to commit suicide as a means of ensuring it. Let me put it that way. It was tough puberty for me.

Özgür Azad: The window of the classroom that I’ve looked out

In the ‘80s, Istanbul was generally more comfortable, but Şişli was particularly uncriminal, very safe, a neighborhood where you could play on the streets at 1:00 a.m. Socially, too, it was comfortable in general. Of course, I was a minority of minorities. While the white Turks or a certain segment of them were very comfortable during that period, different ailments and difficulties can actually occur in parallel. I say I was comfortable as an Alawite-Kurdish queer, but I remember when I was little, my parents had to say, “Let’s not let this information go, let’s hide this information.” We were in a white Turk, a secular neighborhood. There have never been situations where these topics can be discussed more easily. Being Kurdish was something I didn’t understand much about, a thing that I understood at my later ages. You know, I thought it was something like being from Sivas or Trabzon, and then I realized, or rather, they made me realized.
Of course, from a very young age, we began to understand that there was something different, something strange. I’m saying we’re starting because everyone was actually starting. Especially boys, even because I was not swearing, they thought that I was weird. I was trying to swear like them for a while, even if it seemed so weird to me. I was always giving away my faggotness. There was not much talk about what is it actually, but in middle school, harassments like faggot, like a girl, like a woman have started. The last year of middle school was too intense, traumatic for me. I ran away from school for 15 - 20 days. I hid it from my family and... I didn’t want to go to school because of all the pressure. I couldn’t tell my parents, I couldn’t ask for help. When they found out, I couldn’t say why I had done such a thing, and I got a lot of scolding. I mean, I was treated like I ran away from school, but there was something very different. I was happier after middle school. It wasn’t great in high school either, but I had the urge to finish it as soon as possible. I’ve always been isolated.

Salih Canova: A village-world in Cihanbeyli

I was born in a small Kurdish village in Central Anatolia to a poor family. My family was exiled from the third generation of exiled Kurds during the Ottoman era, so they had no connection with central Anatolian culture.

I was a quiet, happy kid. We were a poor family, but I wasn’t very aware of it because almost everyone in the village was in similar circumstances. Our house was close to the health center and the school. We had relations with the officers assigned to the health center and the teachers assigned to the school. Due to lack of lodging, usually, husbands and wives who were medics and teachers were appointed to our village. My mother often developed good relationships with the wives of these officers, helped them with the village adaptation processes and the care of their children, especially when they were at work. My first contact with the world outside the village was through these officers. I have experienced both the positive and negative effects of this awareness. The positive effect was that I learned to read and write at an early age and emulated their lives, so I imagined a different life for myself when I was very young. The downside was that I faced our poverty. We weren’t like them, I didn’t have a life like their children, no clothes, no toys.

My elementary school years were both easy and successful because I learned to read and write before I went to school. In my elementary school years, I didn’t develop an awareness of my identity or sexuality, except for minor exclusions. There’s very little I can remember about this, and with the support of the officers
and the persuasion of my family, I was sent to middle school. The district center was a place where Turkish families lived, and in parallel, puberty made me to face poverty more harshly and to develop my awareness of my sexual identity. These are the first periods when I felt different, discriminated against. I was particularly unsuccessful in physical education classes, and the teachers in the county didn’t like children from the village. I think they were openly discriminative with the effects of the relations they developed there and the effects of the period (after the coup of 80). For example, all the children from the villages were gathered in one classroom. This attitude, which was based on a positive justification as to make it easier to call a snow holiday for that class, was serious discrimination when I look at it today. The kids in the other class were better educated than we were, they were never left idle their classes, and worst of all, they despised us for being made to feel like they were “special.”

After middle school, I attended high school on the same campus in the county. I was a successful student, there was a class in high school where successful students were gathered and they were getting a little better education. They took me into this class, and I think it was one of the most important turning turns of my life. I had a chance to get an education in this class that could get me to university, and this was the first time I’ve ever fallen in love with someone. When this story evolved, I was already beginning to understand and care about identity. At that time I started to read a few limited resources (such as the ERO Encyclopedia of Sexual Culture) that I was trying to understand, to interpret, to define what was unusual with me. I also liked loving someone. Somehow I managed to sit on the same desk with that boy. I’ve had a period where I can’t define as turbulent, but I can’t say it’s too good. At the same time, I went through a process with one of my childhood friends in the village, starting with petty sexual games, and a sexual relationship had begun between us that we never spoke about, but which eventually enriched. We almost never talked about it because we thought we were in a situation that’s embarrassing to us both, but every time we get the chance, we did something. My relationship with that friend continued during my college years and even afterward.

Milliyet newspaper was giving something like an encyclopedia of sexual health, where I saw the article of homosexuality. I think that helped me define myself. At that time, one of our relatives, who was a university student, came to the village for the summer holiday, was reading a book by Murathan Mungan. I think it was In Front of Mount Kaf. So I started reading the book right away, and there was a sentence in it that I can’t remember right now, but it was like, “Men do
not realize they’re beings that they can be fucked”. I was shocked that it was written so clearly, and I was relieved to know that I wasn’t alone. So I’ve studied two things since then; the first was not to be the faggot of the village, and the second was to be able to get out of the village and build a life for myself. The way out of the village was through the university. College meant the most to me in that way. With this motivation, I got into a university in Izmir.

Tuğrul Eryılmaz: Panorama of the ’70s and the ’80s

If someone were to came to me in the 1970s and said -- of course, there was no such thing as LGBTI back then -- a gay group in Turkey will come to you in 2018 and will talk with you as a journalist, as an intellectual, a person who lived very closely in these affairs, I’d say they’ve gone completely crazy. I’d say, “What are you talking about” Okay, life is definitely evolving, everything’s evolving. But believe me, I wouldn't have thought of this, because since I’ve known myself, there’s a situation where every neighborhood had a gay brother or a child in Turkey. There’s even a lesbian needle worker Auntie Nuriye. These are kind of people who come in and out of the houses, who have close relations with the community. But there’s also the fact that they’re a comedy element, a comforting element, or, really, a part of society. It depended on the houses too. Don’t ask, don’t tell, everyone’s living their own lives. So now, if it’s not exclusion, there was no exclusion in that sense.

For one thing, these ‘70s were hard. That’s when I started journalism at TRT News Center. You don’t see that kind of news back then anyway. And the stuff that came out in the papers were things like the gay murder, he molested his friend, that sort of thing. “What’s going on? Who are they? How many of these are there in Turkey? Fifty people? Five hundred people? Five million?” This is when all hell breaks loose about this issue. Anyway, but the thing is, I always say that in my journalism classes; even the opposition in a country, can’t be very independent of that country’s politics. It’s crushing you somehow, pushing you, and you’re looking for places to run.

I’m going to talk about September 12th. There was so much pressure, you don’t know where to run. Almost all kinds of politics were banned. The agility of journalism, intellectual vigilance, whatever you say... At that time, the women’s movement was very important in Turkey. The gay movement, nowadays called as LGBTI movement was using art. What kind of opposition do you make from there? I remember very well, in the early ‘80s, when we were working at Nokta magazine, we had this thing. We’re going to do a two-page “if your child is gay”
story... The team is me, İpek Çalışlar, Güldal Kızıldemir, something like that. But luckily, we had the knowledge. We are explaining things we knew. I remember that at that time, Duygu Asena is also publishing the Women’s magazine, she supported us too... We published the article. But we had to add that, as we were very smart, “Homosexuality, which some consider a disease...” They made us say that sentence. But in the end, we were very happy because we’ve published that article, which was our main problem. If you ask me, the Turkish media is not what it used to be, it’s true. I mean, there are very serious reporters, editors, even columnists, and they can raise their voices. You know, there is a saying “being the voice of voiceless”, in journalism, they do it. But you still see that the news about LGBTI is almost half of the general news... But now it’s a huge achievement, I’ll tell you. Now I don’t know if Kaos GL did it, or the intellectuals of Turkey, or screaming queens in the street as the British call them. But in the end, here’s where we’re at; we came from a place that was hundred percent bad, to the works of people who are far more knowledgable, more proficient, more thoughtful. It has been learned too, but the price for that was rather high. If we look at the media aspect, they’ve had a great relationship with people in the media and they’ve managed to explain their problems. Again, they did it by themselves. The people they communicated, the reporters, editors also had to be careful about these demands, whether they were gay or not.

It’s kind of a sales factor. And you have to entertain the people, that is what they call tabloid. It doesn’t matter if you are citing sociologists, researches, the serious stuff. You still have to explain to people that there’s no such disease! There’s no cure for that too.
Esmeray Özadikti: The Gulf Girls

It was the ‘80s. I just finished elementary school. I came to Istanbul to live with my uncle. To do apprenticeships and to learn a profession. I couldn’t work for my uncle. They were doing oil paintings, decorations. Because they used the paint thinner so much, and I had thinner allergies. I was passing out all the time. Then I worked various jobs. Whatever a kid from the East does in Istanbul, I did it all. I’ve met homosexuals at the age of sixteen, seventeen. They were called as the Lubunyas⁴. In our era, there was no concept of homosexuality. In fact, it sounded so strange to us. Because there was a concept of lubunya (). There was a lubunya-laço⁵ concept. There were the lubunyas and the laços . So the two lubunya couldn’t be lovers. Never! We didn’t know that. In ‘88, there was Mendirek Park in Kadiköy, and the lubunyas all gathering there. I was slowly beginning to discover myself. I mean, I’ve had already discovered it. But I was just looking around if there was anyone else. Well, I was reading, there was a very disgusting article of Savaş Ay⁶ in the Nokta magazine about the lubunyas, trans women. I’ll never forget it. They put a headline like this: A man should have a man lover. And they had put up a very typical trans photo like that. I was reading about that kind of stuff. But the word trans wasn’t mentioned. There were sayings like men who dress like women in the evenings. Like men who engage in prostitution for money... That’s what I knew. Then a coincidence. I was sitting on the bench when I was walking around Kadıköy. A guy came up to me and said, “Should we get out?” I’m like, “What do you mean?” Then I wondered. I went back. Oh, there’s a lot of them, there’s a lot of them, and I was slowly getting inside them. Of course, you’re hiding yourself at first. You know, in associations, a guy comes to the association as a heterosexual and says, “I’m straight, but I’ve come to solidarity with you.” You would get out of closet in a month. I mean, that’s normal, because you are scared at first. The park environment was like that too. I mean, there was no association at the time, there was nothing. Park! People were meeting in parks. That’s the way it was. It was a street encounter, in life.

⁴ Lubunya is a queer slang word can be roughly translated to English as queer. We chose to protect the very word “lubunya” in the translation.
⁵ Laço is also another concept from Turkish queer slang which can be roughly translated as “masculine”
⁶ A famous journalist from 90’s
After meeting the lubunyas, I started to feel different from them. There was a difference between them and me that I couldn't name. I mean, I was a woman, but most of them weren’t. Because they don’t have that problem. I was ashamed of my hair. Back then heterosexism and stuff was more dominant. Here I was uncomfortable with my penis, hiding it, etc... They were very comfortable. You’re slowly realizing these things. And I was separated from the family first because you knew there was no one in your family who could ever understand you. All of a sudden, I got up and left, I didn’t go home anymore. I stayed on the streets, looking for work on the one hand, lubunyas on the other... There used to be a Doyum Pub in Aksaray. It was in a neighborhood where these shoemakers were located. It was a very peculiar neighborhood. Doyum Pub... There were a lot of lubunyas. The bingo players were all there. The thieves, pickpocketers, con artists, it was another realm! I’ve first heard the word transvestite there. Then gradually I learned that there are transvestites, they live in Taksim, they do not live anywhere outside Taksim… And then I started my search. How do I meet trans people? They introduced me. I said I’m going to be a “gacıvari” (i.e. womenlike). They said you’re beautiful, but you’re too hairy. How will this be resolved? Dear, we all had hair. One day they took me to Taksim, laid me on the ground in Tarlabasi. They waxed my whole body, my eyelids, inside my palm, all over me. And the outside of my lips. They waxed me all over. And it’s just sex work right away. I was 18, 19. Then there was the Gulf War. The gacıvari lubunyas, the trans women, who were superior to us, have nicknamed us. The five-six of us became gacıvari after that. They called us the Gulf Girls. The trans women of that era still say, “How are you, Gulf Girl”, when they see me, and they were making fun of us, blaming us for pretending to be women in order to evade military service. We were the Gulf Girls.

I didn’t really embrace the sex work. Because I come from a very feudal family. The concept of honor is very dominant. That’s how I grew up. I didn't get rid of that sense of honor and cultural things. I was very under its influence. I thought that I was honorless. So you’re a prostitute now. And a male prostitute too. And then once you get involved, you see it’s not like that at all. Now you’re slowly grasping the thing; No, I mean, I provide a service like a waitress. You understand that from then on. But you’re still keeping it out. For example, at that time, when one of the reporters spoke to us, we were feeling ashamed. I don’t do sex work, in the evenings I work as a hairdresser, etc. Or we were just talking about the professions that transgender women or homosexuals could do then. I’m a tailor, I’m stylist, whatever. We were avoiding them somehow. Because there was such isolation.
Ali Erol and Ali Özbaş: Adventures of Little and Grand GP

Ali Özbaş: Ali and I met in Guvenpark in 1992. It’s also known as the Little GP. Gençlik Park was the Grand GP. It was a gay rendezvous point. A place of çark.

Ali Erol: I’ve never had a çark experience in Gençlik Park. I couldn’t make it. I got to Guvenpark too late. I discovered it too late. But I caught up. For a long time, Kızılay was closed because of the subway construction. Even though I was passing through Guvenpark, I realized too late that the whole traffic in that park was consisted of gays walking up and down to meet with others. The friends I’d just discovered at school told me about there. So a period for me started that I started to look around carefully while in that park, instead of passing there usually. The early ’90s was an interesting time.

Ali Özbaş: I knew it even before coming from Tarsus to Ankara in ’85, thanks to my sister. When my sister was talking about Ankara’s strangeness, she mentioned that it was a meeting place for gays in the evenings. But of course it took me a while to go first. I had my first experience not by making out with a friend of same age, but by finding someone in Tarsus. So I lived that for about two years before I came to Ankara. It wasn’t the thrill of the first because of this. They were new ways to live what I wanted. So it was about exploring this new place. And I loved walking, walking. When I came to enrolled in college before the start of the semester, I walked alone for hours. For me, exploring a place, feeling a place means taking long walks there. Without knowing the procedure. And to experience the thrill of what you see when you walk down the street. A building, a new road... I was actually on an unnoticeable, aimless çark for 24/7.

Ali Erol: Meanwhile, I came to the enrolls from Mersin to Language-History Faculty of Ankara University with my father for sociology. The enrollment processes was being carried out not in the Language-History Faculty, but in the school gym in Cebeci. Your sister somehow told you about with a negative subtext, but I didn’t have anyone to inform me in anyway about these things, about Ankara. I came to the enrollment with my father. Such a thrill I had. I bought Arslan Yüzgün’s book, Homosexuality, in that curious young faggot mind of mine at the time. It was sold in a plastic bag. I picked it up. My father couldn’t read or write, so he didn’t understand. There were a few other books at the time. But The Book of Yüzgün made more noise. It was popular.

Çark means cruising in Turkish queer slang.
Even in middle school, I was aware of myself. But I was out of the closet in high school. So it’s very interesting... None of my peers, teachers, or anyone said, “What are you up to?” Not one person said such a thing! So there won’t be any problem as a young homosexual?! I mean, I don’t know. And since I didn’t encounter any problems, I was always on a track of socialness. So I guess because of that situation, and maybe a little bit of my own curiosity, I always went for the information part of the business. So I was curious about the approaches of Arslan Yüzgün or other names at work. It was very, very valuable to me, even if it wasn’t the approaches we share during the process that we would start. I mean, somebody’s contributing as they know, as much as they can, keeps a record of something, and then circulates it. These were very exciting things for me... Anyway...

Ali Özbaş: Usually in the winter months, as the weather is cold, cultural activities are abundant, I was minimizing sexuality and give myself to social activities. But when the weather starts to warm up slowly...

Ali Erol: In the spring...

Ali Özbaş: ... Yes, especially in April or something... We'd throw ourselves out. Although in our era, there were no mobile phones, no social platforms, so there were meeting places, places to find each other, indoor spaces. It wasn't just parks; there were places like baths and cinemas. In those weeks, I was going to Little GP a lot. At least I was visiting the park just before going home after the movies I watched, and I was getting some fresh air. I could see a few human faces there. We were communicating socially. We spent time there talking to people we didn't know and have conversations on daily matters and various subjects, without having sexual expectations or thinking about sleeping with that person. That’s when we saw each other. When we left the park together that night, we were on the same way, the way to home. Along the way, I think we felt like we were the right person for each other with our conversations complementing each other. We didn't say it, but we felt it.

Ali Erol: But there was a bit of an entertaining side to it. I discovered the park a little bit before we see each other with friends from the community. And that day, we were walking around, and just sat under a tree for a chat. It's not a big park anyway... The stroll ends in two minutes. At that time, there was really no place in Ankara where people could go, sit down and drink something. So Guvenpark was a center of attraction. What I liked was the diversity of men who came there. And I was trying to analyze them right away, as much as I could. Because it was very interesting. So the men who worked at the embassy was coming, the indus-
trial worker was coming, the teacher, the student, the professor, the worker, the officer... That variety, for example, was both remarkable and exciting for me. So those conversations... You know, jumping from branch to branch... So when we were chatting, under the tree, I think three of you were coming...

**Ali Özbaş:** So now you will say, “Well, you’re overweight and you’re old”, but we’re talking about twenty-five and six years ago. As a pretty skinny, quite handsome fellow, I wasn’t really his type. I think that the conversation we had and the way we look at life first affected us.

**Ali Erol:** You caught my attention because you were attracting attention. I remember looking at you coming from a distance.

**Ali Özbaş:** But there was also this; maybe the month of Ramadan made our job easier. We both had lovers waiting for Ramadan to end.

**Ali Erol:** I had a friend at the time. He was talking to someone, and when that failed, he turned around and started talking to Ali like nothing had happened. And I said, “What the heck is going on?” I said, now he is talking to you, but he was talking to someone else just two minutes ago…

**Ali Özbaş:** He rattled my lover!

**Ali Erol:** Yes, I mean, I don’t want to prolong it, I rattled his lover there. After rattling him, I guess we got each other’s attention, so we went out of the park and walked to the Bakanlıklar, a quieter neighborhood. We checked each other, so to say. Then you had to go to Tarsus I believe?

**Ali Özbaş:** For the holiday…

**Ali Erol:** We wanted to make an appointment…

**Ali Özbaş:** We didn’t even have any regular old-fashioned fixed-line phones... I was living on my own, in a one-bedroom house. Ali was staying with his friends. If you promise someone back then, two days later, a week later, a month later, and you say time, you had to be there at that time. If you’re not, there’s no channel you’ll ever find your friend again. You don’t have his address, so you can’t trust it and give an address to the person from day one. There’s no phone number. It’s not like you can give me the neighbor’s number. With that in mind, I unnecessarily gave you information about myself, saying that I’m going on that day and will be back in ten days from Tarsus. And on the one hand, when we went on that trip and then we went home together, I acted a little quick and tried to get Ali into my house that night. But it was a one-bedroom place, it was the kitchen of a
100-year-old building. But a separate structure was set up in front of that building. That’s where the entrance is. On the one side, there was an oriental night club, it was named as a casino but it is what it is. On the other side there was a coffee house, which was also a very oriental place and it was open until morning due to the month of Ramadan, and then the noise spooked Ali, and he didn’t go in. He went on to his house. So from then on, it was all tied up to him being at the park ten days later, after I returned from Tarsus. And ten days later we met in the park... We didn’t talk like, “We’re in a relationship, its name is love, we’re going to be together until it ends” back then or even when we moved to the same apartment. We didn’t feel the need to call it a name for a long time. The night after we first met, I made it. I took him home. I think that’s a point you should ask Ali now, how he spent that ten days, how he changed his mind so he wasn’t afraid that he went in there. But at that moment, I had to vacate the house. That building was going to be completely demolished. When we were looking for an apartment, we automatically thought about moving into this new place together. And we didn’t talk about being lovers again, but the two of us started looking for a place we both could move in. We found a place, and we liked it, but it wasn’t clear. In fact, the demolition team was there while we were sleeping. We’ve been under that kind of stress. Ali said, “You move in with me, and then we’ll look for a place.” And it was automatically a crowded house, full of straight friends from school. So my little bed in Ali’s room... By “tiny,” I mean it wasn’t really a bed for one person to sleep in, but it was pretty good enough for us.

Ali Erol: It’s not about renaming the past, even if you can’t describe things, you actually feel them. When I think about it now, years ago, for example, because I had a joint course in Language-History, I was a social friend with my late psychologist friend Mahmut, a friend that I met from the psychology department. Other than that, I didn’t have anything. Our relationship was consisted of chatting, crying whining together, and having fun together, having waves of laughter. It’s going to sound a little bit like the old Turkish movies, but when I saw you coming across, I said he is different. He’s just tall, other than that his body’s no different. You know, it’s different from the lubunya on your right or the lubunya on your left. You feel the difference, that difference is actually a little bit about my feelings, my thoughts, my own chemistry. I think I probably made up my mind during our first walk that we took after I rattled your lover...

Ali Özbaş: In the process of getting to know each other, he used to talk about a man named Mahmut, and he was the first reason I was jealous because he was laughing a lot while talking about Mahmut. I was so angry. If I could find that
Mahmut guy I would destroy him... Because we’ve never had a conversation about how to live this relationship, we didn’t name our relationship, how should our friendships go. We didn’t talk about that either. But while I was still there, Mahmut came to Ankara and we went to meet him. After that Mahmut became a friend of mine that I too wasn’t able to stop talking about. I’ve noticed that people like that exist, friendships like that exist.

**Ali Erol:** I remember the time when we were hanging at your place, before moving out; there was a small garden, a walnut tree. The kids next door took two pictures of us. It meant a lot to me that we were in the same frame in that photo. We gave away a lot of stuff from that period, but for example, there was a filter where we washed plums. We’re still using that filter. One kitchen item, what’s going to be special about it? But it means something to me. Because that’s when we sat down, and we salted those plums, and we ate them. We had very simple daily relationships and emotional flows. All those flows of emotion, all those contacts, they’ve made our chemistry a little bit combined. You know, if it’s called love, it’s love. These are the points of contact that bound our lives together. But that period was actually a transition in one way. It was a time of trial and error, time of learning. There were no role models before us. I’m not talking about anything political, I’m talking about something that will ease how our daily lives flow. There was no such thing. We tried to build something up to explore each other. In fact, this has led to some jokes by the vast majority of our friends around social lubunyas. “Girls, what are you doing? Ah what are you doing over there?” Enough to be bored. Well, okay, before us, there was laço, there was lubunya, okay, the word gay slowly got used to the ears, but I mean, “What the heck are you, what are you two doing, that’s not how it works, so you two are males that’s ok, but what you are doing is wrong. So you two are not compatible types. Why don’t you fit in what we have seen until now? What are you up to?” But when there was no interruption in our relationship, I guess after a while, people got used to it. This time, too, a tiresome process has begun for us from the opposite direction. Ali’s Ali’s Ali’s Ali’s... I guess anyone else would be proud of it. Okay, it’s nice to feel good about yourself or to be rewarded, which is good, but I sensed it quickly, and even though it looks like our friends are seemingly giving us a positive load, what is it good for? This time, on the contrary, the burden actually fell on our shoulders. We’re trying to make a life here, but it’s not a feat. I mean, it’s not an oil painting. It is not a unique thing to be forming a binary relation, a common living or a family. Your one-night stand or one-month relationship or three-month relationship can actually be valuable in itself.
Ali Özb aş: The general mindset of people was: I can have a temporary love, it can’t last for a lifetime, you can’t love someone for life. The established order, the system does not allow it, and there is no need to push it. After a while I will finish school, he will go somewhere and I will go some other place... Military service, this, and that, and get a job, then you would get married... These were thought of as the processes that had to be experienced. Other than that, there was no possibility. I think the subway construction was very beneficial at the time. Why, if you say, a café was built from train cars in Kızılay which was closed due to the subway construction, and as people who met in Guvenpark and spoke for a short time, we suddenly had the chance to have a chat in that café while drinking our tea and coffee. We had more constructive, more open-minded and longer conversations at that time. Meanwhile, friends who had met some foreigners from the environment had a conversation about how this was not the case in foreign countries. I mean, LGBTI didn’t come from abroad, but we heard things about how LGBTI people live there. Therefore, we have discovered that different things can be done, that they can be lived differently, that life can be constructed differently than what is known.

Oya Burcu Ersoy: Am I L…?

I fell in love with a girl in high school. I was platonically obsessed. I was scared. She was a girl from prep school. I was looking forward to going to class. Why? Because I’m going to see her. We were in the same class. And I was turning my chair over her. The board was on the other side, but I was sitting sideways and watch her. When I saw her, my heartbeat was getting faster. I was smiling all the time. I kept asking questions about her. I don’t ask anyone about their zodiac sign like that, but I remember asking about hers. She was even hosting the news at TRT Children on Tuesdays. I was just going there and watch her with excitement. But I mean, I never show it to her in any way. I didn’t say it. I don’t know if she understood. I was so curious, I looked at her all the time. But at that time, of course, because these feelings forced me, I said, “Why is it happening? Shouldn’t I feel these things to men? What am I?” I was writing a diary at the time. I’m writing, “I wonder if I’m a L…” I thought if I wrote a lesbian, I’d accept it as a fact. But when I wrote my diary that day, I realized. I don’t want a monologue, I wanted dialogue. I wrote this in my diary; You never answer me, I have to call someone, someone should tell me something... I called my friend, whom I was using the same school bus during second grade of high school. I said I’m going to read you my diary now, please listen to it until the end without judging. Of course, I cried at the end.
of the diary. After that, she was mad at me. Burcu, she said, you scared me off, I thought something bad happened, was that it, etc… What difference does it make if you’re a lesbian or a bisexual? That’s what wrote last. Am I a lesbian or a bisexual? She told me what difference does it make, you are who you are, and that’s not a problem. She said you scared me. Oh, so it’s not a problem? Well, then. Of course, it’s okay, you’re going to let it to its course, and things will solve themselves, she said. I was very lucky. It’s a real chance to get such a reaction from the first person I talked to. During the same period, another friend of mine in high school started flirting with me. But publicly. She was coming to me, asking questions about me, “Which college are you going to go to?”, she was pushing others to be next to me in lines… She was saying “Whatever college you’re going to go to, I will go to that college” So I finally said, “What’s going on?” Did she say something to you?” Because she’s her best friend too. She said, no one said anything to me, I’m seeing you in my dreams, I fell in love with you. Somehow it doesn’t sound convincing. I said she’s probably mocking me. I wouldn’t open up to the girl in that prep school too. I waited until college, actually. But I was telling these little things to my friends: I’m a humanist, love has no gender. Why does it have to be a boy or a girl? We can love everyone, we can fall in love with everyone. I started opening up to my high school friends by saying things like, maybe I could be bisexual or something.

Buse Kılıçkaya: Cut from a paper cup

A lot of things in my life are faded, and my childhood is too. It seems to me that it is an outcome of being trans and wanting to forget somethings. I was born in Mamak, Ankara in 1977. I was born in a slum. I was the fifth girl after four girls. My parents had a shop. Ankara was nothing like today’s Ankara. It was nothing like this Ankara as a city too. It was a life where there were more slum houses and houses with gardens, where the Kızılay was the center. Mine was actually… It was such a simple life. Or rather, according to my parents, because I was a boy born after four girls, I was a little bit like this, school-to-home, home-to-school, my life was more limited, going to the grocery store, working at the grocery store, and very rarely playing in front of our doorstep. But when you are a trans, childhood is a little more painful than usual. I first met the lubunyas at the cinema. I kept it hidden all the way to high school. I mean, I shouldn’t make it obvious in the neighborhood, because I was the kid of the grocer. News of my slightest behavior, the slightest attitude, can spread very quickly, so I was trying to pay a lot more attention. But there comes a time when you can’t take it anymore. Before the end
of high school. I was actually starting to become, “What am I going to do like this?” I have to do something, there were storms inside me, but I couldn’t take a step because I don’t know anything about it. All I know is, there’s a classic story, Bülent Ersoy, Zeki Müren and me, I was one of the people who have those stories, yes. That’s my life. I thought there were Bülent Ersoy, Zeki Müren, and me. And wherever I go, when people see Bülent Ersoy or Zeki Müren on TV, everybody is swearing to them like “Look at that! What kind of people they are putting on TV”. Well, naturally, you feel alone there, too. So you have nothing to do, so you have no step to take, you’re scared. There was this kid I fell in love with in high school. I’m in love with him, he’s in love with someone else. Every day we go to her neighborhood to see the girl he loves. We’re walking past her door. He’s going there to see her, taking me with him, and I’m so happy that I’m spending time with him. One day he said, “There is a new porn cinema, let’s go there together.” and I said, well let’s go. How are we going to get there, I mean, I’m not even 18 yet. I said, damn let’s go. The boy is next to me, I’m next to him, he’s masturbating, there’s a giant screen before us, and it’s so explicit that I’ve never seen sex in that explicit manner. There’s sex on a huge screen in front of me. The boy I fell in love with is next to me, think, think about the excitement, I was shaking. It’s a dark environment, an incredibly beautiful thing. The first cinema that I went with him was called Melek Sineması. I actually met the lubunyas there, but I didn’t meet them that day. After that day, I thought about that place for days. I wanted to go back there, I’m going to go there again, but how do I get there? I can’t go on my own. It’s a very dark environment. I don’t know what’s going to happen to me, I’m scared. I said I’m going to go.

One day I went, I walked through the door, I didn’t dare enter. I went around, and I said, “I’m going to go in now, I can get in now,” but it didn’t work out. Then I went there again another time. Someone sat next to me and tried to touch me. At first, he made contact with his arm. I said, what’s going on? There are people walking around in between, people walking around in the cinema, and there are voices like that every once in a while. Hah hah hah hah sounds are coming. You don’t understand it. I was shrinking, watching the movie, I didn’t know, they come up to you, they touch your arm, then they try to rub their knee, and then they touch you and your penis. I didn’t know any of these, I mean, I didn’t know that these things that people do in the erotic cinemas. He started rubbing his arm. He started rubbing my knees. And then when he tried to put his hand on my thing, I said something like “I’m like you”. That was the first time I opened up. “I’m just like you.” Then I got out of my closet in front of the whole theater. “Girl, she is just like us”... Then the lights went on. After that, they grabbed me
by the arms and they took me in between, and they started an education… If you’re lubunya, you have to do this, you have to pay attention here, look, don’t be a hick, “this girl is a damn hick”. Don’t you know the language of the Lubunyas? They gave me a lot of information, and I was just happy to see something like me. There’s something like me. And I was so happy when I started going at regular intervals and I saw that there was someone like me. And then I met the bathhouse. We would leave the cinema and go to the Şengül Bath and look at the boys there. The Şengül Bath was beautiful. I mean, there’s a place in the middle, then there are the cabins, there’s the top floor, you go straight in, there’s a belly stone. You’re going with the Lubunyas. There are certain procedures, methods unique to there. If the curtain is open or is it closed, how to say come or go, way of looking at a guy that you liked. It was all good, actually.

I know about Güvenpark. There was Sakarya Street. There was Güvenpark. There was a pool in the middle of Sakarya. There were stairs like this, people would sit there. It was mostly where the lubunyas usually go. That’s where I remember the first Alis. I heard Two Ali’s were coming, I was the edge of the Sakarya pool. The Lubunyas are coming and they’re finding each other there, and I was surprised. One lubunya, he was another lubunya’s lover, lubunya was so unbelievable, he was saying things like in the Turkish movies, “Oh, husband, why do you do such things?” etc. “Have you cheated on me?” “Why should I cheat on you?”, she falls in the middle of Sakarya, she faints, and so on, this husband, “My love, why do you do such things?”, then I said love is also happening in such things. I mean, it was the first time I’ve seen a relationship outside of the platonic or sexual relationship I’ve had in my mind, the ones I’ve had, the ones I’ve been scared of, the ones that I’ve created in my mind out of the promises we’ve made to each other. Normally, when you had sex with a human being, it was mutually adhering. Look, you did me, I did you, or you did me, don’t tell anyone, then it’s a problem, or there were situations like you wouldn’t look at each other’s faces again until you had sex. The Lubunyas were a little more relaxed there, and I remember this. They said the Ali’s were coming in, they were handing out leaflets and stuff, they’re handing little papers with meeting places written on them, and they were saying we are meeting there, we are doing this there, we’re the working class, etc. Of course, most of us didn’t have that kind of perception, we were more interested in flirting and what to do for fun and where. You could find a lover very easily too, whether is it because there were less lubunya around or the visibility of them I don’t know but it was bountiful. Thank God if you wanted to eat it every day you were able to eat every kind of thing. There was an amusement park. There was Flamingo Road. On Sundays, soldiers used to come to the amusement park. There
was a road there called Flamingo Road. Soldiers lined up on the edges. And we'd do our makeup, some foundation and all and walk down there sensuously. I think it was the '96s. '95s or '96s. This French Embassy was opposite the Foundation for Social Research. It was my first opening up to my family, of course. So there was Dr. Didem. Didem was a woman attending Kaos GL's meetings. She was writing there, too. Now my sexual orientation was revealed. I wasn't able to hide it for too long. High school was over. After high school, somehow my parents sent me to Istanbul. Because now my appearance, my clothes... I found the Lubunyas. I was wandering around with the Lubunyas all day. So this will naturally be reflected in the hair, reflected in the clothes! And I got caught too. I don't think I'm very good at these things. I mean, I got caught up in everything I did. I can't hide it. I'm not hiding it, I'm living directly. They were thinking “I think he is a lubunya, his friends are a bad influence on him, let’s send him to İstanbul, to his sister”, so they exiled me. Oh, I’ve just found out them I’ve just met all the lubunyas here, I’m just adjusted to this new scene, and now they’re sending me to Istanbul! It's a time when I say there's nothing to do anymore. After I went to Istanbul, I stayed for a year or a year and a half. Then I got caught there again, my sister saw my makeup bags. They called my parents. They picked me up again, brought me to Ankara. We have visited lots of psychologists. They took me to psychologists in Istanbul, they took me to psychologists in Ankara. It's like a funeral at home. My father is trying to kill me on the one hand. My mother is crying over my head. They're hiding my niece from me. I don't know if they thought as if it were a contagious disease. I didn't know what I had either. I mean, there's something, but okay, we're lubunya, but I’m wondering if it’s a disease or not, I thought it could be a disease or something. Because imagine, there were periods in those times when I prayed and begged God all the time. I mean, I said, “God save me from this, what kind of disease did you gave me?” Then when I went to Istanbul and came back to Ankara, my parents knew about my lubunya state, so I made it clear. Yes, I'm a transgender, and that's how I'm going to live. Don't intervene.

I have one brother-in-law at the time, and he had a very important place in my life. Both in the organized struggle, in my meeting with Kaos GL, and in the process of the Pink Life, he never denied, not his direct, but indirect support, no matter what. So I trust his opinions and felt his support very much, he was also involved in the labor union activities. His name is Yılmaz Yıldırım. He was investigating it. I mean, okay, this kid is different but why are you overreacting? Why are you messing with the kid's psyche? And he goes to night clubs, places where transgenders hang out and conducts an investigation. Then he opens it up to his friend, opens it up to Dr. Didem. And Dr. Didem says; There's a formation called...
Kaos GL, they’re putting out magazines, they’re getting together frequently, you bring her to me and let me talk with her. Then he takes me to Dr. Didem. We’re in Dr. Didem’s room, but I’m ashamed as like I’ve done a big misdeed, so I was sitting there and listening to them, she said, “Wait a minute, relax. What’s the situation?” I said, “That’s how I am and I’m very happy about that. It just makes me sad and depressing that my parents are overreacting to this. I wanted to change most of the time, but I couldn’t, I can’t. I’ve tried everything but it doesn’t matter. She said, “There is nothing to change”, “I’m going to take you somewhere”. I went to a meeting at the Foundation for Social Research across from the French Embassy. Ali Ozbas, Ali Erol, Meriç, Ali Ferhat... There were a lot of people, actually. So I kept going to those meetings. There were designated subjects and people were talking about it. And we were nervous. The meetings were held in the bottom room. It was in a room on the right. You look at the street, you go straight, you turn right, it was the room on the right. But in my mind, the most important thing that happened in that Social Research Foundation was this; there was an issue on “we’re going to use paper cups now,” and I think it was a plastic cup, I remember it that way. When we were meeting, there were people who didn’t drink because of those glasses we used. It was decided that we will use another cup there...

**Yasemin Öz: Is there anyone like me?**

The biggest trouble for me was there were always gay men or trans women. There were no lesbian, bisexual women, no such type. If there were no LGBT organizations formed, we wouldn’t see any women coming out. On the İntizar issue too, people were exposed without consent. So no women can come out and say, “I own this identity,” because women live the oppression there, too. And... I knew there were gay men and trans women, but I didn’t know if there was anyone like me. It was also a time when there is no Internet or different alternative information channels. You know, in very small country towns, I lived in places where it was impossible to find books about it. So I was incredibly deprived of that information. I used to read all sorts of books like this, and I was reading more world literature at the time, why, because that’s why my parents are directing me. So the names of those writers are known, and they get me those books, and I’m enthusiastic, and I read them, but In my own way, I’d buy adventure books like this, ones that are sold in newspaper stands. I think it was in those adventure books; when I was 16, I read a lesbian relationship description, and I was shocked. Two women having sex with each other... I mean, I was really shocked, so it’s possible, that one
of them doesn't have to be a man. And that information was so astonishing that I couldn't argue or talk to anyone or know where to hide it, where to put... It was so accidental that I had access to this information.

There are two good things that happened to me in my life when I was in college. One is Murathan Mungan. I thought Murathan Mungan was the songwriter of Yeni Türkü band coming to college. I went to a bookstore with a friend. Who I met in the college dorm. There I saw a book of poems by Murathan Mungan. I said, “Oh, I didn't know he wrote poetry too” I didn’t know that he was a poet. So I was that much of a hick. She said yes, I looked at his books. Then I started reading the book Summer Passes, which had a blue cover and I like blue so much. I’m glad I picked up that book. I’ve read almost all of the A Lone Opera, in the bookstore, standing there. I was struck because those poems were about what I’ve been through, telling me about my love for a woman, and I’ve found myself in them. I was thinking about how a man can write so deeply. We’re having a conversation like this, and I was talking about poetry, and then my friend said, “Murathan Mungan is gay.” I opened my eyes and said, “How do you mean,” “so does he say that?” “Yes,” she said. I was like... I felt like the revelation had come down on me. For the first time in my life, I’ve heard of a gay man, who says it out loud, who’s not a singer.

Öner Ceylan: It’s like I came to my home

I was born in 1971, 26 years old, so when I came out in ’97, I found Lambda sweetheart, and that’s how my relationship with the movement has started. It was a few months after I came out, I’ve read something on the Internet, I’ve read more of English sources, the Internet was very limited at the time, and then I somehow got to know about the Lambda meetings, and I went there. Lambda didn’t have a cultural center at the time, we were gathering at the Social Research Foundation's place, paying rent there. The place at that time was at the back of Galatasaray Bath. It was kind of hard to find. I’ve already shivered while I was going there for the first time. I was terrified, I thought someone would see me and know I was going there. I was afraid of asking the traffic police for directions there. If I ask about the bathhouse, he’ll know I’m going to Lambda. Of course, it sounds funny afterward, but it was a real fear for me at the time. Anyway, I climbed the stairs with my knees trembling, and they were always a place with stairs... After that, the first thing I thought was, “Oh, this place is full of freaks.” For some reason, even physically, everyone looked like that to me. But then, after people started talking, that feeling was replaced by this feeling like, “I came home, and I found my fam-
ily that I’d lost for years.” And then I kept going. It felt so good to me. I wanted to volunteer right away. Even though I didn’t have much experience, I started attending meetings, core group meetings as it was then called. At the same time, I continued to attend public meetings on Sundays.

The first day I went, Pride Week was on the agenda. Pride Week was to be held. There was a Hide-and-Seek show on TV at the time, where people found lovers, and there was a front. It was an adaptation program from the West, they were asking questions. There was one person, behind a front, the others didn’t see. The candidates were asked questions, and they were answering, and on top of that, our main person was choosing one of them. There was an idea for Pride Week, like let’s do something like Hide-and-Seek. I guess it wasn’t done afterward, but it stuck with me for some reason.

Yeşim Tuba Başaran: I’m an ordinary person, how can this happen?

It was ‘95. When I discovered myself, of course, I didn’t know much about bisexuality. When I discovered that I could be interested in a woman, then I thought I am a lesbian then, and I didn’t know the possibility of bisexuality, the idea that the gender of the person you like might not matter. I didn’t know about homosexuality anyway. But when I saw that I could like a woman, I thought, God! I’m an ordinary person, how could something like this happen? Because I thought of two types of people. Strange people in the back streets of Beyoğlu, weird, unreliable, criminal people; Or poets, writers, intellectual people. By the way, I don’t know if I thought about both the same. Maybe I was thinking about someone particular. But I thought an ordinary person couldn’t be gay. So I thought I wasn’t one. Because I was just an ordinary person. Then I made sure of myself. I mean, I know how I feel. But there is one of me in this world, so I can’t have any lovers because another woman can’t fall in love with me, so I’ve been thinking about things like I will be alone forever, etc.

Then, there was Dost Bookstore, and I think there is still one in Ankara, on Yüksel Street? It’s out there, in that area. I saw something on its billboard: Gays, lesbians from Ankara are gathering, PK 53 Cebeci-Ankara. I said, God! They’re gathering. I was trying to imagine what it’s like. I thought there were people like me, but I didn’t dare write to them. And then I’d open up to my friends in between. I told a friend that I opened up to, and I saw something like this months ago. My friend said, “Well, you should’ve written them”. I don’t know, I didn’t write it. I didn’t dare. The friend said, “let’s write”... We’ve seen this ad elsewhere. On the Express Magazine. We took all the Express Magazines in the house upon
the table and searched for page-by-page for the address. I wrote a letter like that and there was no answer. Then I came across Kaos GL magazine and when I saw the magazine, I looked at the same address PK 53 Cebeci-Ankara. So I memorized the address. I still remember how many years later. I guess I thought these people got together, argued, put out magazines. Such intellectual, cool people, of course, why would they respond to my letter, and I thought they didn’t care much for me, a reader’s letter. Then I’ve been just a reader of the magazine. But one day in a friend group someone said something wrong about homosexuality. And I tried to explain things like, you said that but... You know, there are these people who think good things and say the wrong things? It was that kind of thing. And that person said, “Oh, you misunderstood me, I have gay friends, they even publish a magazine.” I said, “Is it Kaos GL? How do you know”, “I’m reading it so why wouldn’t I know?” Then I said, “I wrote them a letter, they didn’t write back to me.” “Oh! It can’t be right. They’re responding to all the letters,” and so on, and that’s how I met Kaos GL. We met with Ali from Kaos GL. In the same bookstore on Yüksel Street again. I was going to meet a magazine of course. So you can’t go empty-handed. I went with an article that argued that lesbianism is not a mental illness that I found in the school library. I thought I can translate it into Turkish if they would agree, for the magazine. I thought if I was meeting those people, I had to do something. Those people were already there for me, you know, I didn’t think about that. I mean, I don’t really have to do anything. That’s how we met. I didn’t understand a lot of things Ali’s been saying. He was very terminological. He was using a lot of words I didn’t know. But that didn’t deter me at all. If it was another scene, I’d think, “Oh, I don’t understand these people, I’m going to go,” but I didn’t think about anything there. I wanted to be there so much that nothing got in the way. Then we left that café. I mean, for the first time in my life, I met someone who was gay, we had a chat, and this was the first time we were going out on the street with that person. I mean, to an environment where there are other people. We instantly met a few people who were his friends. They were gay, too. They were from Kaos GL. And I said, oh, my God to myself. I’ve lived on these streets like this for years, and some people around me were gay, and I didn’t know about it. And we sat with them, we chatted, I spent hours with them. Then I joined the magazine.

Umut Güner: What should a person spend their life on?

When we came to Ankara, I discovered something in Cebeci when we were looking for a home. There was such a run-down park at that time across from the
Municipality of Mamak. It was a çark park. We went there with my mom and sat and relaxed while we were looking for a house - it was something like destiny was spinning its web - and we went there with my mom. Then I saw these guys who were waving their feet at each other. I said I'd come here after my mother. There's no way I'm going to do anything with my mom. After that, I discovered that park. Along with that park, I was actually slowly exploring the gay life of Ankara. It's interesting that when I got there for the third, fourth time, we met someone in the park who wasn't in Kaos right now but came to open Kaos's mailbox. We went all the way to the mailbox and all, but it just ended.

I didn’t explore anything outside the park before I came to Kaos. I’ve always explored parks. Gençlik Park, the park under Medical school, then the one where I was pickpocketed, the one between Sihhiye and Opera. But the year I came to Ankara, it was also the period when the construction of the subway was over and Güvenpark lived its final stages. Because for a long time the Kızılay was closed to traffic, Güvenpark had transformed into an area that they used much more easily by itself. When I came in, it was slowly losing that character. There were people in Guven Park who pretended to be undercover cops, who said they were cops. They were extorting you, threatening to tell your parents. I was extorted by one of them. He took my things, and then I went home. I told my dad. By the way, the psychology of that incident was so interesting, there were no cell phones and they were forcefully taking your family's phone number, your home phone number, and your home address. And you feel compelled to give it to them. It wasn't something like taking your cell and taking your parents’ numbers from there... I guess you can’t think of giving a false number there. Or we were fools... Anyway, I gave it to them. Then I went home. I’ve had another extortion story, so I was more comfortable telling it. My aunt’s son was my cop. My mother called him, told him. And then my mom gave a quest to my father and Ercüment to go there with me in the next day to meet those guys and take back what they have extorted. And that’s how it happened. Then, of course, my mother forbade me to go to the park. There was a tavern called Söğütdalı. It was a place between a tavern and a bar. That’s where I met Ali Ferhat. Ali Ferhat is the first person I’ve ever met to say that he was gay. I met Fuat with Ali Ferhat. Fuat seemed like a different person at the time. He was someone I couldn’t fit in my world as a gay man. At the same time, I met Uğur Yüksel, who would be the editor of the magazine in the following years, and Barış Sulu. Meanwhile, we met Uğur Yüksel and Barış Sulu through a heterosexual female friend. So I started to have my own gay world. The Uğur’s were talking a lot about Kaos, especially, and there was a Küçük İmge bookstore in Yüksel, I think it’s destroyed, or it’s going to be destroyed right now,
anyway I was stealing Kaos GL magazines from The Küçük İmge. By the way, the thing of the Kaos magazine was, because so few people had kept the magazine in the house, you were reading the magazine the day the magazine came out or the day you bought it, then you would throw it away or give it to someone else. Your relationship with the magazine was over on the same day. After reading the magazine, I thought I should go to this Kaos. Kaos’s meetings were then held as public Sunday meetings. Meetings that feminists call awareness-raising. They sit around every week and have a conversation about something. Whether or not homosexuality is a choice, is it a disease, whether homosexuality is a sin or not, whether homosexuality and gay are separate things, can people be really bisexual, are bisexuals lying, real bisexuals, do not actually exist, all bisexuals are actually homosexuals who had to get married are gays who are forced to marry, are passive and actives all gay, are actives actually homosexual, such extremely (!) beautiful, fun subjects. Naturally, people who are tired of these issues are slowly going out of that meeting room. I said, this place isn’t for me, and if the people here are gay, I said I’m not gay, and then I walked away from Kaos. I said the park is nicer. Most of the more handsome, sexier actives are there. I’ll go that way...

After that, I was setting up a shop on the street. I was selling things like jewelry, candles, batik and other things we made, in front of the library in Hacettepe, and Karanfil, Yüksel streets. By the way, There was a little unwanted revelation that happened there. I guess I refused to have sex with someone from the park. The guy came in and said, “I couldn’t fuck you, he is a faggot.” Those at the counter were acting like very libertarian, like sweet people. But homosexuality was also a taboo for them. They kicked the guy saying how dare you to say such things to Umut. On the one hand, there was something really liberating about being a porter in the streets. It was also an opportunity to face your own taboos. Because being a porter means being the person who is chased by the lowest level of civil servants.

By the way, the parks were really depleted. With its influence, I said, “I’ll go back to Kaos one more time” At that time, the summer of ’99 or 2000, I hitchhiked all over the Mediterranean, the Aegean. I stopped by my friend’s when I was walking around. He played ballad of Zülfü Livaneli, who said, “What should a man give his life to, life is flowing away” When I listened to that ballad, I thought, “I have to do something for my homosexuality now, or I have to take care of my own life” Maybe I didn’t put it so clearly about homosexuality, but I said my life isn’t going to go on like this, so I have to take care of my own life. And then this time, I came to Kaos for good.
Can Yaman: We were naive, active, inexperienced

I was open to my family in ‘99, but I had no connection to the movement. We went there through a friend, to meet Lambda. Of course, I’ve researched them before, I asked about them, there were Sunday meetings. I attended to those meetings, but at first, I only watched from a distance. I went for a year almost to get to know them, and then I got into a little workgroup. Then I started working more actively.

There was a technical meeting and a regular Sunday meeting. Sunday meetings were mostly meetings where people shared their loneliness. There was a constant circulation, so it made sense in that way. When I first arrived, there was a very active and established system. There was a culture since ‘93, there was an experience, there was infrastructure. And then there was their own discipline, coming from this experience. The friends who worked with this discipline were a little older than we were. We were like rookies around them, it was a place that thrived by seeing, learning and transferring information. We didn’t have much of a chance to intervene because we were horizontally organized, but what I thought at first was, “What’s going on?” It wasn’t clear. Imagine that I was born and raised in Beşiktas, there is a place that headquartered in Taksim and I wasn’t able to go there for almost nineteen years... At first, there was no place for Sunday meetings, it wasn’t exactly open and it was the most important thing. Being open was a real problem for the friends who worked there, who were active because they’ve all had a career, they’ve reached a certain age, but they were trying to keep themselves in the struggle, while not risking their lives...

My generation was a little more naive, a little more active but inexperienced in that sense, we had a conflict there. But that changed in 2001 when Kaos went out into the public sphere and then we were looking for a place. Because then we were in a position to pay the rent. When you are renting a place, it has to be rented in someone’s name. It’s been controversial, a lot of arguments have been made. There were a lot of ruptures that happened after that, but the next thing we saw was, it can be done after all. The friends who passed on that experience turned their backs a little bit, rightly because they didn’t expect it, they didn’t foresee such rapid development. Because coming out required a process of waiting for decades for them. Of course, then there was an anti-war movement, there was a war in Iraq, and the anti-war movement was flared-up everywhere, and somehow it takes the gay movement with it, and because it takes all the opposition movements with it, it inevitably takes them out to the street. Well, with all the movements are out in the streets, it was a little weird that there hadn’t been a
gay movement. In fact, with the friends in Ankara supporting this, then openly participating in May 1st of 2002, Pride March in 2003, made it possible for us to get into the public scene.

Özgür Azad: Even reaching them was an oasis

I remember this from the ‘80s. It’s something I see so accidentally. It’s like “faggots” or something. Later, of course, I remember them more vividly after seeing the archives of newspapers. So the fags, pancies, nancies. There were nomenclatures in that fantasy world of the ‘80s. In the ‘90s, you know, there were words more like homophile, homosexual, they evolved into “homo”, eventually. There were very popular magazines, the Aktüel, the Tempo. They would put homosexuality related things in their cover, even from time to time. There’d be a series of articles there, for example. There’d be interviews. They’d find a gay man, usually in Taksim, with pictures of him walking around the background. But they were giving a message, or even blackmail with things like, “their lives are miserable”, “something bad will happen to them in the future”, or “they will be unhappy” to the young fags like me... I used to read them with those worries. Still, it was a big thing, of course. I mean, it was an oasis even to get them, that information.

But my real salvation was somewhere else. It’s very important in my personal life and in my history. Late in high school, I liked more anarchist ideas. I come from a leftist family anyway. More libertarian, more anti-hegemonical, all kinds of freedoms are also cared for. I had a mentality, and I was defending it. I started buying some anarchist magazines, fanzine-style, what I found in Taksim. Yeşim and Ali from Kaos GL had two articles in one of those magazines there, the one that I got when I started or preparing for the college. Later, I became a friend and a comrade with these friends, especially with Yeşim. That’s what I always said to her. You’re very important to me. Their writing affected me so positively. I found out about Kaos GL, and I said I need to find this magazine.

Uğur Alper: We distributed a can of lubricant in small bottles

I never forget the first meeting that I’ve attended. I thought all the gay people in İstanbul went to Lambda, and I was just looking around and thinking on the bus while I was going there “Well, is that gay, is he going there too?” Because there was a strange political consciousness that came from within. Of course, it was unconsciousness in fact. I automatically thought something like “if you are gay then you have to get together with other gays and do something about your
rights”. When I went in there and saw only seven or eight people, I knew I was in a completely different situation. But it was still enjoyable; It was like a group of friends. After a few months, we moved to the Foundation for Social Research. I started working actively. I was doing presentations in meetings, doing things, and after a while, they started to call me Lambda Uğur. I’ve been so possessive! And I was a student, so I had a lot of free time. So I was participating in all kinds of stuff. There was a sum of money sent by the World Health Organization. With it, a laboratory in İstanbul produced water-based lubricant, which you couldn’t find in Turkey back then. Then we put on our gloves and distributed a can of lubricant with syringes into small disinfected plastic bottles that we bought from Eminönü. We distributed them to gay bars. There was the Fight With AIDS Association at the time. Because we were working together, we took condoms from them, printed leaflets and distributed lubricants.

Yasin: I was finding someone like me everywhere

I was finding someone like me everywhere, I don’t know how I did it, but I was very young when I was in Ankara. Towards the end of elementary school, I had a classmate named Yusuf. He was like me, I can’t make his exact description, just like me... Something tells me, yes, you love Yusuf, so tell Yusuf about it. But somehow you understand that you shouldn’t, and you don’t do it. He grows up with you and puts his hand on your shoulder, you are burning inside, but you can’t say anything. I don’t remember his name but there was this first guy that I’ve bedded, from high school. My mother was on duty. There was a time that I’ve taken someone to the bathtub by saying, we have a bathtub, let’s go to my home and play some games in the bathtub...

When I was a senior in high school, I came across a story about homosexuality in Aktüel magazine. What kinds of things do these homosexuals do, where do they go... I’ve read this. The story mentioned a radio show called 100% Gay Lesbian. The show was at night, I had a walkman. I listened to that in secret from my mother. Accompanied by the music of famous gay singers, after a little chat then a song again... After that show, I realized I had to do something for myself, and I thought I’d go to this Lambda... I’ve been there twice, but I can’t get through the door. I went up to the fifth floor and came back. And then something triggered me, and I said I was going to go in, and I ran fast, hopped in. They said welcome or something, and then I said, “Thank you,” and I sat down, and I started listening. There’s talk of whether we should exclude the feminists or not. Two groups were arguing like “a gay shouldn’t be that feminine”, “what do you mean” etc.. I
thought, “Am I feminine or not feminine?” an argument started in my head too. It felt good to me, and then I started going to every meeting. I slowly started to make friends. After the meeting, the group was asking, “Are we going to the bar tonight?” I was a senior in high school, I haven’t finished 18, everyone was going there... There was a place called Telve. I couldn't go, but the day I filled 18, I said yes, I’m coming to Telve, again after a meeting. The group decided to have dinner before going to the bar. I said okay, I had a sandwich, but my mom called and said, “Come home.” I said okay, then went home. Then I left the house in the middle of the night. I called the friends at Telve. Of course, not everyone has a cell phone. I have Ericson 337, anyway, I’ve reached there. I was very happy. I went to Telve. My friends left there saying we’re bored... I sat down anyway. Two men were kissing each other. It seemed incredible to me at the time. There were a lot of people and two men kissing each other...
Ali Erol: Even before the photocopy

I was open at the Language-History Faculty. My teachers, the students, everyone knew about me. I didn’t have a very different quality, but maybe the thing that people accept or can’t give up, even if they keep the distance, is that I persevere. I don’t give up the continuity, and I didn’t have any problems in my faculty, I guess it’s because even if the person in front of me calls me a faggot based on the prejudice in their heads, he feels like, or he knows that I’m going to say, “Well, then?” You’re going to say, “What’s wrong with you?”, well maybe problems and confrontations brings something else with them. Maybe it’ll speed up the process or something, but that didn’t happen.

I think there’s something about me related to us publishing the Kaos GL magazine: I had been dealing with mind-blowing things. Does a young faggot read the Cumhuriyet newspaper? I was reading that, for example. In Istanbul, feminists were publishing magazines, I was trying to find those magazines. There was Kaktüs. There was a magazine called Feminist. At that time, we heard about an initiative called Ibrahim Eren’s Radical Democratic Green Party Initiative. A few issues came out of a newspaper called Green Peace. So here’s what I thought. If this thing is going to happen, it must happen in Istanbul. Actually, it wasn’t just my idea. Students interested in literature, left-wing dissident students and so on would always have one foot in Istanbul. In fact, interestingly, there was something in people’s minds, the state, the lumpens, the common folk alike were thinking the same thing, “This won’t happen in this city, not in Ankara. It can work in İstanbul Beyoğlu, Taksim, İstiklal…”, the places they can imagine. They were saying, “It can work in a faraway place”. We thought the information would come from Istanbul. Therefore, we were looking for newspapers and magazines published in Istanbul. But on the other hand, leftist students in Ankara loved to publish magazines. They had 40 different magazines, but they also publish magazines on campus. We had some magazine experiments. We put out a magazine called The Wall. I contributed to it. We put out a magazine called the Student. Then we published a magazine called Virtuel with leftist friends with the intention of a political magazine that was different from those typical student magazines so that there would be a magazine with an intellectual aspect. I have named that one. In
my article on homosexuality, I used the pseudonym C. Ilga Kara. I heard about ILGA then. The global gay organization ILGA. The article I used the name Ali Erol was on ecology and the environment. I felt that kind of need, even though I was open here and there, and in my faculty too. Maybe it happened when our friends said, “You know, but...” The student magazines were very short-lived, maybe for a short period or one or two issues…

In the end, we actually prepared the Kaos magazine in ‘93, which we now say the first issue was published at September 94. But we waited. I mean, no one can think of Ankara, we were looking for something in İstanbul. The other side is: And if you look back and ask, “Is there nothing you feel good about, nothing to be proud of about your past?”, I would say I am proud of this morality of us. Because we heard this, “There is someone named İbrahim Eren from İstanbul and they are going to publish a magazine”; then three months go by, six months go by, I don’t know what’s going on, but the magazine won’t come out. Because when I was a student, we were already publishing magazines. I was thinking that it is not such a big deal, we can publish a gay magazine. I was working in a restaurant in Emek at that time... I was a dishwasher at the restaurant. So I couldn’t go, both economically and in terms of getting permission and so on, but we wanted to go to İstanbul. Ali and my late sister Mahmut took the magazine file and went to Green Byzantium, to meet İbrahim Eren...

Ali Özbaş: Words fly away, writings remain

That period, our house has become a place where twenty people gather every night, a place where they can eat and drink. During this time, Mahmut in İstanbul came to Ankara and started living with us. We always say words fly away, writing remains, and we want to reach out to other people. There’s a magazine idea, but it seems like we would not accomplish that with the people that gathered in our home... People were not too warm to that idea. Before I knew Ali, I wrote to someone who was seeking homosexuals in the reader’s mails column of Onyedî or Blue Jean magazine for a conversation. We met him, we talked once. Then, at the point where we continued to communicate with that friend, he shared with us the communication information of the people who wrote to him, which was in numerous, for the magazine.

We put out an ad on the Express magazine. We rented a mailbox and wrote it under the pseudonym Mikelanj. We made a call for people, but Ali was in a mood like, “This thing can only happen in İstanbul” which stopped us a little bit. Mahmut and I took the train to Istanbul. It was my first time in İstanbul, and then
it was my first gay bar experience too. It went pretty bad... It was empty when we first went. We left early. We’re from the country so we don’t know. And then it got crowded, and we spent the night as two guys who didn't leave that bar for a moment, without any use. But what kind of trauma did we have before that we stayed there like that? When we met Ibrahim Eren, we thought they would look warm and say, “Oh, good, so you are participating too, let’s do it all together.” However, İbrahim offered us tea and coffee and said, “That’s not how it works, friends,” and halted our enthusiasm.

Ali Erol: Poorest of the poor

There was no money. I mean, poorness is not a good thing of course, but I guess we were the poorest of the poor. You know, it’s all fun and games in the Güvenpark or somewhere else, people of all backgrounds come together, it is not the same when it comes to doing a job. Stories that you know, or can guess. And we needed such a little sum that it sounds funny now. The first issue of the magazine, I think, was the most published issue. Because it was copied over and over again, but it needed such a little sum for the first edition. Seventy-five liras... I think it was seventy-five liras. It was such a comical sum at the time. A heterosexual woman friend gave it finally...

Ali Özbaş: And it’s out!

Because she said, “Enough is enough”. Every time we met, when Ali talked about running a magazine and we couldn’t publish it, she was like, “Take it and publish it so that you can relax, and me too”. After that, I was there on many occasions of publication of the magazines, but Ali always had this fear and rhetoric that “we won’t be able to publish the second issue”, and when we did, he was then afraid of not being able to publish the third. So when the third one is out, Ali still won’t stop talking. But somehow he turned himself around, second and third issues published, then it began to come out on a regular monthly basis without skipping for any month, without interruption. But before that, we had regular meetings outside, on how people see this idea, what their thoughts are, and polls and arguments on people’s thoughts. We thought that this long-awaited magazine was never going to come out, and just then that friend gave the money we needed, we started our first magazine without telling anyone, a third person from that group because we had a lot of articles for a long time. On the computer that I had just learned how to use at the work, with all kinds of artistic touches that I’ve created on my own, also with the effect of being so ignorant at the time, I’ve lined
up the typesetting with almost five centimeters of space from all sides. Especially by spending a whole day to make the triangle that we thought for the cover, we made the first number printable, or rather reproducible, but I have to say there was no name Ali Özbaş or Ali Erol there. It wasn’t the worry of being visible, but our fear was to choose beautiful names because people wouldn’t take our articles seriously because they were already telling us, “Isn’t it the same thing again”, so we wrote with names like Gay’e. That’s how we got the first issue out by presenting it to our friends as “Surprise!”

**Yeşim Başaran: We were folding the pages one by one**

Yeşim Başaran: We were folding the pages one by one. The period of photocopy... The period when it was typeset on computers here and there. You know, there was no office like this, and people don’t have computers in their homes. We even did this. We even went to Ali’s office at night and stayed up to set up the magazine. There was no Internet. There was no such thing as sending an e-mail. It comes in papers, it comes by letters, or we write it down on some papers. So someone’s going to computerize them first, and no one’s ever had that kind of expertise before. Ali Özbaş makes the page design, but he didn’t know anything like that before. So he learns while doing it. We do everything, we learn while doing it, we thrive. Once I had a computer in my house, a year or two years later. I arranged the typesetting in the home. The house was in Eryaman, 20 km outside the city. I copied to the floppy disk and threw it in the bag. I went to Ali’s for page layout, to the city. I went 20 km. We put the floppy disk but it didn’t work. Then I took the bus to go back home and copied it to a few disks. Of course, you’re getting the experience. You know, the things that never happen now. Everyone’s already writing on their computer. Using e-mail. We had to put a lot of work into that part alone. And then we were photocopying the pages. We were gathering at home, all crowded. From morning to night, we’d fold and staple page by page.

**Yasemin Öz: My soul says you are so lesbian!**

Yasemin Öz: My soul says you are so lesbian! My friend got the issue of the magazine when it came out. And there was a mailbox of Kaos back then. We’re talking about a time when there’s no Internet, no e-mail. You can’t give an address. Well, there’s no place to invite them. There was only a mailbox. You can communicate with the group by writing a letter there. My friend wrote to the group, wanted to attend their meetings. My friend didn’t even want to tell me the details at the time. Then she went to their meetings when the magazine came out. And then we all hang out at a coffee shop, we were
students, we only have enough money for tea, and we don’t have the money to go to a patisserie or anything. We’re all hanging out in a coffee shop, and in Ankara, these coffeeshops were places where students hung out a lot, where not only students but also writers, journalists, theater actresses, etc hung out, a place where alternative people were going to. Anyway, that friend of mine started to show up with people I didn’t know. Male friends. Very sweet kids, dissidents, intellectuals. I loved them. I started seeing those all the time for a couple of weeks, and they came every day... I said, “How did you meet?” My friend didn’t tell me again. She managed to give me a stomach ache. These kids said, “We’re in a magazine called Kaos GL, we’re having weekly meetings.” I said, “Take me with you. I can’t find anyone to talk to about it. It’s something I want to talk about a lot. I question myself a lot.” I went to a meeting at a café. I was confused, of course... I didn’t even know if I’m heterosexual, and I don’t have any kind of sexual experience. But I had some intimacy with men, but I feel so much like a lesbian, but I don’t even know how to be sure of my lesbianism, even whether it’s something to be sure of. I went to the meeting. There were ten, fifteen of them. One or two women, most of them were male. One of these women is Yeşim Başaran. After that, I thought this team had been gathering for a long time. Here I went... I’ve had this characteristic since I was a kid. When it’s my first time going somewhere, I don’t act like it’s my first time there. People think I’m a very comfortable person. I said I went, and I don’t know if I’m a lesbian or a heterosexual or a bisexual, but I think I can find out here, so I’m confused. It was like, all the weight has been lifted, I felt so refreshed. And I was in shock, a bunch of people calling themselves gay. Publishing magazines, gathering. Leave it to the bookstores. I’ve felt a surge of courage. I found them very brave. And then we continued to chat with the girls, especially with Yeşim, after the meeting. When I went to the meeting the next week, I was in this mood, “I’m a lesbian!” I was so relieved in a week. You know, I was finally sure of the thing that I couldn’t name, that I didn’t know how to put... Kaos GL had that kind of effect on me. Even though I hadn’t had a real relationship with any woman, I was sure. I haven’t been with a woman yet. I don’t know how I’m going to feel when I experience it. But my soul says you’re so lesbian. I mean, from the intimacy I’ve had up to that day with men and women, or because of the feeling of love because of the feeling spouting to women rather than sexuality itself... Now I’m asking, of course, I’ve never experienced anything. I’m saying, do you think I’m a lesbian, as if there’s a person who knows, I didn’t know anything.. Then... Now there aren’t many women, and the women I’ve met haven’t had a lesbian experience just like me. No one’s ever been with a woman, so we don’t know if we’re lesbians or not... After that, I’m asking gays. I’m saying, do you think I’m
TRAILS - Hacking the Official History

a lesbian? How are the men going to know they too haven’t slept with a woman in their life. Then... They look at me in shock, is she an idiot, why does she ask us, but I was so unilluminated... You know, everybody looks for their prince on a white horse, and I’m waiting for the woman I’m really going to fall in love with. I don’t want it just to get laid, I mean, I’m a woman who grew up with old Turkish movies. I have an obsession with love, but life helped me get through that many times. Thank you life. We have no social acceptance. We’re not an organizational structure approved by anyone, there are so few of us already. So even publishing magazines depends on money. We were collecting dues every month to get the magazine out, for example, as much as anyone could give us. Let’s say if a person with a job could be giving fifty, hundred or two hundred, we were giving twenty, thirty, fifty, what we could afford. We were putting this money together, and that’s for this. In the meantime, we were starting to increase our numbers. Whether it is people that we communicated through the mailbox or people we met in bars or from our social lives; people were starting to come. They’re becoming our lovers, and we’re trying to participate them. There are gay bars, we’re going there. Most of the gays here are older generations of us. And the new generation doesn’t want to be associated in a politics-making place like Kaos, they prefer social life. But that’s how our periphery starts to expand a little bit.

Buse Kılıçkaya: Comrades in the prison

Today we have the internet etc., but the tiniest publication we had back then was a diamond-worth for us, and it was in English, or it was a time when we started discussions from single sentences. All of the information we had was the fanzine of Kaos GL. Other than that, we didn’t have any data, and it was so diligently reproduced and it was a magazine where the names were changed from time to time. We had nothing but that. It was a big thing for us to even go to those bookstores for that fanzine. For example, I remember when it came to Istanbul. When it was said you can find it there, I’d buy magazines, give them to my friends, or try to sell them. It was very important to us. You’re trying to get all the magazines out of the stand, to be sold in one way or another. Or you’re worried that bookstore can say, “It’s not sold anyway, let’s not buy this.” You try to spread it after reading, leaving it on buses, leaving it in the parks, leaving it where we can go, where there are people, let someone else read it. It doesn’t have to be lubunya. Just let somebody read it. Meanwhile, I was sent to prison for a while. When I went to prison, first of all, I felt so alone. My parents are coming to visit me, but the first place my lubunya was hit me so sharply was in prison. I was thrown into a solitary cell. I
was thrown into a cell, not even a ward! They made a concrete bed, they put a thin bed on top of it, so they built something resembling a bed, they put a thin flatbed on top of it. It’s a brown blanket, half the toilet is open, and it’s concrete again. I had to stay there because I was in a closed, three-step place because I was transgender because they didn’t put me in a ward. I was so lonely. No family, no one I could reach, no one to communicate with, and Kaos was the first thing that came to mind. I told my parents, my sisters, to contact with Kaos, that “I’m in a prison like this and I’m in terrible circumstances.” In fact, I understood the importance of the organization that day. I always believed that, but that day was something different for me. Staying in that tiny place, people screaming next to me, and at the same time, there are the guards saying, “I don’t know how many people that guy killed”... Think, right next to you, next to you! I mean, there is a person that you don’t know how many people he killed, a man who’s out of his mind on the other side, you’re in the middle, and there’s no sun, nothing. You’re so despicable even when they serve your food. And they put me in a place with glass, where they can see me. You know, like the animals in the zoo, all the people come in, they look at them at certain times during the day and leave in the evening. That’s what they were doing to me. There were actually more interesting things on both sides of me, but I think I was more interesting to them. They were looking at me. The guards were harassing me with things like “How do you do that?” and such.

I think people should organize, should believe in organized struggle. And I wrote a letter to Kaos GL. I was on a hunger strike for nearly 20 days. No one knew! Just my family. I said I wasn’t going to eat. Either you get me in the ward, you get me in a proper place, or I’m going to die here. When I was at a really bad stage, the prosecutor came in. Even when the prosecutor said, “Why don’t you eat, why do you do this” I wept before I could talk anything, and my first response was, “Why are you putting me here?” My attitude and my resistance allowed me to be in the ward. And then, after I got out of there, in 2001 when Kaos GL first participated in May 1st, I read it in the paper and said, “Yes, I have to get myself together and go back to Kaos.”

Özgür Azad: It was a marvelous thing

I got my first issue of Kaos in ‘98, but I knew about it in ‘97. It was amazing for me to even buy it at the bookstore in Taksim. I picked the furthest of a few bookstores. I went there a few times, looked at the books, saw Kaos, and watched it from afar. On the final day, I built up the courage. The funny thing is, I think the guy who worked at the bookstore was lubunya too. It was the issue that broke
the news of Matthew Shepard’s death, which was one of the first of very traumatic events for me. It was marvelous. I went home, read it for hours. There were both informative articles, and what was even more beautiful was something that told such personal stories, love stories, it was something marvelous. It was very erotic for me. It opened up a life-saving environment for me. I got their previous issues right away. Then I’ve been in Kaos GL for years. Then, of course, I became aware of Lambdaistanbul through Kaos magazine. I had heard of Lambdaistanbul before, during the Habitat era, from something like an interview with activists. After I found out about Kaos GL, I decided to become an activist. I didn't know, of course, what was being done, what was it all about. It was in 2000. I’ve seen the Güztanbul. At that time BaharAnkara, Güztanbul was being held. I saw Güztanbul’s poster in a rock bar. But there was no address or anything. We asked around for a day or two. I was open to my sister before. I told her because I didn’t dare to go alone. We found it somehow, but on Sunday, the event was already over. We went there but it was over. There were people chatting. They said it’s over, but you can come next week, we have a meeting every Sunday. I said okay. This time next week, I left alone early without my sister. I think I was the first one to go. At the time, a foundation's meeting room was being used. I went and waited. People came. Of course, that was a weird thing for me, too.

**Salih Canova: What can come out from a picnic?**

It was my sophomore year of college, I was suffering from severe depression, I had serious suicidal attempts. There was already some gossip going on between my friends. “This kid has a problem, he doesn't tell us, I think he's gay.” I was tired of hiding, I was trying to open up, but I couldn't find a way. There was Kabile Bookstore at that time in İzmir-Konak, where I saw Kaos GL, but I couldn’t even touch it. Somehow, I think I knew about the magazine from the interview with Öküz Magazine. One day, while walking around the stands at TÜYAP book fair, I came across the stand of Kaos Publications, and there was Kaos GL at the stand. First I took a few laps, and then I asked Zelha, the booth attendant, whom we're still seeing each other with, a few questions about the magazine. I thought the magazine would be published by a few rich faggots. For some reason, I’ve fictionalized some kind of a class relationship. Then Zelha told me about the magazine and the Kaos GL group at length. She also gave copies of the magazine, free of charge. I read almost all the pages in a quiet corner at the fair. And on the way home, I smashed and threw them away. But I wasn't able to contain myself, so I was going to come out. One day there was a story in the Hürriyet newspaper. One
study found that the ones with an index finger shorter than the ring finger were homosexuals. So I guess that was enough for me that I said to my three roommates that I lived with that night, “Can I look your fingers?” They showed me, and it was really just that my index finger was short, theirs was long. One of them said, “Why did you look?” And I said, “To understand are you homosexuals or not?” When another of my roommates said, “Where did this talk come from?” I said “because I’m homosexual, that’s why”, but I don’t remember how it came out of my mouth, what happened, what it was. As soon as I told them, I went to the bathroom. I looked in the mirror. I said, “What the fuck have I done?” Two or three days of cold winds blew at home like this, but it wasn’t hostile. I didn’t know how to behave, nor did they. And then these friends said, “there is a picnic on Işık Dağı in Ankara, something named Kaos GL is organizing it”. One of them had studied in Ankara before, he knew the magazine and Kaos. “People are meeting, so if you want to go.” The meeting was on May 19th. May 19th is my birthday. Hürriyet even made a sensational story about “homosexuals in the Kızılay on May 19th”. No one’s on the Kızılay, of course. Somehow they bought me a ticket like a birthday present and I went to Ankara.

By the way, I called the magazine before I left, and they were using a joint office with an accountant at the time, and there was a hotline-like phone. I went to the most remote phone booth in the world, to call that number, but I really went to the top of a mountain in Izmir. I couldn’t call first, then I tried again, and as soon as I said “hello,” I kind of got up the courage Psychologist Murat picked up the phone -who became my friend later-. I think this was the first time I’d ever spoken to someone outside of myself who identified themselves as gay, and I was so excited. Murat spoke very sincerely, friendly and comfortingly. He relayed some details of the meeting. Then I found myself in Baharankara. At that time, there were meetings held in Ankara, there was Baharankara held in Ankara in the springs and in the fall there was Güztanbul in İstanbul. Ali Erol picked me up in front of the Cebeci Post Office. Ali had a long beard at the time. I was surprised. I wasn’t expecting someone with a beard and mustache because I interpreted homosexuality linked to being feminine. I had a very nice few days in Ankara, I still have friends I met from that day, including the late Mahmut. After that, it all happened so fast. I was going back and forth to Ankara, writing and drawing things for the magazine. Thus, the period of activism that will last for many years has begun for me. At that time, Kaos stopped being sold in İzmir, I think the person managed that had left the city... I said, “Oh, why can’t it be sold?” Ali said, “My sweetheart it can be sold if you distribute it.” So I assumed the distribution of the magazine in Izmir.
‘93:
TAKING THE STREETS AND MARCH EXPERIMENT IN ISTANBUL

Mine Yanat: What do you mean by homosexual terrorist?

Before Lambdaistanbul, I met İbrahim Erens. We were having meetings with them. There was Also Demet Demir. They’ve been very supportive of me. There were a lot of people. We had some really good meetings. But it didn’t go very far. After that, a new group started to gather. Heribert attended these meetings. I don’t remember exactly, but I think we were trying to find a name at Heribert’s house. He says that I’m saying this. We just couldn’t find it. I was dealing with icons back then. What the gay symbols are and what’s not. There was the seahorse, this, and that, I said the seahorse but they didn’t accept. I said okay. I said I’m a math lover, let t be the lambda. Everyone agreed, Lambda was founded. It’s been named. We opened up slowly. Of course, we tried to hold a march meanwhile. The preparation process of the march was very beautiful. We prepared with great enthusiasm. The meeting was so good. Everyone was so happy, but I’d say they’ve galvanized the public because of the press. Because before the march started on Istiklal Street before people got on to the street, the police caught the people. Threats to the house had begun. I mean, they called my mother and said “We can make a woman out of your daughter. Get your daughter to make up her mind, if you don’t marry off your daughter we will do this, we will do that” a ton of threats. That’s how my mom found out. My mother started to get scared, and she said, “Girl, do it in secret. Come on, you don’t have to be at the frontline.” But I didn’t listen if it was to happen then let it be. I even went to the police, and I said, brother, that I’m threatened like this, that I’m being threatened through the phone.

Before the march, we reported the march tp the authorities, a briefing was made. We made a statement at a café in Beyoğlu Business Center. The press attitude was good in that statement, but the news afterward was very bad. Things like, “You can’t sell snails a Muslim neighborhood, no, no sir, this is not Brazil.”
And I never forget that day. Well, the four or five of us were suddenly thrown somewhere, through the alleys. They lost track of us, then they beat up a couple of people in the Tünel, and then they deported people who came from the airport. As much as I know they stopped it before we even walked, so it wasn’t a march, but it was still a good step.

There were old files at the station, cardboard files, stuff that was written on it, written in pencil, “gay terrorist”. It seemed so strange to me. I said, so you have written this, would you give me a copy of this, give me a picture or something of this. What do you mean terrorist, who’s that?
STRUGGLE OF GETTING TOGETHER

Ali Özbaş: Getting “fired” from İHD

When I said being fired from the İHD, it wasn’t in the form of “get out”. They knew what we were, they let us have meetings there, but we weren’t satisfied with that. We needed something bigger and bigger than that... We’re meeting there, but who are we? We’re not a bunch of wretched lubunya. Let’s name it... We said they should recognize us officially, and there it was moving in the form of commissions. We wanted to start the Gay and Lesbian Commission of the İHD. However, the İHD did not respond. They put our request on hold, then they refused. They didn’t see fit. There were always “even”s or priorities. There were various things like, “But we didn’t let even that happen.” This has alienated us from gathering in their place, but since we didn’t have a place of our own, we started gathering in cafes. We especially preferred quiet hours and quiet spaces where we could talk and discuss. And places where every friend can go in and out without feeling uncomfortable. We’ve been to different places.

Ali Erol: Meetings in bars and cafes

It is not possible to commemorate them all, but it is necessary to commemorate The Sakal Café in Olgunlar. Because they were giving us one of their rooms at the time of the meeting. The meetings there were going well, they weren’t getting interrupted or anything. Then there was the Foundation for Social Research across from the old French Culture in Kızılay, an apartment with three rooms and one hall. There they were giving us a room in the back. Our long-term meetings in the hall of the Foundation for Social Research were the ones where we gradually tried to institutionalize. Because there were study groups. We were doing film screenings, for example. We were having discussions about film screenings.

Mine Yanat: House meetings in İstanbul

There was a little shyness after ‘93, but the meetings continued. Years had passed, and we’ve started making brochures, making little magazines. I wasn’t able to participate much, or rather, there were friends who were making that happen,
they were gathering at Heribert’s house. For a while, there wasn’t much going on beyond meetings. But then gradually the meetings shifted from house to proper places. It was hard to find a place. We found a place to gather with great effort.

No one knew for a while while I was pregnant with the boy. I hid it from my parents, he came early, he didn’t last long, he was born when he was seven months old, and my mom found out at the hospital. May God bless her soul, we are from Istanbul, but believe me, the people who grew up in Istanbul, especially the women, are a little more conservative than others. I’m a bit of a rebel, I say I’m an individual and that’s it. My mother said “Look, your brother doesn’t want it too” to me, she said, “Let’s give this kid to someone.” I said, “Mom, what do you say? I can’t give him away.” In fact, there was journalist Mehmet Duru, who I never forget. God bless him, he helped so much. He came and said to my mother, “Aunt Şükran, that’s a mother,” and he added, “She’s also my sister”, “If you’re not taking her into your home, my sister and her son are coming to my home”. He said, “You can come and see whenever you want.” I said, “Mom”, “You’re a mother too” We’ve had something like this. Well, of course, my mom is a mother, after all. Not a week later, she came and saw his grandson, and then she said, “We’re going home.”

**Öner Ceylan: Lambda in the house**

The Internet was very limited. I was able to go online because there was Internet connection at work, there was not much internet connection in the houses back then. How did these things were getting done when there was no Internet? Lambda had a website that surprised me when I found it because Google didn’t exist, it couldn’t be found easily. They had put the Lambda site and Lambda’s magazine in there. I read the writings there, I was very excited because I read something in Turkish about it. Then lambda became my socializing environment. There have been places that I went with Lambda, with people from Lambda. We were meeting at Heribert’s house on Friday nights, we were publishing a magazine, and it was called One-Hundred Percent GL. Then we changed its name to Cins, and there were three points at the beginning and the end. And, of course, I have to say that here, too. The word I used back then was homosexual, there were talks of today’s trans, bisexual, but Lambdaistanbul was called as the Homosexual Civil Society Initiative. We used a roof word, and we said it covered everything. So was the jargon back then, so the magazine was called that. It’s always changing, this jargon, always flowing, but it was very different from today. I remember doing some fetch jobs for that magazine. Other than that, we were putting out brochures, generally brochures about HIV and AIDS.
Yeşim Başaran: You can ask the tea maker about me

When I wrote the first letter to Kaos GL to the PK 53 Cebeci-Ankara address, which I remember even now, I was a student at METU and there was no mailbox in the apartment where I lived. So how are they going to contact me? I don't have a phone. The internet doesn't exist anyway. I wrote this, “I’m in METU Industrial Engineering. Our section consists of two floors. I’m always on the fourth or fifth floors. If you have a friend from METU, they can come and find me there. They can ask the tea maker about me.” I wrote them the phone number of the tea maker of that building. “If you call him, if you want Yeşim, he’ll find me, he’ll call me.” I wrote these things so they could get in contact with me. Because they’re not going to get to me any other way. Of course, they never got that letter. There was no response. And when I met them, I realized there was no one at METU anyway. Or rather, a friend, who was getting a master’s degree, that's all. And that friend was involved in Kaos in the old days, not too much at those years. Also not as connected to the school as it was a graduate student.

I opened a booth in the school to sell Kaos GL at the Spring Festival of that year. When I opened that booth, it turned out I wasn’t the only homosexual at METU. A lot of people came and bought magazines from me and we talked all the time. After a while, that stand turned into something else. There’s a circle behind the booth all day long, and we’re chatting there. The magazines were getting sold at the neighboring stand. Because everyone thought they were the only gay people at METU. And when we saw we weren’t, we didn’t break up. We didn’t want to leave each other. The canteen of Architecture has become something like our meeting place. It’s not like we’re having an event, more like some of us talking at a table, no matter what time of day you go. A situation formed that “Where are the gays? They’re hanging out in the architecture canteen.” And you know, everyone knew everyone, or so when we showed up like that, other people I already know started opening up to me. I counted it once. I sat down and made a list. Eighteen people opened up to me. I thought I was the only homosexual person at METU for years. A lot of people from the dorm, the next room, a student club I hung out with, a lot of people from the upper class of our department came out. It was like a snowball. And then we started saying, “Should we do something at school?” By the way, there was a visibility that came with that booth. People from other
communities started coming to us. A political science student was writing an international thesis or article or something about the LGBTI movement, and they were going to do an event to present their article, and they came to us. They said, “would you come and speak about Turkey”. I used to go to the events at school, but I didn’t dare, I couldn’t make a comment, I couldn’t ask a question. I’ve been in that business as a speaker without any attempts to speak in public. They took it seriously, they listened, then they argued, they asked questions.

It was my senior year at METU. I wish I’d lived all of my years like that. I’m very happy to have spent, at least that last year, in such an active and social way. When we started the club, when I say club, we didn’t go and formed it as an official registered club. We wanted to name it. A friend suggested this. At the time, we used the word gay as gay. Lesbian Gay... We were writing gay, but we pronounced it differently, contrary to the Turkish, where everything is pronounced as they are written. Lezbiyen Gay Topluluğu, i.e. Lesbian Gay Society. When you take the initials it makes LEGATO. And at METU, the student clubs are called society at the end. Mountaineering Society, Literary Society, etc. So it’s a society. LEGATO also means combining notes together, as a music term. A name with a good story behind it. A friend suggested it. That’s how the name LEGATO came up. And we’re going to do an event, how are we going to do it? You can’t do activities without permission. People from the Political Science Community told us, “Do the activity as if you were one of us”, “You don’t have to ask us anything, do whatever you want to do. No need for things like applications to our board, all those discussions just to get approval. You can use our name on our behalf in any way you like.” That’s what they said. Therefore, when we were doing activities and applying for them, we were applying as the Political Science Society.
TIME TO DROP ANCHOR: KAOS CULTURAL CENTER

Ali Erol: First venue

Our house in Demirlibahçe had an important meaning not only for our lives but also for the early stages of Kaos. But for a long time in Demirlibahçe, the establishment, construction of Kaos, the regular emergence of the magazine, home meetings continued. One day, suddenly the police came. They said, “We’ve heard that you are publishing a magazine” I burst right away, with a sense that left from studentship. I said, “No, I mean, it’s not us, it’s me.” So that at least they take away one person. He said, “Okay, no problem, but you can’t publish this magazine from now on because this magazine is not registered.” The Press Desk, which is now in the courthouse within the Public Prosecutor’s Office, was in the Police Department for that time. They said, “You’re going to go there and register.” And I said, “Okay, so let’s do whatever it takes.” It meant that we also had to show an administrative center address for the magazine. In fact, both the police and the lubunyas and everyone knew that the center of the magazine was in Demirlibahçe. But there was a procedure to name it and make it formally legal, and they were checking to see if we’re going to follow it or not. And then we said we can’t show this house as the administrative office, we shouldn’t. It’s the house we live in. Okay, we’re not secretive, we haven’t had a problem for how many years, we haven’t had a problem in the neighborhood, and so on, but it’s another thing to show it as an administrative center in the magazine. In our search for a place, we first showed an address on Kennedy Street, where we never went. At least so the magazine doesn’t get too much disruption. Then we started having meetings and so on in a room of a friend’s accounting office on Ergün Street.

It was also a time for us to have new encounters, new conflicts. Okay, we’re going to find a place for the magazine, and on the other hand, just because we did what we wanted it doesn’t end. The prosecutor’s office had opened an investigation about us for not registering this magazine until now, and we needed a lawyer. Even though we had gay lawyer friends who were with us in socializing, having fun, small talk, because of the issue of visibility, these friends did not want to attend to our court proceedings and again our hetero friends defended us in court. We needed space, again, our straight friend opened some room in their office,
or, in the problem we had at the Human Rights Association, a straight friend of ours said, “What are you guys doing?” So I think it’s important to see them, too. Because coming out problems or anxieties of gays took a lot of time.

For example, what does everyone know? It is said that homosexuals and transgender people joined May 1st in Ankara for the first time in Turkey with rainbow flags and their own banners in 2001. Right... I mean, that’s true as of date, but we had an experiment on May Day, 1997. We are already a group that hosts regular Sunday meetings, regularly publishes its magazine, works, tries to weave its policy of struggle. In fact, we are a group that has come to work as an association even without a name. Therefore, we want to participate in May 1st and in 1997 we participated for the first time. All hell broke loose at the Sunday meeting after May 1st. So a segment was saying, “What are we doing on May 1st?!” or they were asking “How is it related to us?” just to understand. There were people who sensed where this was headed and how it was going to end. And because they sensed that it wasn't going to end by joining a May Day, they were saying, “Where did it come from?” So it took time to get to this stage... No... So Kaos joins May 1st and works to ensure that homosexuals are safely participates and returns without even a nosebleed, but it doesn't impose on everyone to join everywhere. For example, when a group goes to May 1st, I can keep watch in the office and keep it open, and when my friends come back, I can make tea, coffee, bagels. I mean, whatever I want to do, whatever I can do. This stage, for example, took time. Similarly, Mehmet Ali Birand, a prime time news anchor, wanted to make a special program for his show, so we said, “What’s wrong with that, we're not hiding anymore, let's join in.” All hell broke loose again. “How can it be” that “even if two people from the group show up there, even if two people from the organization goes there, the work will not end with them because I am a member of this group too”, people felt that the conflict of visibility would eventually compel them too... I think we made some historic interventions there. For example, we were sensing the thing there; What do the friends here actually want to tell us? So is this anxiety a personal concern, a collective concern, a concern that comes from not being able to predict or know something, or is it a stimulus that we should say, “Oh, we missed that part, we didn't think about it, and we need to look at ourselves”. When we tried to understand that, I realized. We needed to act on the average demands of the groups on issues like the tv show, visibility, May Day experiment, etc., for the sake of the survivability of the group, for the average of the group and to protect the organized network. If we hadn't done that, I think there would probably have been a more radical rupture in Kaos GL, and Kaos GL would have been a smaller group, thrown off its cooperative, independent
and inclusive line. It has something to do with space too. Again, as we saw that the number gradually increased during those meetings, we saw something. People couldn't find a place to have coffee or beer in the past but with the opening of some new places, people were being accepted to some of them at least for a period, in the summer, when Ankara is emptied and those places starved for customers. Even if they kick you out in six months, on whichever excuse. There were also suggestions that meetings should be held in a bar, for example. It was the first time I'd noticed a thing there. People were looking into our eyes, to make us understand. These guys, the guys who actually go to the bar on a regular basis, they want to go to that bar, but they don't want this meeting they come to on Sunday to be held at that bar. They were looking into our eyes to make us see that, but they see us there as decision-makers to keep them from conflicting with the friends who invited us to that bar. So we said, “No, this discussion is over, these meetings will continue as long as we find a place, but they will never be held in the hall of a political party or in a corner of a bar.” And on the other issues of tv, May 1st and so on, we said, “Oh, the group is not ready for it yet. Rather than disbanding the group, let’s postpone it for three years.” And that was what actually happened. We had our own place at the same time on May 1, 2001, when we joined together with our own rainbow flags and our own banners, which we participated together as the gay magazine Kaos GL together from gay to transgender. And there had already been meetings, which we discussed why were we attending, and so on, and there the group has become a structure that started acting for itself, layer by layer, that protects itself. For example, who goes to May 1st? Who’s going to stay at the precinct when the ones that go to May 1st go? Who will be in charge of the building’s door? Who’s going to brew the tea? Who’s going to take care of who’s coming, who’s going to take care of who’s going? When all this happened, it happened with enthusiasm and we said it happened finally, we came back after May 1st to the center, we had that tea and coffee, had that bagel, and people felt good about themselves. And I’d say the problem of finding a place was solved.

Oya Burcu Ersoy: Cultural Center Meetings

It was a big, beautiful thing for all of us to have a place. I was always going there at every chance I got. We needed to do somethings, like meeting the newcomers. Having a place was very important. We needed to show more people what homosexuality was, that homosexuals were everywhere. And this was an important means to achieve that, so I needed to be in. There was not a lot of people. The internet was just spreading at that time. So it was very important to
distribute magazines because facebooks, Instagrams weren't there, posters were very important, announcing the events was very important, to invite people to the cultural center, to increase their participation in events. It was very valuable. That's why I never quit.

On the other hand, due to the need for a boost of confidence for the women to believe in themselves and do something in this patriarchal world, patriarchal country and organization, we wanted to do something to make women more active in Kaos GL, or even to make them come. For example, when a woman comes to Kaos GL and sees that there's no woman there, just, I don't know, she's running into men, she's not opening up completely. So we said that if we designate a time especially for women, women who are afraid to come at other times, who came and went back, come to us and feel warmer. That's how the women meetings were born. There were a lot of women who came to Sunday conversations and then started doing things actively at Kaos GL. I mean, it happened the way we wanted it to.

**Umut Güner: Cafe-cultural center discussions**

The second reason I didn't come to Kaos before my street stall business went down, I had a friend at Hacettepe University from the student community there. Everyone knows METU, but there was a gay student community in Hacettepe. He made film screenings and opened regular stands. From there, my friend saw me setting up shop on the campus and the moment he saw me, he yelled, “You’re gay”. And such horror. Okay, I’m gay, but like, you know, it didn't mean someone on the street yelling at me that you're gay. Every time he saw me, he was like, “You're gay, you should come to Kaos.” And I was saying, if Kaos is full of people like this, I shouldn't go. I delayed my return for a period because of that too. In the following process, I went to Kaos after my hitchhike tour. Kaos had a cafe back then. The café was actually open to solidarity as an alternative café, and it was a place where they would say, “Come in” to people. The first venue of Kaos. I’m sitting there in the kitchen. It was a narrow kitchen. Ali Erol came. He said, “What’s he doing here, let him sit in the living room” with all his sympathy, his smiling face! I felt like I shouldn't be here, but on the one hand, it’s a good thing. Because I could’ve been sitting in the kitchen my whole life. The second time I came, I came to sit in the café. But that's when they suddenly moved away. the internet wasn’t that common. It's not so easy to find out where Kaos has been moved. I guess fate gave me some pretty sweet messages not to go to Kaos, and I didn't take any of them. When I first came to the second place of Kaos, there was
a meeting on Sunday. The person who opened the door said, “Have you come for
the meeting?” And I said, “well yes...” I don’t know what the meeting is, or what
they’re meeting for. I was sitting there at the table. Meanwhile, Kaos was such a
lovely and genial organization at the time. People were looking at me like, why
this one came. Unlike the previous period, they divided the meetings into two.
This place was a better one too. They have a place, and because they use it well,
they can use it at a wider time, so they were holding their own internal meetings,
and a second public meeting after that. I accidentally attended the group’s inter-
nal meeting.

At the café, we were discussing whether to make pancakes or make cold sand-
wiches. But behind this argument was a background. In fact, how do we relate
to people in Kaos’s café, Kaos’s own business? That was the main thing that was
being discussed. Are the people who come here a customer of the café, or were
they coming to Kaos to get information, and to organize? There was an incon-
venience due to the organization and the café was using the same place, and for
a long time, we couldn’t talk about anything other than that. How are we going
to pay the rent, what about the water bill? And then there was this broken heater
when I came in. And it stayed broken until 2002. The last agenda of every week
was whether to get the heater repaired or change it. At that time, the Çankaya
Municipality provided great support, they closed the café. Supposedly, someone
complained about us. The apartment that we were using was not eligible to ob-
tain a workplace license, so they decided to close the café. But across the café,
for example, there was a place called the Bookworm. How did they get a license?
They didn’t have a license either. Actually, it was all about having a friend in the
municipality. The café got closed because we didn’t have any. At that time, we
made a cover for the magazine as “Tea is just an excuse”, with a tea glass, and
we thought as very creative. But then we remembered that our main goal was to
change, transform and be liberated together. The café is just a tool for it. And over
time, the café got in the way of what we ultimately aimed for, and we were really
grateful that the café was closed and it became a cultural center.

Meanwhile, during and after the café period, meetings such as Thursday chats
and Sunday meetings were held a lot. These were actually meetings where people
who wanted to come to Kaos to be informed could attend to, where they could
participate in the discussions. For example, we were discussing this a lot in our
closed meetings; “how much we should intervene in the debate”, and what we
agreed on was to ensure that everyone at the meeting had a say, and to give the in-
formation about how Kaos conveys homosexuality by differentiating it from our
own personal perspectives. Because of our identity, there was debatable, it could interfere. Is that said on behalf of the Kaos, or is Umut expressing his own personal opinion? For example, we were always stating that with things like, “That’s what I think personally.” On the other hand, one of the issues discussed was that during the time of the café, especially the people who came to the café were actually coming to satisfy the needs which they failed to do so in the park, cinema, bathhouse, bar, in a way like me. They were actually coming to find a sex partner. We were saying, should people get what they wanted and leave? So is this should be a place where people meet each other just for sex and romantic relationships, or should it have something else that goes beyond that? Then should we talk to these people in the name of Kaos and at the same time send the message that we are the first candidates to become their sex partners? After a while, we brought the prohibition on the thing, half-jokingly, half-serious. We don’t sleep with a newcomer for a month. Let the person socialize. There was a time of awareness that we realized homosexuality needed something other than sex, that it needed socialization, that it was also a social identity.
A HOME IN İSTANBUL:
LAMBDAİSTANBUL
CULTURAL CENTER

Öner Ceylan: Terkos Impasse

We were meeting at the Foundation for Social Research, where we were paying rent and we could only use it for a few hours on Sundays, and we wanted a place. After that, we thought, are we able to do it, at first it felt like a distant dream. We thought it wasn’t possible, because of the financial aspect of it. We thought we couldn’t manage it, we couldn’t keep up. Then one day we did a little math, and we did an account like a grocery book, and we started looking for a place. We had a hard time there, of course. We were an NGO and all that, but what are we going to say if they ask us what is your deal? We even made jokes among ourselves, like the flower association, bug association. After that, we found a place. It was at Terkos Impasse. I remember whitewashing with great excitement. We were incredibly excited. It was about a month before Pride Week. We were upstairs and the downstairs was empty. It was a big place. We had Pride Week that year at downstairs. I remember we were doing panels there and stuff, and I remember it was pretty nice, attendance was very high, of course, there weren’t always events at the time, so it was important. There's still interest in Pride Weeks, but it was an important week then too, and people were coming. There were a lot of people coming to the events, how we were announcing it, I still don’t know. We've been leaving ads in cafes and stuff, but now it seems impossible for me to announce something, without the internet. In the following years, it continued on in various places because every time we somehow had problems with the landlord.

Özgür Azad: The first place and snowball effect…

Lambdaistanbul couldn’t even look for a place in its early times because it wasn’t a group with a budget. At some point, there were talks of a permanent place. We wanted a place where people could come every day, pour their hearts out, socialize. We rented an apartment in a building at the end of the Terkos Passage. It was a place with a single hall and a mini room. A year later, we moved upstairs, which was bigger and had more room to use. We were there for a few years.
Then we moved higher up in İstiklal. It was a little more accessible, even though it was a small place. It was also the time when we made some big moves. The place has had great functions, in the sense of motion, in terms of applications. On the other hand, we were always in contact with Kaos and groups established in various places from time to time. When one of them did something, it would set an example for the others. I’m so happy to see that snowball era.
Esmeray: What happened in Ülker?

Our Pinar Selek... I met Pinar. We became friends right away. I went to the workshop and I’m also a member of the ÖDP. But the workshop engulfed me more. There were so many different things being done in the workshop. So we were recycling what we found in the streets and taking it back to the street and selling them. These things were happening. I met with the theater there. That’s what I had, a longing for. When there was a play at school, they made me play. After I learned the theater, I said I could do it. There were several groups, reading groups in that workshop. We’re reading, we’re doing something. Then they said, “Why don’t we stage a play?” I jumped right in: I’m in. We started with reading. Here’s the history of acting. What a history that was. So we said let’s get out of here. Because we went all the way back to the era of gathering and hunting before the established societies. Because the men hunting and women stayed at home, I don’t even know. Maybe they’re doing it together, men and women. There are those who stay in the house, there are those who go hunting, and those who go hunting do certain rituals with the fires and wearing the fur of the hunt and the other shows how they hunted them.

Anyway, we left it there. We took a more practical route, theatre readings on stage... We spent a year there with a lot of acting. We started with street play. It was going so well. Then the workshop fell apart after the plot happened to Pinar. So we couldn’t hold on, we couldn’t make it. We had to shut it down. Because we were under direct surveillance. There were Renaults back then. The Renaults were still going on. In the ‘97s or so. 96-97. The white Renaults were always following us. So we knew. I was on the streets. I hadn’t stopped being a sex worker. No one was going to wrong me because they knew the police were there. I knew the police were waiting for me there. I was leaving, I was coming, they were waiting there. Then they let us go. I guess they said, “they are transvestites, they have no business with an organization or anything”. They already knew Pınar was innocent too. After that, they let us go. In fact, it was good for me as no one could wrong me with them waiting around the corner... We had to close the workshop. Then I started going to the Mesopotamian Cultural Center.

9 Özgürlük ve Dayanışma Partisi, a leftist socialist party
Back in ‘92, ‘93, a police chief named Süleyman the Hose came to the Ülker Street. We knew Suleiman the Hose. Now you know the violence of him. They had hoses, three individual hoses. We were constantly being detained when we entering the house, and we were being detained at the checkpoints. We couldn’t go out on the street, we couldn’t shop, we were picked up on the way to the grocery store. We were being detained everywhere. Süleyman the Hose suddenly left, he was appointed to somewhere else. We were so happy.

There was a Habitat period in ‘96 or something. And they said that Süleyman the Hose will come back. You know, because a direct operation to clean up Istanbul has begun. Who are they going to clean up? They’re going to clean up street kids, hobos, and transvestites. They’re bringing the Hose. Süleyman the Hose came back to Beyoğlu. And since it was summer, everyone’s gone on vacation. We said, “Let’s go on vacation, meanwhile the Hose would go away and we can return to our home” We were wrong. It turns out the Hose has came to settle down. Of course, the first raids to Ülker Street... Terrible raids. The street was closed. There was martial law on the street. There were always police waiting outside everyone’s door. We couldn’t get out. We were taking our lovers in from back doors. Those lovers of us were so determined that we discovered places from in the backsides of buildings. Think about it now, we’re on the fifth floor. We come down from the fifth floor with duvets, sheets tied together, we climb down. There are gaps in that alley, and we’re going from that gap to the other street. We’ve discovered a place at the entrance to the other street building, we’re going through the coal depot of that building to the other street. The lover is coming. We’re describing the route to him, and he goes through that coal depot. We take the lover up to the fifth floor with things. That’s how the lovers came. That’s the way it is. It was a lot of fun. So, for example, I don’t know how much fear we felt, when we heard that Süleyman the Hose was coming we were jumping down from the fifth floor and poof! I probably can’t do it now. And I have a fear of heights. And you say you can’t, but you do it. Suleiman the Hose has put some serious pressure. In the end, the doors were broken, all the doors were broken with sledgehammers, houses were burned, arson, things were thrown into the streets. We can’t go out on the street anymore. We lost the street. Then we fell apart. Everyone’s gone somewhere.

In 2001, Amargi10 was founded. Now I’ve grasped feminism, I’ve learned that language, I’ve started reading. I’m attending acting courses at the Mesopotamian Cultural Center. I started a drama class. I go to that course three or four days a

10 Amargi was a feminist collective established in Istanbul
week in a very disciplined manner. I went there for two years. And then when I was halfway through the feminism theory, when I slowly started to grasp it, I stopped being a sex worker. I wasn't looking at that with an ethical perspective, I've quit because it was imposed on me. I said you can't impose it on me, I could do something else, so I left. Then people didn't give me a job. I tell it a lot now, everywhere. It was hard for me to get a job. I tried to stand on my own two feet. I was starving for a long time. Then a friend gave me a job. She was a feminist woman. In the café industry. That's where my field was. I've worked, I've worked there. Then it came to this, here in Amargi we're discussing the theory of feminism from an academic perspective. There were some activities going on. A meeting held in Konya. There was an event called ‘All women are walking.’ What we have in common is that we'll meet in Konya. Messengers were sent out. So I set off from Istanbul as one of the messengers. Events like this continued. Our relationship with Lambda and Kaos was very good. Lambda, Kaos, here's Amargi, other women's institutions, a lot of feminism and LGBTI debates have begun. I'm still unemployed. What do I do, what do I do? My landlord told me to sell mussels. I started selling mussels in the street.

Meanwhile, we formed a theater group in Amargi. Theatre Amargi. We worked there for a year. We played at the end of the year, its name was Things That Falls Down From the Kerchief. We also had the premiere of the play at Afife Jale Theater, which was very important for us, because the first Armenian woman who was on the stage in Turkey was there. Then the usual end of an amateur theater happened to us too, it couldn't go on. A year later, that theater fell apart. Playing a feminist theater play was something different and it wasn't easy to put on the track. I started selling mussels, and all this piled up within me. And I had amazing stories while selling mussels... You meet another world, it's different. So, yes, you're always on the street, just as a prostitute, the stories on the street and the stories of a shopkeeper, a peddler, a trans woman, are very different. I've got all this piled up. And a friend of mine said to me, “Why don’t you go out and tell these stories? You have a gift like that, you're a very good narrator, you can do it, you have a very good imitation ability too. Do it.” I laughed. I told her some of that, “Look,” she said, “the framework is ready” Then I met Ayça Damgacı. I worked with Ayça for two months. The narrative was my own life story. No regie. They said, “Take the bundle, get on that stage.” Then I had to be very careful with the language. It could become a bawdy show easily. So, how can I put that feminist language into my narrative... That's why I met Jale Karabekir, the Painted Bird Theatre. Jale and I worked for a month. My first performances were staged to feminist women and to the Lambda gay community, LGBTI. The play
has evolved after many performances. Criticism, self-criticism, all my narratives are like that. It forms up with the audience. Then folks said we had to go public with it. Friends from Amargi got organized and formed a group with people from other institutions. Back then WhatsApp, Facebook didn't exist. A group was created via mail. That group worked independently of me. They organized it very well. The Anatolian Cultural Center has also sponsored. We had a premiere at Bilgi University, The Witch's Bundle, and suddenly it exploded, the Witch's Bundle. Then it happened at all the universities. All the teachers who taught gender were either sending their all students or invited me to school. There are no more universities in Istanbul that I didn't go to. Ankara is like that. Then the Tour of Turkey began. Then the European tour, then the second play and the third play...

Tuğrul Eryılmaz: Ülker Street has a bitter memory in my mind

Back then we were publishing the Street magazine. In Ülker Street, people were hanging flags on their doors saying we are not trans, gay... It was bizarre! And even then, they really kidnapped people from there. But flags and all that, it was like we were going to war. We're talking about the citizens of your own country, they are no different from you. Same sadness and starvation... You like to sleep with “A” and make friends with, what if he does that with B? Because it will take a really long time to explain... Because I’m going to be so out of line, but I mean, we're talking about a male-dominated culture that's been thousands of years old. What do you expect from today to tomorrow? So much apocalyptic things have happened, that women are equalized... How did they got equalized? It's not that easy, but it means that people who are engaged in this kind of work, who have humanitarian concerns, who have ideological concerns, will make this happen with their efforts. “One step at a time”... There's no such thing. Ülker Street always leaves something in my head, it bitterness... I remember the thing, they put up the flags and “come on faggots, transgenders, come on out!”... I mean, so many horrible things have happened there, the thing about people... Well, a lot of things are being ignored. It’s terrifying, too. I mean, as if when you ignore it, it disappears. There's no such thing, but there are people suffering there. There’s no way one person can cause another person pain for one reason or another. I mean, if they thought of such general things, of course, people's minds wouldn’t be on their asses, you know? If they could look at it like this, that woman, that man, that person is suffering... You know, it sounded a little like a Turkish movie, but that’s the truth! I don’t have to tell you ideologies, you know something. For thousands of years, men have ruined this world. And when we say men, we talk
about something, we talk about ideology. I hit, then it starts. It starts with your mother, then who knows what, it starts for your daughter, “Don’t go out on the street so much, are you going to be a bitch”... Of course, I don’t mean everyone. But that’s what you call as patriarchy, and if you stay within the rules that I draw, you have the right to life, and people don’t accept it anymore. Whether they’re gay or not. They say I don’t care, I live my own life.

Now when a movement starts, when a social movement starts, it’s not so easy to put it back in the bottle. But I see things sometimes, I see from the numbers of Kaos GL, there’s still serious homophobia, and sometimes even your friends who you assume aren’t homophobic say things that make you say “Oh my God! Where did that come from?” Something that was internalized. It will take many more generations, so that it can be fired, exorcised and thrown out... Otherwise, it’s not all fun and games... But there’s always hope. Things came to this, after all. Imagine, I mean, if people think like that, not just look through eyeglasses.

Even in the ‘70s... So they hit us in the head and said, “Let’s go, tell us you’re a communist.” Communism was forbidden then. “We are socialists!” Isn’t that pathetic? What a horrible thing, not being able to say that defines you. Even though you were beaten, taken to the courts. So we’re talking about violence against all groups. As soon as this was realized, the job of gays in Turkey became easier, the work of the women’s movement became easier, and the work of all other minorities became easier. The voices are started to come out. Because they’re starting to understand each other. It’s as simple as that. We’ve survived from the disease to being able to write articles without using the word disease, but we will always feel that pressure. That pressure will always come to us from these hegemons, but just as everyone is in resistance against this, there is no other chance that our LGBTI people will do something... It came like this, but it’s not going to go like that.

And I’m thinking, of course, that we’re all human in the end. You’re saying, “I don’t know if I’m going to be able to see a socialist president?” “Will we have a gay prime minister, or a foreign minister before I die?” Because some other folks have them. Do you see what I mean? But of course, these are nice fantasies, but I’m sure that people are going to have these conversations in 50 years which will be from a very different perspective, but that’s how they make people suffer en masse.
Şevval Kılıç: There were seventeen trans women’s clubs in İstiklal!

There was fascism, transphobia, homophobia in the ‘90s too. And there was much more brutal fascism, more crude fascism. Before such Western, institutional fascism, as it is in these days; There was more hardcore fascism, yet there were seventeen dönme\textsuperscript{11} clubs in İstiklal. When I say dönme, I mean transgender women’s club. That’s what I mean when I say dönme. There were seventeen clubs for trans women! I think music, art, and fashion presented the most radical, avant-garde lines in the ’80s and ’90s. I mean, like it or not, we are sniffing at the ‘80s now. But after five years it will be retro, after a decade it will be vintage, it will be something else. Now, in such an environment, for instance, I started to see it very differently. Well the first bans began, bans began in Ankara, they attacked the Pride Week, the state attacked, and so on you know, we lost our motivation, we did not know what to do, we were disoriented, so we didn’t know which way to go, we didn’t know what to do. But honey! I survived in the ‘80s and’ 90s. I experienced the ‘80s and’ 90s. Nothing can be that bad. I don’t mean it is better now. Now it’s a whole lot different. There is a much more organized, much more complicated fascism and there is the discrimination, which is coming from all sides. Because as we develop, fascism is developing itself too.

Even the Turkish pop wasn’t pop back then. On the other hand, most of the clubs were clubs where sex work was done too. For example, only post-ops were able to go to some of them. We called it the pussy club, but there were clubs where the ones with pussies could work because they could have official sex work documents or night bar escort documents. We used to go to the club where the ones with dicks went. Their club would close early at night, so they’d come to visit us, to have gullü\textsuperscript{12}. As soon as they walked in and they were saying, “Damn this place smells like dicks!”, which would be a topic for discussions that would take many pages today. That was our daily dynamic back then. Well, of course, that’s discriminatory.

\textsuperscript{11} A Turkish deragotary word used for trans women, can be roughly translated as sissy
\textsuperscript{12} A word from Turkish queer slang language Lubunca, means chit chat and fun
I worked at a club on one of the alleys of İstiklal Street for about a year. I was a street girl, an Ülker Street girl, but we weren’t allowed to work in an alley. One day a police chief came in and said, “You’re going to go to clubs”, “Everybody goes to the clubs, work at the club”. Another one said, “No hanging from the windows, no looking through the windows”. So we started going to the clubs. No one really took us for a while. I’ve had club experience. There were Tarlabası clubs, and we used to sniff at Tarlabası clubs. “Cruelty of the oppressor” is such a thing, every time the oppressed get a chance, it would oppress another. Of course, I was, like nineteen, twenty years old at the time. I didn’t have much consciousness, but.

I worked at the Cabaret 33. I was a cabaret girl. Every once in awhile, we’d go on stage and try to say something to the microphone, but there was no sound system, and the people who came there had nothing to do with them. We were sex workers, and I couldn’t drink much for instance. I didn’t like drinking much either. Someone’s going to have to buy you a drink so they can sit on your table and take you out. That drink is an expensive drink. So let’s say the beer was 5 liras so my beer was like 15 liras. I may not be able to give the right ratios, but... So you’re sitting there as an escort. I couldn’t, you know, sit at someone’s table, do some chit chat, “my dear, my sweetheart, so handsome, much gorgeous, you are the one”, so convince the koli¹³, agree on the money and take him away. These procedures were too much for me... I’m a street girl. I’m an Ülker girl, so I want something like bam-bam, you know, Action! “My love, are we going or not? That’s the stuff” and so on... So club bosses didn’t like me very much because I wouldn’t have tables. For example, I had a roommate called Gökçe. She had the mouth for it. She had a kind of mouth that, the money we made out of kolis, she’d make from 20 tables at the club, and even in a single hour, she’d fly. She’d make 20 tables there and she’d take the money from them in an hour as a tip, money that you had to fuck people for. That’s another kind of skill. Well, she was a club girl. She wears makeup, she gets dressed up. It’s an industry. You got to dress for it, know to talk a little. You have to be always beautiful because there are young, beautiful girls like you, you have competitors, and somebody has to notice you among them. It’s a profession that involves some kind of competition. Especially the club-style sex work, a style that included competition. I couldn’t do it much. I didn’t do it. With men, with guys, whom I don’t know, if I’m going to make kolis I have to do it right away, and with people I didn’t know for a long time, it wasn’t for me at all.

¹³ A word from Turkish queer slang language Lubunca, means sex or sex partner regarding the sentence
There was 1001 in Sıraselviler. These are the biggest. There was Vat69. Right now, where is that? I think there’s a Demir Café on Mis Street. There was the Modül, a club where “has gacı”s\(^{14}\) worked, as they call it in the time. We used to take time off from the club and go there as guests. We used to do little games and visits like that. There was an incredible police pressure. Two transwomen couldn’t leave a house at the same time. So when we came to sit in a house, we took turns to leave the house, warning each other. Ten minutes apart, five minutes apart. Because it was a cause for being detained, two trans walking side by side. I mean, there was this climate. And your detention isn’t a three or four-hour police station visit. They keep you at the police station for a minimum of three days because there was no computer, there was nothing. I’m talking about the Dark Ages. And those papers go back and forth and such. If the slightest snag occurs, they then send you to the Cankurtaran Venereal Diseases Hospital. If you’ve been in a place of possible prostitution, for example, if you’ve been taken from the club, or if you’ve been taken from Ülker Street, they were considering it as a place for prostitution. They’re taking you to the Cankurtaran Venereal Diseases Hospital to see if there’s a sexually transmitted disease. It was the funniest place ever. Because you’re a boarder there and there’s nothing to do. Your boyfriends, lovers, bring you laundry and cigarettes and stuff, they bring you some stuff because you’re there for three days, and there’s a big chat going on.

Sex work was a money-making profession. You wouldn’t believe it now, everyone had money, everyone was making a relative amount of money. Of course, there were poor people but it wasn’t like today. Eighty percent of the lubunyas are poor today. It doesn’t matter if the sex workers are as beautiful as they want, whether they are Barbie or a doll. We were a hundred girls on Ülker Street, and there were a hundred different types. We had some very beautiful ones, and we had ones that when we looked at them from the perspective of these traditional beauty patterns that wouldn’t fit the traditional beauty patterns, who weren’t so great. Old, hairy, I don’t know, friends like that too. Everyone could make a certain amount of money. There was no poor, starving person there.

There was Ceylan. Ceylan is my first, so it’s the first club I went to when I was 18. We had a group of friends. Recently passed away, İbrahim Eren, by the way... I think we should commemorate İbrahim Eren. That’s where I met the people I’m still friends with. The friends I met the first time I went there are still my friends. There was another aura, and that was ‘89 or ‘88? Something like that.

\(^{14}\) A word from Turkish queer slang language lubunca, means cisgender women in a derogatory way
Or I was, like, 17 or 18. Anyway, there was one club in Taksim, “14”. We were kids from normal middle-class families. It sounded a little... As a high-class night club, which celebrities were going to. There’s security at the door, they won’t let everyone in. Anyway, we dressed up ...... We all went together. Of course, we were let in. It was Ceylan’s club and the club inside was really a club club. Sedat plays, where high-volume music is played. Meanwhile, Sedat plays, but i mean, all these Barış Ks, DJ UFUKs, Murat Uncuoğulları, etc, they have all came out from there. I mean, I wanted to say that I know their rookieships, too. They were really all DJing with cassette tapes. Of course, I was very young. I’m going to the club for the first time, and you see some very handsome kids who are like you, so it’s amazing. You see the types you see in magazines like they’re flirting with you and stuff. This was the first place for me to have that encounter. It was the first place for a lot of my friends too. It was known as 14 or Ceylan. The customers, the regulars were calling it as Ceylan. Ceylan was the manager. Ceylan, 14 stayed there for such a long time. And it was beautiful. And they kept it tight, so not one camera went in there. I remember one time that the place was raided. Someone got into a fight like this, and one of the people who got into a fight has done something like that. But this is a place in Talimhane that’s now in ruins. I can’t tell you about there now. Now there are the the kebab places and the shisha places, the parking lot. It was a place by the electric authority. When they first take me there, there was an oval thing, an oval bar, there are bartenders in it, there are chairs around, a chair there was twice the size of other chairs. What the heck? I said. Why doesn’t anyone sit there? They said that it was Pasha’s. I said, “Who’s Pasha?” They said Zeki Müren. I didn’t see them when I first went, but the next time I went, I saw Zeki Müren there. They showed the Pasha to me from a distance. They got napkins all around, and there were hundred bills, there are boys dressed like sailors, Dooooooools! There are these boys like dolls and sister is doing köfte, constantly. Non-stop köfte. I was pretty sick and stuff. I was sick to my stomach, but I was sick of this. The destruction of the image of Zeki Müren. Of course, I was being stupid again. You know, why do you put so much meaning on a celebrity? The celebrity makes köfte too, and the celebrity gets kolis too. But childhood was probably at work.

Then Ceylan bought the neighboring shop. By the way, 14’s name was also its door number because it’s the 14th. The club didn’t have a name at all. It’s not written anywhere. It was called 14 or Ceylan. Ceylan then bought the no. 19th.

15 A word from Turkish queer slang language Lubunca, means handjob
Then no. 20th. He made those places separately. Let’s just say 20 was a little more straight like. And 19 was a club that everyone came out of 14 could easily enter. I think the two were separated at first, then he put them together from the inside. It was the best club in the world.

Then Ceylan finds a car cemetery in Maslak. You’re climbing up the tower with a ladder. If you’re given OK in the tower, you’re going into the club, and it’s a huge club. Tremendous. Maslak 2019. It’s a myth now. We were let inside from the VIP entrance, I guess. Of course, in the car cemetery, everything, all things like sex, make outs, hangouts, arguments, all kinds of things were happening. I think it lasted about two or three years. But in its first year, it was named as the best club in the world. The periods that I went to spend money there, not to work, had begun. I was starting to get alienated from the sex work. I mean, professionally, I was starting to get out of it. Last year, Pride Week had nine pre-pride parties. When we said isn’t nine a little too much or something, they said something like, and they were right. “Well, people will come together, there are not many associations left in Taksim.” There were four or five associations five or six years ago. There’s no association left anymore. Everyone’s gone somewhere else, some of them aren’t functional anymore. People are looking for an opportunity to come together, period! If the party is the basis for this then we will have a party! The parties are booming. So if the goal is to come together, to get together the queers, the queer crew, the queer community and to strengthen each other and politicize in this way, dance is also a way of organization, you can organize in the clubs too. We’re going to do interviews in five years, if this climate continues, on things like “Club life and feminism”, “Sociology of club life and queer whatever”.

Salih Canova: Change and transformation of the nightlife

I moved to Istanbul in late 2009, so I can say that my closer relationship with nightlife began during this period. In Izmir, we went out at night and had fun, but the number of venues was low and we were going out mostly to spend time with our friends at night. The nightlife in Istanbul is a little different in that respect, there was a rich and varied nightlife where you could find what you were looking for. I have been involved in the music, as a listener. When I was in Izmir, I was part of the founding team of a blog that broadcasted world music, and I developed a music ear that I could call more unique and refined. I was more or less interested in electronic music, but it was limited to a very amateur level.
After coming to Istanbul, I started to make a program on Ozgur Radio where I featured world music. On the other hand, I was going out at night, especially trying to go to places that played electronic music. One day, Lambda didn’t have a DJ at a solidarity party, and one of them said, “Don’t you have a radio show, you should play”. I said, “But how, the concept of my program is ethnic music, there is no connection”. They said, “Honey, play two Hande Yener songs or whatever.” I didn’t even download the songs, I’ve played some of them from YouTube. But everyone had a lot of fun. Because the energy was too high. I enjoyed it that day, something inside me said I had to keep doing it. That’s when I met Bade and Sema. They organized several small parties called BD-SM in Lambda. I’m talking about Lambda’s place on Tel Street. The place was two-story, so there was no family in the building, and there was no problem with the neighboring due to noise. As it was on the top floors, only those who want to come to the party were coming, so those who stopped by did not create crowds. Deniz was managing Leyla Terrace back then, I don’t know if they saw me at one of those parties or heard me from somebody. They were throwing a party in order to finance the travel costs of a group, who were coming to Pride Week from Armenia, they asked me if I could play there. I played there. I think it was the first party I played outside our community. Then, under Bade’s direction, I downloaded a DJ program on my computer, went to courses, and I became a DJ.

Being a DJ is a very positive profession. You’re doing something fun. People are happy, the music is beautiful. It’s always done in a happy environment. I guess that’s very motivating to me. On the other hand, I care about creating our own entertainment culture, our home spaces, and having fun in a safe, non-discriminatory way, both in terms of venues and DJs. Having fun is a way to organize solidarity, it’s an easy way, but it’s also a class-based and actually expensive way. So it motivates me to transcend this classism while we create our own spaces, to create entertainment that is accessible to everyone. When I was improving myself in Djing, I’ve always acted on the idea of why wouldn’t I offer better entertainment to those who come to listen. On the other hand, I think I play more comfortably in environments I trust, where I feel safe, where people can flirt around me. Because knowing you’re “accepted”, or making yourself accepted is a good motivator. Many aspects of a relationship with entertainment can be open to debate, and I don’t go into them to stay on topic, but it’s inevitable that it’s one of the most effective ways to keep people together.

16 Famous pop singer, called by some people as a “gay icon”
Uğur Alper: Lubunya nightlife in the ‘90s

When I first entered the scene there was “5th floor”. Yasemin Alkaya was running it. It was the top floor of the BILSAK building. We’re still talking about it, we were students in those days, but we could afford to go out there and drink, somehow. Then a place called “Barbahçe” was opened on the first floor of that building. In fact, there was an image like this. The 5th Floor is better quality, Barbahçe is a little crazier. Then there were clubs. Clubs; 14, then next to it there was the 2019... Oh, of course, there were Lambda parties there for a period. You have to mention them, too. 2019, Prive. These were darker places. At least that’s what it seemed to me. A lot of celebrities would come to Prive in particular, but I wouldn’t go without an elder, without a person who is known there. NEO opened later. Then... These were the only places that we were going to at that time. Oh, then there was HANS. I’ve been there like once or twice. Then 99. These were the places then. HANS with 99, then and the TEKYÖN came out and you know it still exists. It has moved a lot. It’s now one of the biggest gay bars in Istanbul, even one of the biggest bars.

Before I even came to Istanbul -- the beginning of the ‘90s -- Maslak had 2019, the summer club. We used to see it in the papers. And they still talk about there. You know, to believe that there was such a place in Turkey in that period... Ceylan Çaplı has opened a club in the car cemetery. Electronic music in the early ‘90s in Turkey? There was. The guy was sending his DJs to Amsterdam, getting them to buy records. Then he moved it to Talimhane, opened clubs 14, 19, 20. He put money into it. At 14, it was all gays, and everybody was going to 19 and 20, or rather 2019. Ceylan Çaplı was very supportive of Lambda in recent times. He gave 14 to Lambda for a party, free of charge. Lambda was getting the entrance fees. It’s funny, we were designing tickets on the computer, printing them and selling them.
Yeşim Başaran: We didn’t know how to talk about our own experiences

So, okay, Kaos is working on parallel. You know, there’s a magazine, there’s a production, and then there’s its content, what you’re going to publish, the production process, there’s a lot of work. And then there’s the co-existence part, and the meetings were more about that coexistence. We were getting together even if it didn’t have a very deliberate agenda. Sometimes we were saying, let’s set an agenda, get ready, discuss it like that. Or you know, sometimes something came out of the magazine. We were discussing them, too. There were very few women at these meetings. There were only one or two women. Over the years, we’ve become four or five. But even if there are fifty men, there were four women. And everything that was said was about men. So, if we talked about it something, we were actually talking about that experience. We weren’t talking about our own experience. We didn’t know how to talk about our own experience. Nothing like that could occur in this unequal mathematics. Then one thing happened. One day I wasn’t at the meeting where the agenda was set. Next thing I know, the list of topics was something like this. Like work-life, old age, aspects of life that can be discussed from the viewpoint of homosexuals or transgenders. And then there’s the topic of lesbianism, and I didn’t understand why there’s a separate topic on lesbianism when in fact lesbianism was part of all the other topics. And then it turns out that the other guys at that meeting were uncomfortable, too, that it was a separate title. In fact, in all these headlines, we were talking about male homosexuality, female homosexuality, transgender women. There were no trans men. We didn’t think that trans men did not exist, of course, but there was no relationship between us and trans men. But at least you can talk about the people who are there while talking about the work-life, you can talk about all of them. We didn’t think of that. Then we brought that up for discussion. They said something like “After all, we don’t know lesbianism. So we put up a title like that, so we thought we’d find out.” So we said okay, keep the title as it is. We went and held an event explaining why that title wasn’t the right one. Then this came out of it: Daughters of Sappho. I mean, it’s because we thought this title would always be a side headline unless we got together and talked. I mean, we were like detached islets in the sea of men. It’s like how LGBTI+ people are detached isles in public, we were like smaller isles in it. We also wanted to gather to find our own language, our discourse, what we
wanted to talk about. It turns out it was the sensible thing, to gather separately. Because over the years, I’ve come to realize from this experience that there are men and women in an environment, and women are scarce. Why women are few, why women don’t come, you know, that’s been a matter of debate over the years. And people were always thinking about things, they were worried about it, but there was no answer because they were asking the wrong questions. The women think they’re not invited there. That’s why they’re not coming. You have to think about how they can feel that they’re invited. They aren’t not coming. They don’t know you want them to come. But when you do a women’s event, so it’s very clear that the women are invited, so women started coming to the scene. As they get to those environments, they can socialize and move on to other areas. It’s not just a women’s thing. It applies to any segment of the population that is the minority, feels unaccepted, uninvited. So I realized over the years we should ask how can we show that we invite them instead of asking why don’t they come. So we actually created that invitation space by setting up Daughters of Sappho, unknowingly. One comes in, for example, saying “I’m a researcher”, and another topic comes out from that. Someone else comes along in another way, comes up with a different topic. We were talking about our lives. And then there was the thing that we’re not feminists. Or rather, we’re feminists, but let’s not say that we are feminists. Individually, everyone thought feminism was logical. But we were saying, “Let’s not say that The Daughters of Sappho are lesbian feminists.” Because feminism was thought of as a very bad word. Then one day, the thing happened. I had communication with the feminist movement. There, people were saying, “Well, we’re very curious, we want to meet. Should we get together and have a meeting, what should we do?” It came out talking to a friend like that. I said, “Okay, we’ll meet at my house.” We were already meeting at houses. We set the time and date. It spread to all feminist circles in Ankara. And the address spreads. Forty people came that night. There’s the door ringing all the time, someone’s yelling, “you have to push that red button”. It was so funny. It suddenly became our own place. And our group immediately said, “Okay, we’re feminists, no problem.”

**Oya Burcu Ersoy: Militant times**

When I came to college and to sociology, I said okay. A bulb went on in my head. I’ll do some research on this. “Conduct a symbolic fieldwork where you will choose the subject yourself,” said the professor in our first year of university. I said, “I want to investigate homosexuals.” I went to the professor’s room. “But,” he said, “it’s a symbolic investigation. I think you should only research lesbians be-
cause the subject is broad.” I said, “Sure, as you wish.” That’s how my relationship with the Daughters of Sappho started. The Daughters of Sappho called themselves a lesbian feminist group. I’m supposed to say ourselves, but I’m talking with my words back then. I met Yeşim (Başaran). She said, “We’re having house meetings.” “We gather in houses on Sundays. You can come if you want to.” I said okay. After that, I already told them at the first meeting. I mean, I’m doing research like this, and I really want to do this research, and I’m going to give a presentation. But I was really doing it for myself, to find myself. There were six, seven of them, in the meetings. Sometimes there were others I, then there were, like, ten of them. We usually had a certain topic of conversation. For example, one of them was love, and another time it was something related to the matter of organization. Sometimes we read poetry, sometimes we read articles, sometimes we just chatted…

The Daughters of Sappho made a pamphlet while I wasn’t there. There was a brochure called ‘About lesbians’, a brochure of The Daughters of Sappho. We were distributing it, so the militant part is there. I, of course, immediately packed the brochures in my bag. I was always talking to every person I met then. I was talking a little bit about myself. Then I take out the Daughters of Sappho brochure. My era of militant lesbianism has begun with the Daughters of Sappho. For example, I met someone new. It could be in a bar, it could be in a café, it could be when you’re chatting at school. I was taking the conversation there and I was talking about the research I’ve done. Then I was giving the brochure.

In the following years, we said, let’s devote our energy and time to the organization of women in Kaos GL and the organization of lesbians in Kaos GL. We had already started to hold our meetings every Sunday in 2000 when Kaos GL opened its first place in Konur Street as the Kaos Cultural Center. That’s what we decided. And then we said, we ended The Daughters of Sappho. We made our declaration in Kaos GL magazine. But even though there were few of us left, those few continued to be active in Kaos. When a woman comes to Kaos GL, if there’s no woman there, she won’t open herself. She could say that “it will be the same if I come back” then never come back. So we said that if we designate a special time, at least the women that shy away from coming in other times can come, can warm up. I just thought we could have conversations, women to women and maybe when that woman satisfies the need for conversations, she’s going to develop confidence that we can do something together. That was what happened to me. On the one hand, we introduce ourselves to the women that come to Kaos. But we wanted to have a brochure where we could show what we’ve done so far and distribute. The brochure of ‘Do you know? Not all women are heterosexual’ was published as
the outcome of that desire. That brochure actually has two purposes. The first is to say to gay, bisexual women, “Not all women are heterosexual.” I mean, saying they shouldn’t feel alone. And to say something to the heterosexual world. To take a stand against a heterosexual approach. So it meant you’re not heterosexual when you don’t say anything... We put what we have done in writing, and we had a frequently asked questions section. We had that goal. We put a lot of effort into making it work. We talked to a lot of people. Its development, the process of doing it, was also exciting. When I see it in my hand as an outcome... That pamphlet was like a baby for me.
WE MADE OUR VOICE HEARD: LAMBDAİSTANBUL ON THE AÇIK RADYO

Üğur Alper: From a demo tape to a show

The first quarter of ‘96, I’d say. Açık Radyo has come to our attention. They were saying, “All kinds of voices have a place here.” Their motto was “Açık Radyo (Open Radio) to all the sounds and colors of the world”. Why wouldn’t they take us? At a friend’s house, we did a demo as we see it. But it’s so propaganda-filled! We sent the tape to Açık Radyo. As soon as they listened, they called us and said, “Come quickly!” We went there, we talked, how could it happen? We had a bulletin called 100% Gay Lesbian. We took this 100% name, put it on the radio show, and found ourselves at the microphone. I was using the name Alper at the time, and then I was sorry I didn’t use my real name, so I made Alper my last name. And we were making grand preparations every week at that time. But we were so didactic and stiff, I’m laughing when I look at it now. I guess it seemed good for us at the time, it felt great. We were reading Shakespeare or something. Like, “Shakespeare was gay,” like, “He wrote these sonnets to a man.” On the one hand, it suited to Açık Radyo, because all styles of them were like that. After that, it went on for a few seasons.

At that time, we made Lambda’s name heard, both through the radio and the events we participated in connections with other non-governmental organizations, and connections abroad. In fact, an interesting picture has emerged. Let’s say there were things going on in Mexico, and we’re joining the campaign there, e-mailing them. That’s why we’re often invited to training seminars and festivals abroad. And it opened up our horizons a lot. There was a big problem with coming out. There was a coming-Out problem in Turkey. But we didn’t have that problem abroad, so we were able to express ourselves with ease.

Öner Ceylan: There was also the censorship of RTÜK

The Lambda was doing a radio show, on Open Radio. I was something like an assistant there. Koray and Kerem were talking on the radio, they were preparing...
and presenting the show. I was assisting in the preparation process and connecting the phones during the live broadcast. It took a year and a half, and I caught up with some of it. There was an aunt who always called, saying, “I support you guys, you’re doing so well.” It’s a channel on frequency, so it’s something you might find while you are going through the frequencies. I also remember that once we were befooled. Someone called and said, “I want to raise my kid as gay, what can I do, what should I do?” And the friends said, “So, ma’am, that’s not how it works.” “But no, I really want it,” she insisted. Turns out she was a friend of one of the friends, so she called us from the school to bamboozle us. And I have a very funny memory, a phone again. A woman, who lives in Sweden came to İstanbul with her girlfriend Aslı. I’ll never forget that name. Of course, there was RTÜK, i think it was newly established, and therefore there’s censorship, you can’t say some things. You can’t swear or anything on the radio, and you can’t say anything that would be an advertisement, you can’t say the names of businesses. This woman called and started, “I came to İstanbul. Everything in Sweden is very nice very comfortable, we run a club with my girlfriend Aslı and we are living a very comfortable life. I came here and there are disgusting places here, I went to a place called Bar Bahçe...” We are saying “It would be better if you don’t tell the name of the place”, but she said, “Why wouldn’t I say, dear, Bar Bahçe was a disgusting place... And then while she was hanging up, she said, “I want to say hello to my friends.” “I say hello to the listeners,” she said, “And I’m already licking Aslı!”
Yeşim Başaran: Press release and two and a halft day…

Early 2000s. Maybe 2003 or something. There were Ankara and Istanbul meetings, we named them as Güztanbul and BaharAnkara. Lambdaistanbul organized the one in Istanbul, the one in Ankara was organized by Kaos GL and everyone was coming to the city of the event. I mean, mostly, of course, there were people from Istanbul and Ankara, but people came from other cities too. When I was in Ankara, I was in the organization of BaharAnkara. And once we said, you know, we meet at these meetings, we talk a lot of things, it’s good for us, we’re getting stronger and so on, but let’s just say something, let’s do something. Why do we exist? And then we decided. We thought we’d put out a text saying, “What do homosexuals want?”. Let this event have a text. Of course, it was named as what do homosexuals want, but I think that text should be rewritten as “what do LGBTI+s want”. And I mean, I was proud of ourselves, so we were able to make a moderation that was able to find out what did those two hundred want, one by one. We went right after that and edited the text until the night. The next day we had a text. Let’s make a press release. There were volunteer friends who said I’d do it, I’d do it. And I said, “I’ll do it.” And we summed up that long text. We made the announcement at Lambda’s. And there were a lot of reporters. I think if you did it now, there wouldn’t be all those journalists. It was full of journalists because it seemed very interesting to them in the early years. It’s always been like that in the history of the world, by the way. First everyone’s interested, and then whatever you do, you can’t get the reporters. Anyway, it’s going to be in the paper, of course. We’re talking to my cousin. Then I was praying, so it’s not published in the Posta newspaper, because my mom reads the Posta. My cousin got angry with me. “You,” she said, “you’re going out there,” she said, “a press release, but you’re avoiding talking to your mother. Isn’t it unfair to your mother that she learns it from the papers? You have to talk to your mother first, and then you cab make a press release.” Anyway, she didn’t see it. And after that, I said, okay. I have to tell my mother. So I’m either not going to live this life the way I want to, or I’m going to tell my mom. So it makes more sense to tell my mother. I went to visit her for five days. I thought let them live the first days in peace, but they’d need time to digest, you know, but if I were to tell them in the first day, all of our time could be ruined. So I decided to tell them on the two-and-a-halft day. So I calculated
the time. In this day at 4 o’clock, it would be the two-and-a-halfth day, the exact halfth of my vacation. Se was upset, she cried, it seemed weird to her, surprised, and then she ignored it. For a long time, for years, but, well, i mean, I kept living the life I wanted. And now we talk sometimes, sometimes we don’t, but you know, I feel that she doesn’t like to speak about it openly.

Öner Ceylan: Hosting at home

I don’t remember the contents of the meetings very well, it went on for a while, and then it ended, but I remember the times of going to Ankara because we were all going on the train, together. It was a different thing for us to go to Ankara, I didn’t know much about Ankara. The first thing I can think of is a bathhouse visit. We were definitely going to the bath house at least once, when we went to Ankara. Good memory, and lots of fun and gülüm. There were also planning meetings that we held together. When they came to Istanbul, we welcomed them to our homes, and when we went to Ankara, they welcomed us in their homes. It was a lot warmer, too, so there wasn’t any hotel stuff like that. We were getting intimate, so we were getting closer.

Uğur Alper: Kids are celebrating October 29th!

It was something like children’s festival of April 23rd. It was beautiful. I had a big party in Güzandanbul the first time, and the police stormed it. Those were the good times. It was in a house in Galata. In the basement of the house. But it was a beautiful house. And we were on its garden too, of course. The neighbors got jealous, called the police. The police came and said, “You are running an unlicensed bar here.” Don’t be ridiculous, we said. Everyone brought their own drinks. They said “No, it’s not possible, there are these many bottles”. They’re counting people on their way out. It doesn’t end. 150 people came out. The police say, “Whoa, no way”. Then they count the bottles and stuff. Then they called the friend that owned the place to the police station. The boy’s mother was one of the Daisies at the time. One of the Özal’s, Semra Özal’s Daisies. By the way, October 29th\(^\text{18}\) was the day. She called the police station. And the police had lectured the ones at the station saying “The kids were celebrating the October 29th, how can you do such a thing in Atatürk’s Turkey”.

\(^\text{18}\) Republic Day of Turkey
May 1st, 2001: 
KAOS GL ON THE STREETS!

Oya Burcu Ersoy: We are here!

There were a handful of us. Two people were already holding the banner. Three people carrying placards. My mother didn’t know about me at the time. I told my parents all about my research and stuff. They know me as doing a research. My mom said, “You know, you did your research, it’s over, okay, don’t see them anymore. Otherwise, you’ll be a lesbian too, they’ll make you a lesbian.” If I’m a lesbian, Mom, I’m a lesbian, you can’t be a lesbian afterwards. I mean, I was making sentences that were looking for ways to tell her. But my mother had a very tall mental wall. She was saying, “We raised you so well, you’re a good family girl, you can’t be a lesbian.” I was like, “They’re from good families too, I told you.” So my only unease on the march was this: I was so happy. I was so proud. I was so excited. It’s just that things were coming on to me from time to time. You know, the cameras are coming and such. If they record me, if we go on TV... When my mom built a wall like that, I didn’t tell her. Other than that, I’ve thought very little about it, what if my family sees me. I thought I’d be relieved if she saw me there. Support for Kaos GL’s banner was also good. The applauders... We were usually applauded from the unions, of course. It was beautiful, too, very exiting. From beginning to end. You know, that happiness was beautiful, from the making of the banners to the march itself.

Buse Kılıçkaya: We are organized!

Even though we were so insecure, it was a wonderful thing for us to be seen with banners in our hands, scared, not knowing what was going to happen to us every May Day. Here in those places, the way people look at us... Because you’re very few people, and many of them say, “What rights do the faggots have?” and despite all there are people with banners marching all around. Marching with fun. Chanting “Mutiny!” while marching. I mean, these were beautiful. But being organized wasn’t a thing that anyone wanted. When you can run after so many colis out there, when you can have fun, when you can live more secretly... Organizing was something that made you feel that you were more vulnerable to violence. So there was the thought of, if you organize, if you open yourself up, if you say that’s who I am, you might get hurt. Today shows how right things have actually been done. This day shows that as you hide yourself or get scared, you’ll be hurt... You move forward as long as you exist, as you organize, as you stand together.
2003: WE GOT THE MICROPHONE, SYMPOSIUM

Umut Güner: We put posters everywhere

The Symposium on The Problems of Lesbians and Gays and The Search for Solutions for Social Peace took place on May 23-24, 2003. I wasn’t there on the first May Day. The process after that was a period where, people got interested in us after participating in the May 1st, due to raised awareness in public space, especially in civil society. And when someone came to us with an offer at the time, we weren’t saying no to anyone. If someone came to us and told us they wanted to make a presentation about the offside decision in a play-off match, we would welcome it too. Because we wanted to say homosexuals don’t just talk about sex. A friend of ours, Adem Arkadaş, said he wanted to tell about the project cycle. We don’t know anything about projects, but we said, if he wants to talk about it, let him come and talk. He made a presentation to ten people from Kaos about the project cycle. Meanwhile, Adem prepared his presentation in English, assuming that all homosexuals speak English. Everyone besides Ali Erol and me knew English. And at the end of that year, in the fall of 2002, Ali and I wrote the project of the Symposium on The Problems of Lesbians and Gays and the Search for Social Peace in that workshop. Then we met the Dutch ambassador at another reception. The Dutch ambassador said he wanted to support us. Meanwhile, while Kaos took many steps to gain legitimacy of homosexuality in quotes, people did not know about our legal status because we worked as we were a very serious organization from the very beginning. For example, the ambassador accepted our project, assuming that we already have been a association that was publishing a magazine for years. Then, of course, it turned out we weren’t an association. We’ve made all the preparations for the symposium. The day before the symposium, the ambassador gave me the money in cash. I signed a document like this at the embassy and delivered it. And it’s so funny that we didn’t have any taxi money to go to the ambassador. I took the bus. How scared I was while carrying 10,000 euros or on me. It’s a neighborhood I don’t know about. It’s something like that.
It was going to be the first event that the gay movement was talked about in public. So we tried to shed all the issues that the gay movement had been worried about up until then. It was a very busy schedule. It took two days. I think there were sixteen or seventeen speakers, and there were many areas from psychology, psychiatry to HIV, AIDS, human rights, law, media, working life... Unionists, for example, were afraid to come. So in 2003, when the Symposium on The Problems of Lesbians and Gays was being held in the municipality, at the Center for Contemporary Arts, for example, the wife of a speaker who came to talk at the hall asked him, “Are you sure you’re going to go to that event?” People said they’d rather contribute from the hall than talk at the symposium. I mean, it was held in a period like that.

Meanwhile, Kürşad Kahramanoğlu had a significant contribution, especially in terms of international guests. Michael Cashman came as a parliamentarian of the European Parliament. Cemil Çiçek was the Minister of Justice at the time. “I’ve come to an event about LGBTs, do you have any work on this?” he asks. Cemil Çiçek says, “Are there gays in Turkey?” He told that to us. For example, the first street poster about homosexuality was made at that event. It’s funny, we had fifteen people out there hanging posters because we couldn’t provide security. Two people are putting up posters. The other ten people around them were trying to cover them so that no one would see what they were posting. And then we were all running away from there. Everywhere, Kurtuluş, Cebeci, Esat, we hanged posters everywhere. And then people were looking, they were checking to see if the posters were removed or not. They were e-mailing, the banner here didn’t seem to be removed, the one here is removed and such. And then the next day, we were going back on posting, to re-post the posters in the same places. It’s been that kind of a process.

There were five hundred people in the hall, and it provided a very serious visibility. There was a lot of media attention. It had a very important function for me to open up in the public sphere. For example, when we were told to meet with the media by making a press release on the results of Güztanbul six months ago, three people had come out to meet with the media. Ali and I were back because my ticket was already purchased, so we were going back to Ankara. Six months ago, there were five people in Turkey who could talk to the media about LGBT, and six months later we had an event watched by five hundred people. We were thinking that the media will come and Tuba Özkan and Yeşim Başaran will meet with the media as media officers. Tuba is heterosexual, by the way, a friend of ours who works as an academic. Yeşim is bisexual, an open friend of ours from Ka-os’s old days. Those two were going to communicate, and we thought we weren’t
going to deal with any of that. But the media showed so much interest that the live broadcast vehicles came, the fire brigade came. Çankaya Municipality or the metropolitan municipality had sent a fire truck in a strange way in case a brawl broke out, an incident, a fire broke out. And we promised to talk to media outlets so that the media, cameramen and televisions, wouldn't bother people, Oya, Ali Erol and I, saying “We will explain what we're doing here today”. So that we talked with the media, and they’re broadcasting live at the time, but I didn’t know it was live, by the way. I was thinking they’re going to shoot, they’re going edit it, meanwhile I can tell the folks at home. Turns out we were talking on live television, and I was on nine or ten news channels that day. In fact, my grandmother saw me on TV, probably heard the lesbian as technician, so she was talking about something like, “What’s a technician?” She said, “I called all the neighbors, the relatives, and I said, watch TV.” With my opening up in the public scene, my coming out to my family, and the dispersion of the obscure cloud over my homosexuality happened during that event. At the same time, it has been a process in which being anti-homophobia brings the need of talking about it, brings activism and which sparked a debate that this is a necessity. In terms of the institutionalization of Kaos, it has the following function: While we were planning and discussing the sessions, we also actually began to define the workspaces of Kaos. Kaos GL is going to do this in this area, because homosexuals are going to live this in that area.

And one of my personal sweet memory is that I’ve never spoken before the symposium except for the Kaos meetings about homosexuality. I didn’t have any experience being an orator. Since Perihan Maden did not come, the program was empty, Ali Erol and Oya Burcu were speaking on many of the panels, so I was told to speak at the media session as a person from the magazine editorial board. Yusuf Eradam, Yıldırım Türker and I will speak. Of course, no one would come to listen to Yusuf Eradam and me. Everyone would be coming to listen to Perihan Maden and Yıldırım Türker. That’s what happened. By the way, I got very excited, I told Yıldırım that. Yıldırım taught me a very simple technique there. I’m still using it. “Take ten blank files, pretend you’re following notes in the file, when you feel overwhelmed lean to the papers like you are reading. In the meantime, this will be an opportunity for you to think.” Yusuf Eradam also introduced me as Perihan Maden at the panel. Coming to the stage as Perihan Maden, while my confidence was at its lowest... Of course, he corrected it again during the session, and he told me that he made a joke, but in the end, I was already mortified. No one wants to listen to you when you have someone like Yıldırım with you. You know, everybody wants to listen to him, and everybody’s looking at you as shut up and let that guy talk.
If one of the activities where the LGBTI+ movement comes out of the closet is May 1st, the second is the Problems of Lesbians and Gays and the Search for A Solution for Social Peace. Meanwhile, the event was called The Problems of Lesbians and Gays and The Search for A Solution for Social Peace, but it was an event that included transgender people and bisexuality was not very visible. And the reason we call social peace is because a peace that ignores homosexuals is not really possible.

Oya Burcu Ersoy: Coming out in the opening speech

I wrote an article to Kaos called 'symposium from head to toe'. Because there were effort of a lot of people out there, from the preparation of name cards to the identification of moderators, to designating the speakers, to talk to them, to setting up places. It was a great team effort. There was a great turnout. I honestly didn't expect such a big turnout. They asked me if I wanted to give the keynote speech. I’d like. Can I do it? I’ll do it and so on... There will be cameras too. Yes, there will be. Should I think about it then? But I mean, I really wanted to do it, and we prepared it together, and we already prepared the keynote speech together. Even when I was rehearsing, I was so excited. Şey diyor musun, ben bu nasıl okuyacağım bu kadar heyecanla? Kalbim bu kadar çarparak nasıl okuyacağım acaba? Benim için o sempozyumun bir önemi de şu: Şimdi kameranın önüne çıkacağım için, basın orda olacağım için ailemin oradan öğrenmesini istemedim. O yüzden aileme sordum. Onların bana sormasını istiyordum. O yüzden çalışmamı başladı. İşte o dönem ben üniversiteden mezun olmuşum, boşta. O yüzden zaten tam zamanlı Kaos gönüllüsüydim. Annem tabii sordu; her gün nereye gidiyosun kızım? Ben Kaos’a gidiyorum dedim. “Niye Kaos’a gidiyorsun? E, sen onlarla ilişkilerini kesmedin mi?” “Yo, kesmedim. Hepsini benim arkadaşıım. Boyle sempozyum düzenliyoruz. Ben de yardım ediyorum sempozyuma.” And then as the time of the symposium got near, the more I started talking about it. I finally got my mom to ask. So we started with “Are you one of them” and then we had a three-session opening, saying, “Come on, Mom, let’s sit down and talk.” I said it after that. I’m going to give a keynote speech at a symposium like this, and I’ll wait for you. It happened too fast. Within a month, I opened up to my family. I o 
and I went to them. On the one hand, in front of that many cameras, that many... Those cameras meant something, a lot of people were going to hear it. So you’re not just telling something to the participants of the event. Now you’re telling a lot of people something. The whole of Turkey will hear, that kind of excitement, so it was a big thing, so it was very important. It was one thing, my family to be there. It was a symposium that became an occasion for the openings. And it was so beautiful.

**Buse Kılıçkaya: Oh no, my mom is on the front row!**

The preparation phase was beautiful. Ali came in and said, “Buse, will you write something on trans experience, your testimony?” I mean, I can’t even picture it, what’s it going to be like, how am I going to talk in front of that many people? I didn’t think it would be that crowded first. I mean, there’s an incredible excitement, we’ve been working really hard. We’re going to meetings today without maybe even two pages of reading. I locked myself at home for 15 days with a friend so I could give the speech at the symposium. We wrote the testimony of my whole life. Then we brought it. Was it twenty-three pages or thirty pages or what. Ali said, “Buse”, “Can you shorten it a little?” and talked for hours. I said I’d have to shorten it a lot so he won’t speak for hours again. Then I shortened it, brought it to the symposium for the day of the speech. Ali said, “Buse, can you shorten it down to a page and a half? At the symposium I mean. How do I put this on a page and a half at the symposium? I’ve narrowed it down to one and a half pages.

There was going to be a press conference before the symposium, we didn’t think there’d be a lot of cameras. There’ll be one camera at the most, maybe two cameras. Because Ali said, “Oh, no one’s coming, after all, there’s a camera or two. Again, we will talk and we will listen” and so on and so forth, But journalists came pouring in, and I keep saying, “What are we going to do?” And then we went to the stage, and they’re taking pictures, they’re filming, we are reading the press release, trying to announce the symposium, and I’m going to die. I mean, there are so many cameras and so many photographers. I said honey, I guess it’s over today. We don’t live anymore. And you’re afraid of. You don’t know what is so open will bring you. If all these journalists have come, that much news will cover us. And that’s what happened.

When I was writing the narrative of my life, I started living with my family. I got out of prison, I started going to Kaos GL, and I’m writing my story. When I was writing my life, I was taking pieces of my writing to home and pretending I forgot them there, to let my mom read it. It’s my life, I thought she should read it.
Because I was going to tell for the first time that I was a prostitute, a sex worker. I was going to put my life in front of people in every way, in all its nudity, whatever I was going through. As a person who can’t talk to three people, I was going to tell all those people about my life. I left it piece by piece. I thought she wasn’t reading them. But now I think she did. Then I said, “Mom, I’m a speaker at a symposium like this.” I told my mother, my father, my sisters. I said, “Come, it’s going to be a good event.” Oya’s family was coming. On the one hand, we were scared. You know, they’re going to come, and what are you going to see next? Maybe they’ll disown us. We’re going to come out there. I mean, okay, they know about me, but they don’t know I’m a prostitute. And we were in something that we said it will happen no matter what, that we took a leap of faith, it was our lives, it’s a part of the struggle, and that we will do whatever it takes. Today, do I have the courage to do the same things? Not so much. I may not be able to do it today, but I think I had insane courage then.

I didn’t think my parents would come. It was a surprise to me, actually. Next thing I know, my parents were there. The decision had been made to put the families in the front. It was Oya, I think, the one who gave the keynote speech. I just have one thing on my mind: “My parents are at the front, what are we going to do?” I mean, there’s a symposium, the kid’s a speaker there, and I’m going to talk about my life, my testimony, and I’m excited enough, and I don’t know what’s going to happen. We went there and sat down. We lined up together. We sat next to each other with Koray. An academic study was presented. Then Koray spoke, I think. And then I talked, but it was like that, it was a buzz for me, actually that day. An academic study was being presented but all I could hear was a buzz. I see crowds in the hall. I’m thinking about how to give the speech. Worst-case scenario, I’ve worked on it so hard, I’m saying I’ll read it, but it’s like I lost my sight, so I almost forgot how to read.

The first old gay I saw was Osep Minasoglu. I’ve never seen a gay man at that age before I’ve known him. On the one hand, I was saying, “Look at that! He’s fighting the fight for it, today. He’s fighting for rights. He takes pictures, he runs around, he’s more excited than anyone.” I had incredible respect. Then it was my turn to talk. I started talking and it was actually a transition to another phase in my life for me. This bodybuilding process, those difficult periods I spent in Istanbul, prisons, Kaos GL, in my memory and starting to fight in Kaos GL... I’ve bought and sold their magazines before, of course. I’ve participated in the marches. I’ve been attending occasional meetings now and then, but that’s exactly what Kaos GL was like. You can see a person there, but a month later, two
months, three months, people would disappear. Then I told about my life. The speech was over, my parents came to the stage, holding a bunch of daisies. They gave it to me. They kissed me, they went to their seats. I felt a little better that day, and from that day on, I embraced the fight a little more. Because until then, in Kaos GL and in the trans movement, I was a bit of a trans that couldn't find her place. I mean, because I'm organized at Kaos GL, people kept saying, “What are you doing there? It's a gay lesbian organization.” At the meetings in which the transgenders from streets were saying, “Well, they do nothing but gays and lesbians” or “every time we go, they are talking about the same thing” On the other side, there are transgender people who make a living as sex workers, who work in casinos, who work on the streets. So it was a place that I never really was able to feel a belonging to, between these two. I didn't feel a complete belonging to Kaos GL either because I was thought of as. I was asking myself and my friends, “I am here, but I mean, why just gay and lesbian?”, and I don't really get the answer, and at the time people told me, “This is a gay lesbian organization” too. I had nowhere to go, so much that people had responded to me like, “I'm sorry, but this is a gay lesbian organization, and that's just how we can work”, where I don't have any other organizing options, and on the other side, there was only a platform called the “Humane Platform for Life,” and I didn't feel like I belong there either. It wasn't just for me, a lot of people were like me. Some of them were able to talk about it, and some were not. Some felt offended and left, some were stubborn. I've been one of those stubborns. No matter what happened, I believed that something had to change inside and I joined the struggle in the ranks of DEHAP. Until the 2000s, I tried to make myself visible not only in Kaos but also as a transgender in DEHAP. I was responsible for the party’s county office in Mamak. People from the region, people from the east, usually come there for the hospital. Those who came to Ankara University for treatment or something. DEHAP was very close to Mamak county, hospital, and I was working there again until the period of the symposium. A congress was to be held, and I presented a motion at the Central Anatolian Regional Conference to include the sexual orientation and gender identity in DEHAP’s constitution. Then it was accepted into the constitution in 2003. I gave a speech to 250 people. Elections were being held.

Then I didn't continue with DEHAP. A person named Umut Güner came into my life, and we agreed that we should spend more energy on Kaos. And Umut was putting a lot of effort into Kaos. On the one hand, we were both confused. I mean, why we just call it GL or something, we always had in our minds. We thought we should continue to fight in Kaos GL. We also thought about gender identity was as important as sexual orientation, and above all, I should continue
to be there. At that time, a specific topic was being chosen for Kaos’s meetings. We were discussing for days and weeks on that topic about what that meant. For example, one of the things that bored me to death was something called “coming out.” How can we talk about this coming for three, four weeks? They talk, and talk, and talk, but no one explains to me what coming out means. I was a stranger there. I was so much of a stranger that I thought the fags must be made from something else. I couldn’t understand the source of discomfort back then if they thought the more fancy words you use, the more fucks you could get or whatever. Still, there is that discomfort in some places today. Kaos GL was a place where such bizarre sentences were discussed, you didn’t feel like you belonged, they didn’t know that there was a life outside, and how much connection we had with the outside world, on the other hand, it was a place where politics was tried to be produced and magazines were published. A method of struggle that tries to create politics only from where we explain ourselves with our half-knowledge, describes our steps only from our own individual struggle. Although we often try to generalize it, it shows that we will never have a common story. It’s very clear. Here’s the movement that started as GL is heading towards LGBTI+, and everyone’s practices are different from each other. No matter what we say it’s meaningless. So all that’s important is being together and the reflex that we show towards another person’s voice or scream or posture, i.e. sensitivity.
GET USED TO IT, WE ARE HERE: İSTANBUL PRIDE MARCH 2003

Can Yaman: It was rehearsed many times

We were going out on the street on May 1st, March 8th, in the anti-war movement, but we weren’t going out on our own. We wanted to show that we could do it on our own. We were very worried, of course, so we didn’t take permission for it or anything, but we were going to walk from where we were to Mis Street. In fact, I had a memory in 2001 before that. Every year we had a Pride Week, but pride weeks usually consisted of a week-long event, and then there’s a party, poof, it ends, and there’s a show-off march in the night. A march from here Dolmabahce Palace. That would be our march. Of course, it’s not visible, but it’s done as more of an enactment. There was a famous writer. The writer said, “Okay, you’re doing it, but what kind of pride are you secretly celebrating? People there in ’68 did something with their lives, put themselves out there, died, you’re still hiding in the night” The hit was a little under the belt. Because it wasn’t easy to open up and pay the price of it... But that reproach was seemed justified at some point. On the other hand, the march was always rehearsed at these events.

At first, we had our tarp, and we were opening our tarp while we were on the way, and all of a sudden, the police came up to us, and they said, “Hang up, do you have permission?” We had a lawyer with us, so we were not afraid... People are looking, but we also have strange confidence. There was a press release after the march, so we’re standing, excited. The first people to come to us were mentally handicapped people in Taksim. It’s interesting, like one of them is holding the microphone, and one of them is doing something else there, that’s when I realized we’re really crazy, so it’s nothing else, there are the talks of if it’s a disease or something, but it was pure craziness. People come out because they are gay, they’re walking, etc., in a place like Turkey... They must be mentally challenged...

Esmeray Özadikti: We had a little flag

Eight or ten of us went out and marched. Fifty people at the top of Mis Street the following year... So it went on and on and... We were excited, and the police were making fun of us. They didn’t even pay attention to us. I don’t remember the
exact things, but I know that we were extremely excited. We left the association building, we had a little flag. You know, that big flag right now, which everyone's holding and walking around in Istiklal. There were smaller ones then, we were holding it eight or nine people, we were walking. It was something like that.

Mine Yanat: A thrill after years!

A thrill after years... How can I explain that feeling? We couldn't make the first march happen in ‘93, then you go out and walk there with your son. It's different. You really have to experience that feeling, words are inadequate. With those feelings, I was drunk. I remember my son and me, walking. I remember waving the flag, kissing my son, kissing the flag and everything. I mean, it's a weird feeling, and now I feel strange. I’m a very emotional person, I can’t express those feelings, and I wish there was a march every day, walking every day, without disturbing people, of course, we’re cheerful people, we’re happy people, we’re supposed to show that we love people. That’s how I’ve always set off. That’s what I’ve always tried to tell people. We’re no different.

Öner Ceylan: That moment was just a step we took

Unlike May 1st, we were there alone. At the Pride March, we were on our own, very few people, a flag in our hands, and if I’m not mistaken, of course, we’ve had a banner as Lambdaistanbul Homosexual Civil Society Initiative, we’re holding it and walking. We were a little spooked, wondering if there’s going to be a reaction, whether they’re going to attack, if somebody going to say something, etc. I mean, I don’t remember much about the preparations before, but I remember that day as a dream. We left Lambda and started our walk to Mis Street. So I’m not so sure but we weren’t too crowded, some say more, I remember like twenty people but people say various things about this number. Especially compared to the following years we were very few people, we are holding the banner, we started to walk ... Of course, we never thought it would get this big in the years to come. That moment was just a step we took.

Yeşim Başaran: 2004 and boxes

So think of boxes of big appliances like refrigerators. In 2004, some of us got into those boxes. So I went into a box. We also glued hateful or negative news about LGBTI+, newspaper clippings outside the boxes. So it was like, you as a society like this, are locking us in these boxes. What was it after that? We had pre-
pared a banner saying, “These boxes you’ve imprisoned us in are not our destiny.” We took off from Lambda. It was on Büyükparkmakkapı Street at the time. Some of us were in boxes and I was in the box…

Özgür Azad: Before and after

Of course, we were very excited. We joined May 1st as a group, but May 1st was still a very mixed and sheltered space. For the first time, as an event that would belong to LGBTI+’s on their own, consisting of just their existence and voice, the Pride March carried far more importance. With the support and participation of people that we were in contact with at the time, from the anarchist, antimilitaristic, leftist and feminist sections there were about forty of us. We don’t know the exact number. We were in Terkos. We’re on our way from Terkos. We had t-shirts made at the time, we wore them. There were sheep on the t-shirt. They were all going in one direction. Our colored, 6-color ones were going in the opposite direction. I still have that t-shirt. It was a big deal. And then we kept it going every year. Until it got settled, I think we walked in the second year with 250 people. We said okay, we did it! Just because it happened. It was the third year, I think. When we got into a rut, we could barely gather fifteen, twenty people. I’m glad that there are hundreds of people who can socialize, open up, and participate in activism. It’s not a very long time, really, the period we’re talking about. I was always hopeful, and I thought it would pick up momentum in a very short time. In 2007, we marched with 1,000 people. From 2003 to 2007, we had reached 1,000 people in a very short time. That’s the march we lost our minds. We were amazed. We felt empowered greatly. Same with every Pride March. Every year I felt we got refreshed, we got stronger. I knew very well that many young people from small cities, towns and provincial cities of Turkey came for the march with such enthusiasm and empowered themselves and returned to their village and town with that power, and it was very important. That’s what they actually stole from these kids with the bans. It’s my biggest regret about the Pride March.
Yeşim Başaran: How was it founded?

My ex-girlfriend gave me a book about the London advisory line experiences. So I translated this book into a summary, and I said in Lambda, “Let’s take advantage of this experience and set up a hotline.” A few people came and we became a team. Lambda’s advice over the email for many years actually existed. What has been asked so far, what answers have been given? That information was there because of our archiving friends. We argued about what our approach should be. The book helped a lot. What’s the hotline? What’s our mission? What can we contribute when communicating with people? What’s the way to do this in a public way? We’ve learned all that from that book. Then we wrote our own text. We started the discussion in Lambda. It was a very crowded meeting. We’ve shaped it further with criticism. Then we prepared a training program, we announced it. Those who want to join came. It was a four-day training that lasted two weekends, from morning to night. And there was a lot of synergy. We’ve made the announcement. We printed stickers. People pick it up on the way home, stick them everywhere. There were stickers in parts of İstanbul that we never thought of.

One of the most asked questions was, “How am I going to find a lover?” There were a lot of questions from married men, too. As concrete information changed, we were updating our database. Where to go? What to do? What is the bureaucracy of it? We’ve been giving out this kind of information. There were a lot of callers just to not be alone and to chat. Our goal was: as a hotline, we were aware that we would not make a big change in people’s lives. That’s what we’ve been saying to people. But if you come here, if you attend events here, movie screenings, interviews, conversations are always open. You can come and chat, you can meet people. We were always advertising, so people come to Lambda. Indeed, a lot of people came to Lambda in those years, over the hotline. We were describing the street and apartment that we were in just to make them imagine the place physically. Because they’re imagining a dark place when they’re talking to us on the phone. We were saying it wasn’t. Here are the movie screenings, - this, that. “What kind of movies are there?” I mean, we were telling them about the movie
that we’re watching that week. We’re telling the story of the movie like there is a boy, and he’s afraid to open up to his parents. Because when you say there’s a movie, people were imagining porn movies or something. The most basic thing we did was to address those concerns. And sometimes we were giving out concrete information too.

**Esmeray: Questions, questions**

Guys were calling like we were going to have sex. Can we meet, I want to meet you, I’m not gay, but I want to meet you, I want to know how much you charge worth. Do you have a transvestite, a woman? I was getting calls like that. Of course, we were getting the training for that, to not to act angrily. We were explaining that this not an institution like that, that our main purpose is opening up and that this is not a charity, and that we were giving directions to the related authorities. I mean, let’s say, if someone has been exposed to violence, we can refer that to a lawyer, if someone changes sex, we can refer it to a doctor. We were explaining these to the people, slowly. And sometimes I was getting a phone call, in which a person was crying non-stop, saying I don’t have anyone, I can’t open up to my brother, I can’t open up to my mom, I can’t open up to that, I can’t get there too, I don’t know what’s going to happen to me. We were persuading them to come. Sometimes a trans woman was calling and telling us the stuff that happened, and sometimes a woman was calling us just to cry. My son is like this, what can I do about it, my daughter, what can I do, there was even a person that requested help for their mother. What can I do with my father, I’ve been getting calls like this. Some of them were coming to the association and were able to direct some of them before they came. Those hotlines were very efficient, that definitely needs to happen.
WOMEN TO WOMEN
STORY CONTEST

Oya Burcu Ersoy: How did it all start?

The competition appeared in our conversations with the woman in Kaos. So we had this conversation; So far, we read about the love between women mostly in stories that show the love between women as depressive, or with bad endings like someone eventually commits suicide or gets oppressed by her family or stories full of delusional content. That’s the way the products that published in the media are. Why don’t we write it ourselves? Because it’s not like that. It’s not all delirium, frustration, drama. So we thought we’d write our own stories. And to make it fun, we thought about competition. There was the Burcu Baba back then when we first spoke. It was her idea, the competition. We made our announcements right away. Nine people participated in the first story contest. There were nine participants, and probably two of them weren’t activists. The rest were activists. It was like only we participated. I was on the jury. I don’t have that kind of ability. So I didn’t attend. We were judges too anyway.

We gave an award to the first three. And then we did special awards. Because there are nine people involved, and the goal is not to race people and create competition. The goal was something else. The goal was visibility, the goal was to really encourage women to write and to contribute to the visibility of gay bisexual women. We gave an award called the Yelda X special. Yelda was a woman who was killed by her husband because she was having an affair with a married woman. We put it there, for example. There were also prizes attributed to this kind of thing. But after that, it got bigger and bigger. So the number has grown from nine to twenty, thirty to forty. And it was a beautiful thrill. I had the excitement of the first Women-to-Woman Story Contest, every year. Then we published a book from those stories. L Version of Love. It’s on its third edition now. So through the L Version of Love book, there were those who contacted us after reading it, who had nothing to do with activism or Kaos GL or the LGBT environment before that. It was beautiful for us, too.
A REST ON A LONG VOYAGE: KAOS GL IS NOW AN ASSOCIATION!

Yasemin Öz: How did it happen?

Back then we were having suffocation. We don't have a legal personality, we don't have money, how are we going to pay the rent every month? And our weekly meetings are something we're talking only about finance, so we can't discuss politics, we can't discuss what we're going to produce, we can't find the resources to produce. And we're starting to talk about how we can come up with a solution to this. I was calling our members on my Saturday shift, for example. Can you pay your dues, we can not pay our rent we are in a very difficult situation... Which is not enough even if you collect the dues... We ask for loans from our friends who have money, we borrow money. We're trying to pay them on the side. We're in a cycle like this. At that time, the Law on Associations changed in 2004. It became very easy to become an association, so as soon as you create a constitution, you were established as an association. I’m a lawyer, of course, and I started talking to friends, so let's become an association. You know, they made it so easy, if we found 16 people, we’d become an association. Let’s talk to our heterosexual friends, ask them if they be our founder members, in case our homosexual friends do not want to become that visible. We're arguing about if we were able to do it or not, and then a year later, in 2005, we wanted to give it a try. But we had this idea. They won’t accept that we're an association, they would sue us for closure. But let them sue us so that we can take a step against the state in concrete. Let them give us a concrete answer. You know, let’s make this official. Our strategy was to get the rejection so we will resort to the law, we will apply to the ECHR, our intention was in that direction. And we became an association, of course. And we became an association with a majority of LGBT founders, and we had heterosexual friends.

Of course, the governor's office immediately applied to the prosecutor’s office for us to be closed, citing the ‘immoral associations can not be established’ article of the Civil Code. We were waiting to see the outcome of it... Meanwhile, for the first time, we're going to the international ILGA conference, the ILGA Europe conference, at those years, at the same time. It happens simultaneously. They were
coming to us, they were holding workshops, you know, on how we can use the mechanisms of European Union law, how we can use human rights mechanisms, and so on. That’s how our relationship with them developed at that time. We’ve contacted them, too, in case we face a shutdown case. They had parliamentarians write letters in the European Parliament and send them to the ministry, saying “We are monitoring the events with concern” to the Turkish authorities. Then we got a prosecution decision. The prosecutor said they wouldn’t accept the association’s closure. A decision that they won’t press charges. It was a very democratic decision, written in detail, examined in human rights perspective, you know, it was as good as our plea, it was better than that, a shocking decision. We didn’t expect it.
Yeşim Başaran: The case and the visibility

In Lambdaistanbul, there was always an argument in the years before me about becoming an association. Then these arguments resurfaced while I was in it. And we decided to do it, and there is supposed to be a list of seven founder names. We asked who wants to be one, and everyone says it’s going to be me. So we said, if there are so many volunteers, let’s make positive discrimination, set up Lambda with a list that’s mostly women. We set it up with a list of trans and cis women. That’s the way it was. And when we did, of course, we knew about the Kaos GL experience. But it didn’t work out like that, we were sued. And then, of course, especially the friends who were on the board had to be more invested physically because their names were mentioned directly. We were acquitted, but we monitored all those processes, so Lambda had a culture of going to the gates of courts.

Özgür Azad: Societal Effect

Kaos had just become an association. We were talking about whether we should be an association or not. There were disagreements between us. After a while, we said, “Yes.” The advantages are greater. Let’s set it up for the sake of recognition and confrontation. It was decided. We completed the preliminary processes and became an association, but I think the legal process began soon after the closure lawsuit. Of course, our legal working groups had already begun to work in a more settled way during those processes. Our court processes, of course, were all kinds of demonstrations and they were fields of empowerment and struggle for us. In front of the courts we were always expressing this with our press releases, and with our banners, we were providing visibility. In fact, we went to the Supreme Court en masse in Ankara. In the process leading up to the Supreme Court, we had hired buses from Istanbul to Ankara. Making our voices heard was the most important thing. To be able to be in the news...
ESTABLISHMENT OF PINK LIFE

Buse Kılıçkaya: From the attacks to the self-organized struggle!

There are so many stages before the establishment of Pink Life. We've really struggled with Umut in Kaos GL for trans visibility. I worked professionally for a while in Kaos. I've made reports about the violation of rights. The periods that I said, “There is a trans policy and there are not many people working on it. I don't want to be a showcase mannequin” began and we started to show our reactions about that. Kaos GL’s transformation to become an LGBT magazine from a GL magazine was actually something that brought by the arguments of that time. So the structure of Kaos GL was a little different. It's still different from most LGBT organizations. Then I didn't understand that. So there can be different organizations, places that work in different fields. You understand a little bit more today, but today you look at it and you say, “That day, there was no need for it.” I mean, maybe it should've been organizing from a more inclusive perspective. Maybe it chose to be organized in that way. It had its own truth, and it was organized through its own truth. But in Kaos GL, we were trying to do this persistently: I’m a trans here, trans visibility is very important, I’m not a showcase here, I’m nothing, I work here as much as anyone, so something has to change. I had a lot of support from Umut because Umut and I were already very close friends and we thought we should fight together for this. At the time of meetings such as BaharatAnkara and Güztabul, I was always hearing transgender people or other people say, “here is the showcase of Kaos GL” about me. Of course, that wasn’t something we liked, but you can't do anything by standing outside. You know, you had to be in there and fight for it, and no matter how much you fought inside, it had a certain, settled policy.

At that time, the first seeds of Pink Life were actually being sown. So Pink Life was starting to form. Perhaps Kaos GL did the best thing at the time by not getting in touch with the trans struggle so that Ping Life was founded. If it was organizing the trans struggle, maybe everything would get complicated. It was nice that Kaos offered its support. In fact, Kaos wanted to break free from it, and it broke free from it nicely, and it saved the trans movement on the way. If it believed that it could do it, it would. I mean, there are things that Kaos misses, things that it can't see in the long run. Trans women’s organization requires serious patience. They want to not to get beaten up when they are on the street, not you. What they need is a husband to be able to rent a house, not you. The three sentences you wrote
in your magazine don’t satisfy them. Or they want the venues in their lives. The needs of trans women were different and it was very difficult to organize, and no NGO would have got into it.

The first seed was the Eryaman process, the events in Esat, the same people attacking both Esat and Eryaman... The time when the “Balyoz” came out. A law enforcement force called Balyoz had been created. It’s a unit just against trans people that actually belonged to the extortion department. A safety unit that was attacking trans people, smashing transgenders’ cars. There are cops, undercover, giants of men, and they beat up transgenders, smash their cars, they try to destroy them. In a conflict like this, Pink Life was established. You’re thinking, a formation, oh good, we’re set up. From now on, we’ll take some rights. Here’s what we’ll do to the struggle... Nooo, we fell in the middle of a full-on gang. In the politics of the state, the policies pursued by the police and the policies pursued by the gangs, the struggle of transgender people who are trying to fight for the right to life, who shout “Life!” , and a few faithful activists who do not know what to do in the middle of this struggle.

We started from a time when you go to a Lubunya and say, “Lubunya, you’re suffering right now, the cops beat you, let’s go and file a complaint at the police station,” they were saying, “Honey, which station, which right are you talking about, I’m a transvestite.” This was a different experience for us, for me, for Kaos GL. When we started to gather in our early stages, we were gathering in Kaos GL and the meetings were... I’m coming from a political party and organized life, and at least you start with what we call meeting ethics. Kaos has this kind of ethics about the meetings, about how you should be there. While you are talking about something, there were lubunyas who say, “Why don’t we talk about this?” about twenty different things and you try to achieve something out of there. Because it was a time when there were transgenders who were really stripped of the right to education, or that there was nothing but sex work. So, there was nothing like, “There is a trans doctor, there is a trans lawyer, one is interested in yoga, one of them is working for a non-governmental organization” as today. There was no such example in our lives. There was only one example; transgender women who work as sex workers.

Of all these madilikş, we also remember the times when we went to Kaos GL’s meeting and cancel the event. There were days when we said, “No, there’s no trans here!” Or there were days when we clashed with each other big time, so chairs and tables were flying in the air. I think these were special occasions.

19 A word from Turkish queer slang language describes mischief
If we hadn't gone through this, we wouldn't be understanding each other today. I wish we understood the issue of trans not only through gender identity but also through orientations. Because I have experience with a meeting like this, a trans-meeting, and a trans women's meeting, no no, I mean a meeting of transgender people, and a women's meeting was put in the same hour. I was newly, like, “I am having sex with women too” Which meeting am I going to attend? I was such a grumpy woman, I still have such grumpiness. I went and I said, “What is happening. Why did you put the meetings at the same time? Which one am I going to attend now?” “Well, of course, you're going to attend the trans meeting.” “How, me, to trans meeting... I'd like to attend the meeting of other lesbian women and bisexual lesbian women too.” I thought every one of them was beautiful, we went along like this, and I went and sat in that circle. I said, “I think I like women too, am I bisexual?” and I came out in that circle. A lot of things in my life were actually witnessed by Oya and Umut. Let me tell you, in my struggle. I mean, it's like a fish coming out of the water. You're not coming out at all, I've been an activist just by fluttering. Actually, I didn't care about activism. It's a matter of being visible and having rights. To fight to be able to live, to spare others from experiencing the pain I've been through, it doesn’t matter if I lived inside or outside. As much as my friends on the street have suffered from others, I am one of the activists who has suffered in civil society.

Umut Güner: Getting established

The founding activists at Pink Life played a very important role. It's not just the activist friends we know right now. Friends who are not in the movement at the moment also shouldered very serious responsibility, and the source for Pink Life to rent the first association office and get their first equipment was born from there. On the one hand, the reason I’m telling this is because of the Eryaman fact, there was a time when people wanted to come together to do something. At that time, transwomen came to Kaos, asking “what can we do about torture and ill-treatment?” and Pink Life emerged out of the need to organize as we talked about what we could do. There was an associationalization process. Candle demonstrations played a very important role in the capture of the Eryaman gang. Eryaman litigation process has begun after the press coverage of the demonstrations carried out in Yüksel on a weekly basis, in response to the prosecutor’s inaction, the exposure of the names of the perpetrators, their surnames and even the license plate of the car they committed crimes with.
Yeşim Başaran: Aren’t we all under the same blue sky?

An association in Bursa was going to hold a march. People from other cities would come. From Ankara, Istanbul. Before the march, Bursaspor fans had correspondence on an internet forum, such as “they would come here, let’s not let them march” or something. We heard about them, but it was like... Then, just one day before, a local newspaper published a threatening article that was saying, “We will not let them march in the city of sultans and saints.” We set off for Bursa, we’re on our way, not knowing what we will face. And people who didn’t normally plan to come decided to come when they saw there was such a threat. So it’s a bit of a weird thing like that... Why would you go to something like that? But people probably didn’t want to leave us alone there.

We’re set off with many more people than we anticipated. First, we went somewhere by bus, then by ferry... Then we could hear people talking on the bus we were on. “Bursaspor people are going to beat them up today”, how about that? Even if you knew something like that, you’d have to act differently. You know, if you’re talking about us, say hello, say something like are you okay. They are talking like they will be beaten and such. We’re taking steps towards a place where we’re so alien and vulnerable. It’s like the intro of a movie and it’s being messaged.

We met at the association’s venue. In an apartment building in the center of the city. It’s pretty crowded. People came from other cities. Friends we haven’t seen in a long time. We’re happy in our own way. But then when we wanted to leave the building to go to the meeting place for the march, but the building was surrounded by Bursaspor fans. And the police didn’t let us out of the door. As far as I know, that association applied and got permission from the governor’s office for the march. After all, people were saying, “We have a document, we have permission to walk”, but the police were responding as “No, it’s not safe, so we can’t let you out of this building.” Such an argument has begun. And in the meantime, people outside were cursing, yelling, shouting, screaming, shouting slogans full of horrible profanities. After an argument with the police at the door for a while, we went upstairs again. Meanwhile, the back of the building was surrounded by them too. They were throwing rocks, and the window of the room we were in
was smashed, so one of those stones came along. We don’t know about what happens a minute later, you know, it’s scary. On the one hand, we were transmitting the news to people, and what we’re transmitting is translated into English and transmitted to the world. In other words, other friends in Ankara in Istanbul are trying to make this known and heard and try to mobilize the institutions that can support us.

I felt... I was looking around, not knowing what to do. What I was most angry about was a few of us, swearing at the other side, and some of us were yelling at them like that. I was most angry with them that day. There were people who were very discreet, sane, organizing everything smoothly. In particular, the trans friends took immediate action and organized us within ourselves and communicated more properly with the police. I mean, if we left there that day without even bleeding any noses, I think it was because of them. Hours like this have passed, trapped inside the building. We’re not getting anywhere. Finally, the bus came to take us out of town. There’s been a police cordon. Because the building was surrounded by Bursaspor fans who are swearing, shouting, in an agitated state.

And then when the bus was going, they scattered around the city, and they know about the bus. I think it was the city bus, they followed the bus and stoned it. We went lying on the floor, so we were scared. It was all calm when we got to the station.

Then we got on the bus. On the way back on the ferry, the sun went down like this. I’m looking up at the sky, so aren’t we under the same sky with these people? How did something like this happen? How can something like this happen? Then I thought, what if we invited any of those people to dinner, we could sit at home, have a chat, I mean without hiding our identity... I mean normal life, we’re eating, we’re having a conversation. There wouldn’t be any problems. Then I guess it was a week later in Istanbul, a demonstration was organized. It had a very sweet language to dampen hatred, not to incite hatred against hate, and eventually, the flying balloons were released into the sky... We said we are flying these balloons to the sky that we share with the people of Bursa, with the fans of Bursaspor...