

PERFORMING TRANSGENDER EXPERIENCE  
THE CASE OF ESMERAY ÖZADIKTI

A Master's Thesis

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Ankara  
May 2015





To Şerife Şekerci...

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THE CASE OF ESMERAY ÖZADIKTI

Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences  
of  
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by

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in

THE DEPARTMENT OF  
COMMUNICATION AND DESIGN  
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ANKARA

May 2015

I certify that I have read this thesis and in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Media and Visual Studies.

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## ABSTRACT

### PERFORMING TRANSGENDER EXPERIENCE THE CASE OF ESMERAY ÖZADIKTI

Şekerci, Erdoğan

M.A., in Media and Visual Studies

Supervisor: Assist. Prof. Dr. Özlem Savaş

May, 2015.

This thesis mainly deals with several foundational approaches to transgender identity and considers transgender experience as a concept to discuss transgender identity and politics in Turkey. This study considers the role of transgender voice in constructing a transgender subjectivity. Moreover, this study inquires the production of transgender self through performance of experience and examines how it broadens the political and social territories of transgender identity and politics in Turkey. Esmeray's three performances, titled as *Cadının Bohçası*, *Yırtık Bohça* and *Kestirmeden Hikayeler*, are analyzed in order to contextualize the performance of transgender experience. It is concluded that Esmeray's performance of transgender experience moves beyond a mere theatrical representation of a trans woman. Rather, it is a productive method of struggle against heteronormative views on trans women in Turkey.

Key Words: Performance, Transgender, Experience, Autobiography, Theatre

## ÖZET

### TRANSGENDER DENEYİMİN PERFORMANSI ESMERAY ÖZADIKTI ÖRNEĞİ

Şekerci, Erdoğan

Yüksek Lisans, Medya ve Görsel Çalışmalar

Danışman: Yar. Doç. Dr. Özlem Savaş

Mayıs, 2015.

Bu tez, temelde transgender kimlik üzerine kurucu nitelikteki çeşitli yaklaşımlara değinmektedir ve Türkiye'deki transgender kimlik ve politikayı tartışmak için transgender deneyimi bir anlayış olarak dikkate almaktadır. Bu çalışma, transgender özneliliğin inşasında transgender ifadenin rolünü göz önünde bulundurmaktadır. Ayrıca bu çalışma, deneyimin performansı yoluyla transgender benliğin üretilmesini sorgulamaktadır ve deneyimin performansının Türkiye'deki transgender kimliğin ve politikanın politik ve sosyal sınırlarını ne şekilde genişlettiğini incelemektedir. Esmeray'ın *Cadının Bohçası*, *Yırtık Bohça* ve *Kestirmeden Hikayeler* isimli üç oyunu transgender deneyimin performansını bağlama oturtmak amacıyla incelenmektedir. Esmeray'ın transgender deneyiminin performansı salt trans kadının teatral temsilinin ötesine geçtiği sonucuna varılabilir. Esmeray'ın deneyiminin performansı daha ziyade Türkiye'deki trans kadınların heteronormatif bakış açlarına karşı mücadele etmesinde üretken bir metottur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Performans, Transgender, Deneyim, Otobiyografi, Tiyatro



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, several theatre plays emerged, which focus on trans women lives and the problems they face in Turkey. *Garaj (Garage)*, hosted by Craft Theatre, tells the story of one photography student and a trans woman, who meet one of the garages in Istanbul. *80'lerde Lubunya Olmak (Being Queer in 80s)*, hosted by Mekan.Artı, tells the story of four trans women, who lived in Turkey during 1980s. This play is based on trans women's oral narratives in the study of Being Queer in the 80s. *Kimsenin Ölmediği Bir Günüün Ertesiydi (It Was a Day After No One Died)*, performed by one of the famous female actresses, named Sumru Yavrucuk, tells the story of one trans woman, who has quite difficult living conditions due to being a trans woman in Turkey. *Kadınlar, Aşklar, Şarkılar (Women, Love, Songs)*, hosted by Mek'an Sahne, is about three fictional trans women and shows the interrogations they make in their childhood, adulthood and elder ages.

All these plays and the ones, I did not mention, make a great contribution to problematize what trans women experience in Turkey. Moreover, these plays increase the visibility of trans women's lives and experiences on theatre stages.

However, it should be primarily stated that this thesis is not directly associated with the theatrical representation of trans women in Turkey. It examines the performance of transgender experience and its contributions to broaden the political and social boundaries of trans women in Turkey. Therefore, I attempt to explore the ways of performing the transgender self beyond trans women's representations within the theatre context. This thesis examines the performance of transgender experience, which enables trans women to express their lives and articulate their own voices.

Beyond the theatrical representation of trans women in Turkey, Esmeray's performance of experience guided me to explore the significance of performing autobiography to enhance transgender politics in Turkey. Esmeray is a transgender activist and a stage performer in Turkey, who makes a living by performing her life story on stage. Esmeray immigrated from one of the villages in Kars to Istanbul when she was fifteen-year old boy and she faces her transgender identity in the upcoming years. As Pinar Özer says: "She fights an economic battle and she also fights with the society for the sexual identity she identifies with." (Öztek, 2009) Since 2015, she has continually performed three different solo performances based on her transgender experience, titled *Cadının Bohçası (Witch's Bundle)*, *Yırtık Bohça (Ragged Bundle)* and *Kestirmeden Hikayeler (Before Cutting Stories)*. *Cadının Bohçası* is the story of her experiences from childhood to adulthood. *Yırtık Bohça* is the queer stories she experiences and these stories include social aspects of transgender identity. *Kestirmeden Hikayeler* tells the story of her sex change experiences and involves the discussions on the trans body.

These three performances are beyond the context of theatrical representation of trans women because they seek to destabilize prevalent connotations on trans women in

Turkey and because they construct the transgender self as more performance-based process.

The major aim of this thesis is to interrogate and reveal the deficiencies and limitations in initial, queer and early feminist approaches compared to transgender experience. What I examined under the lights of transgender theory was quite helpful but not convincing for me to discuss transgender identity because I believe that foundational approaches to the transgender should pay attention to transgenders' own voice. Therefore, I focused on transgender autobiographies and oral narratives to hear how trans women express their lives. I observed that transgenders' own voice initially shows us the right course to construct an argument on trans women in Turkey. In that process, *Being Queer in the 80s* and *Being Queer in the 90s* were guided me to find out what trans women lived in 1980s and 1990s in Turkey. Moreover, trans-documentaries and interviews conducted by trans women, were quite helpful for me to be closely acquainted with trans women. Then, I tried to build a conceptual framework, which gives priority to transgenders' own voice and expressions based on their life narratives. With time, I realized that while transgender experience is strictly personal, it also helps enrich the social, cultural and political backgrounds on trans women in Turkey.

This thesis also aims to approach autobiography as a performance text beyond a textual form. Based on Esmeray's performance of experience, I found out that performing autobiography may be a highly useful course of action for trans women in Turkey. Performance of experience might be the way of expressing and articulating one's transgender identity, which enables the individual to constitute her/his transgender identity through acts and expressions. Moreover, performance of

experience may be a productive device to for a subjective self-constitution for trans women and to multiply transgender selves.

This thesis aims to show that performing autobiographies constitute a political demonstration an/or social events; and they include social and cultural potentialities to challenge the prevalent connotations of trans women in Turkey; and in return these performances enrich the transgender politics in Turkey. Following all these discussions, the research question was developed as: “How does performance of transgender experience broaden the political and social territories of trans women in Turkey?” To answer this question, I mainly focused on different theoretical approaches based on trans theory, performance theory and autobiography studies, and Esmeray’s performances.

As a methodology, I intentionally avoided giving reviews of Esmeray’s plays in detail. Her three performances are not separately analyzed and reviewed. Rather than her detailed on-stage performances, I consider both her on-stage and off-stage statements about her performances and her way of approaching transgender identity. Since Esmeray does not draw a strict line between her theatre performances and everyday life experiences, her on-stage and off-stage statements carry the same significance for this thesis. This was the punchline of this study and the fundamental aspect, where her performances move beyond the theatrical context. On the other hand, her borrowings from theatre were also examined because Esmeray approaches theatre as productive and constructive device for her performance of experience. That is why, theatrical forms of her performances were analyzed especially under the titles of Esmeray’s performances.



Before the elaborative summary of the chapters, I would like to give several remarks about the certain terms I used along this thesis. The first one was the distinctions among *transsexual*, *transgender*, *trans* and *trans woman*. *Transsexual* is used as a medical term, refers to a medical process of sex reassignment or body alteration. Therefore, it is commonly articulated within the horizons of biological aspects. Therefore, the term produces a limited spectrum for the person, who feels that the gender assigned to him/her at birth does not give a complete description of who they are. Moreover, *transsexual* is an obsolete term for the theoretical discussion, which refers to prevalent connotations of transgender discussions. *Transgender* provides a broader agenda for the people, who feel that both the sex and the gender assigned to them at birth is not adequate to define their genders. Moreover, *transgender*, as a term, moves beyond the biological aspects and is also shaped by social and cultural aspects. Therefore, in this thesis, it is commonly used as a category. *Trans* is becoming a popular term since it includes both *transsexual* and *transgender* identities. However, *trans* as a concept, draws an obscure line between *trans men* and *trans women*. Even though the term provides a political agenda in order to discuss the *transgender* beyond gender categories, it also causes a problem because of deconstructing the lines between *trans man* and *trans woman*. What they live or face after the gender re-assignment is quite different in Turkey because *trans woman* is the one who is commonly labeled as the sex-worker. Therefore, the terms, *transgender* and *trans woman*, were extensively used within the context of this thesis. However, I should also note that all these terms are interchangeably used, even though there are several distinctions among them.

The term *performance* was also used as distinct meanings within different contexts. Initially, in the first chapter, *gender performance* denotes that gender is constructed

through acts and expressions. There are moments that one can move beyond the social and cultural constraints and express his/her gender identity through performance. Secondly, it refers to *theatre performance*, which is directly associated with the performance of the one on the stage. This use is based on theatrical aspects and directly related to theatre play. The last but the most significant use of the term is related to the concept of performance. *Performance* is a specific action or set of actions, which contests, resists, challenges and breaks the forms and the norms. Within the context of this thesis, *theatre performance* is used in order to explain Esmeray's performances. On the other hand, within the context of performance studies, the concept of performance was majorly considered in this thesis as the resisting form or a mode of contestation.

In the first chapter, titled "Approaches to Transgender", the aim is to give a detailed theoretical and historical overview on transgender identity. Initially, the pre-existing binary approaches to transgender will provide the essentialist viewpoint, which is mostly associated with biological aspects of transgender identity. Within binary discussions, transsexual body is initially discussed within the boundaries of body alteration and genital transformation. Queer approaches will reveal that transgender identity moves beyond the essentialist categories and is constituted by acts and expressions. Feminist approaches will show the possibility of transgender difference and subjectivity. Instead of these three main foundational approaches to the transgender, transgender experience will suggest that transgenders should theorize their lives and should articulate their own voice in order to construct multiple transgender identities.

In the second chapter, titled "Approaches to Autobiography", the aim is to show that performance of transgender experience is the practical solution to broaden the social

and political territories of trans women. For this purpose, I will primarily analyze how initial approaches to self has evolved and shifted within different theoretical contexts. I will examine the impacts of autobiography within feminist theory and will show the potentialities to de-centralize and deconstruct the autobiographical self. Then, performing autobiography will be contextualized as the practical resolution of what feminist literature argues. This chapter mainly aims to explore the theoretical viewpoints of what Esmeray does and how Esmeray's performance of experience contributes to transgender identity and politics.

In the third chapter, Esmeray's performances, statements and interviews about her performances will be regarded as the components of her transgender identity. Esmeray's content, form and the components of performances will be analyzed in detail. She borrows several forms and techniques from theatre. Later, Esmeray's performance of experience will be explored in order to understand what Esmeray's performances express. Therefore, instead of who Esmeray is, what Esmeray does is the discussion of this section. Performativity of Esmeray's experience will be analyzed based on the concept of subversive performativity in order to understand what Esmeray does and how she contributes to transgender politics in Turkey and how these performances challenge the prevalent connotations of trans women. Finally, Esmeray's contribution to transgender identity will be discussed in order to reveal the impacts of her performances.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **APPROACHES TO TRANSGENDER**

In this chapter, foundational approaches to transgender will be discussed in order to examine the theoretical distinctions. Initial binary approaches aim to analyze the incapability of essentialist categories for transgender identity. Then, queer approaches to gender will be briefly discussed to reveal the impacts to break down binary formation of gender and also queer approaches to transgender introduces new and critical agenda for transgender identity beyond conventional viewpoints of gender. Later on, feminist approaches to transgender would be analyzed in order to understand how transgender identity has evolved in different feminist approaches. The impact of postmodern feminism and its emphasis on subjectivity and difference would be regarded because postmodern approach paves the way for transgender experience and considers transgender experience as the main focus to conceptualize transgender identity. Transgender experience is based on constructing transgender self through transgender's own voice. Therefore, this chapter may be observed as a detailed theoretical overview on transgender identity in order to examine how Esmeray Özadikti constructs her transgender identity.

## 2.1 Initial Approaches to Transgender

Transgender is a controversial term, which is firstly coined by 1980s and takes its current meaning in Feinberg's small but groundbreaking title (1992) as *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time has Come*. (Stryker, 2006) The term is initially used in order to compromise between the term *transsexual* and *transvestite* since both these two terms indicate limited spectrum because these terms are solely based on biological aspects. Benjamin notes that "Transsexuals, who want to belong to the opposite sex, and transvestites, who only 'cross-dress' in their clothes, sometimes live, quite unrecognized, as members of the sex or gender that is not theirs organically." (1966:9) Benjamin's position seems extreme in its biological reductionism since both transsexuality as well as transvestism is reduced to 'organical' sexual or gendered mode of being and additionally, the main difference is solely defined through genital transformation. Sandy Stone shares the definition of The Stanford Gender Dysphoria Program in 1968:

A transsexual is a person who identifies his or her gender identity with that of the "opposite" gender. Sex and gender are quite separate issues, but transsexuals commonly blur the distinction by confusing the performative character of gender with the physical "fact" of sex, referring to the perceptions of their situation as being in the "wrong body". (1991:281-2)

As far as Stanford Program's definition is concerned, transsexual is the one, who defines himself/herself by the opposite sex/gender assigned at birth. The definition somewhat indicates the transsexual as in the mode of sex/gender confusion. Following the essentialist viewpoints of transsexuality, body alteration or genital transformation has been initially the main corpus of the transgender identity since 1990s. That is why; initial approaches to transgender majorly consider transgender

identity as sex/gender incongruity. Transsexuality is considered as being in opposite sex or staying in the wrong body.

Instead of transsexuality or transvestism, transgender, as an umbrella term, reveals gender as socially constructed. As Stryker claims: “a transgender was somebody who permanently changed social gender through the public presentation of the self, without recourse to genital transformation.” (Stryker, 2006:4) Transgender, as a term, provides to discuss transgender identity more socially constructed beyond biological transformation.

As far as binary approaches to transgender are concerned, transgender identity is constructed within the normative and binary boundaries. Stryker emphasizes that “the field of transgender is concerned with the cultural mechanisms that work to sustain or thwart specific configurations of gendered personhood.” (Stryker, 2006:3)

Eleanor MacDonald attempts to propose more open-ended transgender definition as:

The term includes all those people whose internally felt sense of core gender identity does not correspond to their assigned sex at birth or in which they are raised. This includes people who identify with the gender other than that assigned at birth as well as those who do not identify with any gender at all. (1998:5)

MacDonald’s emphasis on transgender with regard to possibility of not being identified any gender at all is a quite substantial corner for transgender approaches because early approaches to transgender considers the one with its opposite sex or gender assigned at birth. Ekins and King says: “Transgendering refers both to the idea of moving across (transferring) from one pre-existing gender category to another (either temporarily or permanently), and to the idea of transcending or living ‘beyond gender’ altogether.” (1999:580) Ekins and King’s definition of transgendering involves more flowing edges to transgender identity since

transgendering is not defined as a permanent state. Therefore, the concept of transgendering includes more obscure lines compared to very initial approaches to transgender because transgendering shows that there could be different stages of transgender, which the one can also exercise temporarily. Therefore, transgendering is not a permanent, stable gender category and it is not fully endowed with permanent sex or gender transformation. Ekins and King (1999) define four modes of transgendering, which are named as ‘migrating’, ‘oscillating’, ‘erasing’ and ‘transcending’. They explain these four categories as:

Migrating body stories involve moving the body from one side of the binary divide to the other on a permanent basis. Oscillating body stories are stories involve moving backwards and forwards over the gender border, only temporarily resting on one side or the other. Erasing body stories are those in which the gender of the person erasing is expunged. Transcending body stories tell of moving beyond gender into a third space. (Ekins and King, 1999: 583)

As far as Ekins’ and King’s body narratives are concerned, transgender identity is constructed or produced by different stages of body narratives. Therefore, both permanently and temporarily, the body can be located in one of the stages. As Hines notes: “Ekins and King (1999) have developed a cartography of transgendering to take account of the ways in which transgender narratives are distinct.” (2006:52) As a result of transgender body narratives, transgender identity moves across the immutable binary modes of being, but is still produced by the different mode of categorization.

That is why; initial approaches to transgender are restricted to binary, conventional and normative boundaries and these initial approaches hold back essentialist viewpoints to transgender identity because of being limited to sex/gender categories. At this point, queer approaches to transgender may be considered as a new and critical agenda, which struggles with normative accounts of gender.

## 2.2. Queer Approaches to Transgender

Before the elaborative discussion on queer approaches to transgender, it may be useful to give some background about what queer theory mainly suggests on gender.

Initially, Jakobsen explains:

In fact, *queer* is often defined precisely as resistance to norms and normativity. Yet to move beyond the invocational ending, which by simple reiteration keeps us in a static relation to the problems of lesbian and gay politics, we need a way to think through the complications of embodiment, of resistance, of norms, and of the associated terms of normativity and the normal. (1998:512)

Queer, attempts to challenge the heteronormative organization of lesbian and gay politics and examines the alternative resistances. Therefore, the term attempts to suggest possible solutions in order to move across the heteronormative conceptualization of gender. “Queer is an ongoing production and necessarily unfixed site of engagement and contestation” (Berry and Jagose, 1996:11) Therefore, queer is an ongoing process as well as unfixed position rather than such a point of arrival, which contests the stability as well as coherence and it is also a reiterative and repetitive process. Halperin contributes to the queer approaches from the similar viewpoint that “There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. ‘Queer’ then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative.” (Halperin, 1995:62) As far As Halperin’s arguments are concerned, queer is a counter position to normativity. Following initial approaches to queer theory, queer may be framed as a contestation or resistance and queer also challenges normative and hegemonic aspects. Butler explains her concerns on the possibility of stable gender identities:

In the place of an original identification which serves as a determining cause, gender identity might be reconceived as a personal/cultural history of received meanings subject to set of imitative practices which



refer laterally to other imitations and which, jointly, construct the illusion of a primary and interior gendered self or parody of mechanism of that construction (1990:138)

As far as Butler's arguments are concerned, there is no single mode of embodiment and the ontological mode of gendered self. It is a process of construction of mechanisms. As Lloyd states: it is "an endless possibility of de-determination and re-citation." (1999: 197) In order to clarify the argument for an endless production of gender, "Gender does not necessarily follow from sex, and desire, or sexuality generally, does not seem to follow from gender." (Butler, 1990:135-6) According to Butler, queer proposes that there is no sex/desire/gender alignment to analyze gender approaches. Butler avoids of figuring out proper and adequate mode of gender.

Butler's concept, *gender performance*, proposes that queer way of gender is a mode of expression, which is endowed with social and cultural bounded acts. In these expressions of performance, Butler does not give any agenda completely outside of the social norms. She says: "consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense can not be taken as the fabrication of the performer's 'will' or 'choice'." (1993: 24) That is why; there is not the one who completely exceeds the repetition and reiteration of norms. The one is under the effect of compulsory cultural and social repetition. However, Butler does not contextualize social and cultural powers as oppressive. Lloyd claims that gender is endowed with cultural and social constraints but it is also such a productive activity (1999). Then, Butler considers power as productive to challenge heteronormative organization of gender.

Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. The existence of power relationships depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance... Instead there is a plurality or resistances... (Foucault, 1980: 95-96)

There is no power as distinct from resistance because resistance is not external from the network of power relations (Sullivan, 2003). Then, Butler borrows the Foucaudian concept of power and customizes it to queer approaches to gender. She claims that even though there is no possibility to escape from social and cultural constraints, there are performance moments, which enable the ones to act out outside of the social conventions and norms. Butler says: “(it is) not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to displace the very norms that enable the repetition itself” (1990: 148)

Hence, queer is a challenge or contestation, which holds back possible set of moments to move away from set of social and cultural norms. That is why; there is no complete identity. Contrarily, identity is an ongoing production within the boundaries of social and cultural norms. In the process of production, gender performance is bounded to set of social and cultural repetitions and reiterations. However, as far as queer theory is concerned, there are performance moments, which enable the ones to move beyond heteronormative institutions. Then, queer approaches to gender claims that gender is not completely categorized or structured. Therefore, queer is an ongoing process of exploration and articulation.

Having given brief background about the general discussions on queer approaches to gender, it is useful to discuss the queer approaches to transgender. As it is previously stated, initial approaches to transgender consider transgender identity as a category. Contrary to initial approaches, queer approaches to gender struggles with the gender categories because these categories constructs gender as normative. Butler’s ideas on categorization of gender may be noted:

What’s clear is that I have an uneasy relationship to categorization, I accept that categories exist and I even use them, and yet the point of

my work is not to figure out a proper and adequate mode of description for myself and I would hope I never come up with such a thing. (Butler, 1997:286)

As Butler states, she does not completely deny the existence of gender categories. However, gender categorization is not the main corpus of the queer approach. Queer keeps sex/gender binary framework at a distance through considering it as inadequate and insufficient. Based on queer approaches to gender, queer may be conceptualized as a position rather than a formation, which contests and challenges structured and categorized gender identity. Prosser says:

Seized on as a definitely queer force that “troubled” the identity categories of gender, sex and sexuality –or rather revealed them to be always already fictional and precarious –the trope of crossing was most often impacted with if not explicitly illustrated by the transgendered subject’s crossing their several at once: both the boundaries between gender, sex and sexuality and the boundaries that structures each as a binary category. (2006: 258)

Queer approaches troubles concept of gender as a whole and its heteronormative organization in order to find a position to fictionality and inconsistency of categories. Butler emphasizes the uneasiness of following sex/desire/sexuality to examine gender framework (1990). Therefore, her conceptual framework does not simply put new labels for old boxes just as the initial approaches to gender because the majority of early approaches consider transgender as a social or biological category. Stone says:

But the transsexual currently occupies a position, which is nowhere, which is outside the binary oppositions of gendered discourse. For a transsexual, as a transsexual, to generate a true, effective and representational counter discourse is to speak from outside the boundaries of gender, beyond the constructed oppositional nodes of which have been predefined as the only positions from which discourse is possible. (1991:295)

As far as initial approaches to transgender are concerned, transgender issue majorly finds its course through normative gender categories. Transgender is simply defined

as different gender category. Therefore, the majority of the initial approaches, taken under review, do not provide an adequate critical account of transgender. Therefore, “We need a deeper analytical language for transsexual theory, one which allows for the sorts of ambiguities and polyvocalities which have already so productively informed and enriched feminist theory.” (Stone, 1991:297) As Stone notes, critical gender inquiry needs to possess new and critical voice of transgender to move beyond the traditional view of gender. From the same line of thought, Whittle states:

In trans theory there is an inherent recognition that the trans position is problematic. The labels “man” and “woman” are inadequate to describe the trans experience, as the trans person’s history and knowledge of the world is so different from that of “men born men” or “women born women. (2006:xiv)

Transgender theory intends to have a new agenda to change the traditional views of transgender. In this regard, queer may be proposed as a potential useful trajectory for transgender theory. As it is previously discussed, queer way of gender is an endless and productive performance rather than a complete form of sexed or gendered being. It is a mode of articulation of performance moments, even though it is majorly bounded with cultural and social repetitions as well as reiterations. Within this respect, Prosser says: “Crucial to the idealization of transgender as a queer transgressive force is the consistent decoding of “trans” as incessant destabilizing movement between sexual and gender identities.” (2006:259) Then, queer approaches to transgender possess great potentials to destabilize traditional views of gender. However, as far queer approach to transgender is concerned, Butler says:

...There is a kind of spectre of transgenering that heterosexuals work with all the time, and that gay people do, and that it actually haunts any stable gender identity. I don’t mean to globalize transgender, that is, make into something everybody is, but I want to say that it is an issue that people deal with all the time. (1997:286)

Butler claims that transgenering is not restricted to transsexual body or the ones, who has body /gender transformations. Transgenering is the moment to step outside of social and cultural norm. Within the context of queer theory, transgenering is not completely associated with transgender identity. Transgenering is the way of destabilizing normative boundaries. Therefore, even though queer approaches to gender pave the way for discussing gender beyond traditional and normative linkages, queer approaches do not produce an adequate agenda to discuss transgender identity.

There are also several viewpoints, which consider queer approach to transgender as inadequate and insufficient in order to contextualize transgender issue. Hines problematizes the current limitations of queer approaches to reveal transgender difference within social analysis (2006). Prosser contributes to the same perspective as: “Queer theory fixes on the transgendered crossing in order to denaturalize gender, to loosen its tie from sex, gender’s bodily referent.” (1995:483). Moreover, MacDonald notes that all theorized form of transgender within different critical framework is somehow insufficient (1998). Hausman contributes to the same discussion as mentioning that queer destabilizes, re-genders, even queerifies but maintains gender categories as ontological realities (2001). From the same line of thought, Ki Namaste adds:

In recent years, the field known as queer theory has witnessed a veritable explosion of essays, presentation and books on the subjects of drag, gender, performance, and transsexuality... The violation of compulsory sex/gender relations is one of the topics most frequently addressed by critics in queer theory. These discussions, however rarely consider the implications of an enforced sex/gender system for people who live outside it... (1996:183-184)

As it is noted, there are several counter arguments about the limitations of queer approaches to transgender. Even though queer approaches to gender challenges and

contests the traditional view of gender, queer approaches to transgender considers transgenering as stepping outside the norm. Then, the leading discussions examine transgender issue by initial feminist approaches.

### **2.3 Feminist Approaches to Transgender**

Having given the theoretical discussion on queer approaches to transgender, it is useful to discuss the transgender issue from feminist point of view. The major discussion is surrounded by the theoretical backlashes and counter attacks against Janice Raymond's book, named *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of The She-Male* (1979). In this book, Raymond blames transsexual bodies on their pseudo-female bodies and their negative contributions to insist on patriarchal system. She says:

Rape... is a masculinist violation of bodily integrity. All transsexuals rape women's bodies by reducing the female form to an artifact, appropriating this body for themselves... Rape, although it is usually done by force, can also be accomplished by deception. (Stone, 1991:283)

Raymond criticizes transsexual bodies as sustaining the pre-existed masculine / feminine roles and possesses negative aspects on challenging the dominant masculine ideology. Rather than defining 'transsexual' as a different category, she considers transsexual body as the raped version of female body. Moreover, she also attacks the sex change operations since she claims that these operations reinforce patriarchal system through distorting/imitating female bodies. Riddell unfolds Janice Raymond's standpoint as:

Trans-sexual surgery is a form of behavior modification and control which is allowed conditionally, an trans-sexuals accepting and learning to present themselves in terms of patriarchally approved stereotypes. It follows typical male patterns in that it fetishizes forms, artificial

vaginas, removed organs. (1980: 147)

As it is observed from the general overview of Raymond's claims, her standpoint on transsexual bodies is essentialist and normative. She blames transsexual bodies through their fetishized and artificial body forms. As distinct from Raymond's perspective on transgender issue, there are more reasonable viewpoints, which considers feminist dissonances with transgender issue. MacDonald says: "Feminist theory, in both its identity-based and anti-essentialist versions, has denied the validity of transgendered people's experience." (MacDonald, 1998:3) As far as early approaches to feminism and its relation to transgender identity are concerned, transgender issue provides initial feminist approaches to interrogate and its traditional viewpoints. There are several suggestions to position transgender issue within feminist framework. Stone says:

I suggest constituting transsexuals are not as a class or problematic "third gender", but rather as a genre—a set of embodied texts whose potential for productive disruption of structured sexualities and spectra of desire has yet to be explored. (1991:296)

Stone problematizes transgender issue through revising its position beyond binary formation of gender. She realizes that transgender approaches are stuck in binary viewpoints and she reveals its potentiality to challenge the normative boundaries. Stryker explains the feminist approach to transgender by Heyes' (2003) perspective:

"woman" typically has been mobilized in ways that advance the specific class, racial, national, religious, and ideological agendas of some feminists at the expense of other women; the fight over transgender inclusion within feminism is not significantly different... Just as in these other struggles, grappling with transgender issues requires that some feminist re-examine, or perhaps examine for the first time, some of exclusionary assumptions they embed within the fundamental conceptual underpinnings of feminism. (2006:7)

As far as Heyes' arguments are concerned, transgender approach provides a productive agenda for revising feminist literature. Moreover, transgender issue

enables feminist inquiry to re-visit its essentialist and traditional aspects. Transgender identity interferes in feminist literature through interrogating it beyond fundamental approaches to feminism. Therefore, transgender approaches broaden the territories of feminist literature through destabilizing, multiplying and dislocating the prevalent connotations of feminism. Therefore, transgender issue deconstructs feminist literature as a gender issue rather than woman's issue.

Hence, transgender approaches have utmost importance for re-examination of traditional views of feminism. Transgender issue opens up the essentialist views of feminism. Moreover, transgender issue leads feminist approaches to re-examine the initial standpoints. MacDonald (1998:5) says: "In addressing transgender politics' challenge to the boundaries of gender identity, traditional feminist approaches need to critique their own exclusionary practices, and challenge their own understanding of gender and sexuality." Moreover, feminist literature incorporates into transgender issue in order to broaden the territories of feminist approaches because transgender issue enriches the initial feminist approaches through contextualizing it beyond woman's issue. Hausman says: "It is clear that transgender issues are becoming focal points of scholarly and popular thinking about gender in a way that women (as the objects of analysis) used to be." (2001: 465). As far as Hausman's statement is concerned, transgender issue unfixes feminist literature. Therefore, transgender issue contributes to feminist literature through revealing traditional aspects of feminism and initial feminist approaches confront its essentialist standpoints.

Postmodern feminist approaches basically concern about quite much theorization of feminism. The viewpoint of postmodern feminism examines the possibilities of reconstituting gender "without resorting to linear, teleological, hierarchical and binary ways of thinking and being". (Flax, 1990:39) Besides, postmodern approaches



to feminism are troubled with quite analytical and universalizing way of theorizing feminism. Postmodern feminist scholars claim that feminism, at the very beginning, opposes to objective and centered way of thinking. Then, if feminism is fully structured, universalized and rationalized, the philosophy of feminism contradicts to its initial approaches. Therefore, postmodern feminism attempts to remind us the preexisting routes of feminism in terms of difference and endeavor to move beyond the rational and universal conceptualization of feminism. Di Stefano says:

If gender has been the original impetus for the skepticism, then it may also be the case that it is time to give up the comforts and closures of the concept for a more radical and decentered attention for multiple differences. (1990: 75)

Therefore, by definition, feminism is oppositional, challenging way of thinking, which struggles with the preliminary foundational and structural approaches. Postmodern feminist approach suggests that feminism should interrogate its traditional point of views and opens itself to the difference. Beyond initial theoretical foundations, postmodern feminism considers the importance of difference, multiplicity and diversity. Flax says:

Feminist theories, like other forms of postmodernism, should encourage us to tolerate and interpret ambivalence, ambiguity, and multiplicity as well as to expose the roots of our needs for imposing order and structure no matter how arbitrary and oppressive these needs may be. (1990: 56)

As Flax considers, postmodern feminist approaches discuss that feminism should embrace complex and controversial aspects, which constitutes the difference. Then, postmodern feminism struggles with being subjected to theoretical coherence and stability. Rather than theoretical foundations, relationality of gender is considered within the postmodern approaches to gender. Bordo claims: "Gender never exhibit itself in pure form but in the context of lives that shaped by a multiplicity of

influences, which cannot be neatly sorted out.” (1990:150) Postmodern approaches to gender consider relationality of gender based on complex and controversial social processes. Flax claims:

“‘Gender relations’ is a category meant to capture a complex set of social processes. Gender, both as an analytic category and a social process, is relational. That is, gender relations are complex and unstable processes (or temporary totalities in the language of dialectics) constituted by and through interrelated parts.” (1990: 44)

Gender needs to be analyzed through considering social contexts. Therefore, it is not possible to produce gender as separate entity. Bordo notes:

In the context of a practice, which is attentive to issues of exclusion and committed to developing the conditions under which many voices can speak and be heard, clear, accessible, stimulating general hypotheses can be dialogically invaluable. Such ideas reconfigure the realities we take for granted; they allow us to examine our lives freshly; they bring history and culture to new life and invite our critical scrutiny.” (1990:140)

Bordo’s ideas on postmodern feminism have utmost importance in order to reveal the impact of different voices for configuring, articulating and constructing new and critical viewpoints. Gender can be produced by theorizing the lives and the different voices. Therefore, postmodern feminism does not attempt to suggest foundational approach to analyze gender because postmodern approach proposes that gender is based on relational, controversial and complex set of social practices.

However, there are two significant concerns, which criticize postmodern approaches to feminism. Primarily, postmodern framework does not offer any theoretical coherence or stability to discuss gender approaches. The second concern is that postmodern feminist discussions undermine the legitimacy of theoretical foundations of gender. However, Harding claims that theoretical instability and incoherence does not make the feminist approaches fragile and trivial. She says:

I think that the rationale for feminist ambivalence should refer not primarily to feminist error, or even exclusively to intellectual and political inadequacies in the mainstream debate. More important in generating this ambivalence are tensions and contradictions in the worlds in which feminists move. (1990: 86)

As Harding discusses, ambivalences and inconsistencies does not pose a threat to break down theoretical approaches to gender. Contrarily, postmodern approaches broaden its horizons through toleration to difference, openness for multiplicity and potential for decentralization. As Harding suggests, feminism needs to embrace all these differences. Di Stefano stands on the same point:

If gender has been the original impetus for the skepticism, then it may also be the case that it is time to give up the comforts and closures of the concept for a more radical and decentered attention for multiple differences. (1990:75)

As far as postmodern feminist discussions are concerned, postmodernism may be claimed as an attempt to remember the initial problematization when feminism emerges. Postmodern approaches emphasize the significance of difference. That is why; postmodern feminist framework loosens the ties with theoretical foundations.

Di Stefano claims:

By reference to postmodernism's own championing of an alternative to unified theoretical coherence, we should insist that the theoretical and political dilemmas of difference are well worth pondering. As yet, they remain stubbornly persistent and elusive, suggesting that gender is basic in ways that we have yet to understand, that it functions as "a difference that makes a difference". (1990:78)

Di Stefano considers the difference as the cause of making another difference. The difference is not the reason for feminist error. Contrarily, the difference enables more radical perspective to feminist approaches. Therefore, postmodern feminist approaches contribute to feminism through indicating its too much structural and theoretical aspects. Contrary to theoretical stability and coherence, postmodern

feminist approach interrelates, pluralizes, proliferates and multiplies the difference.

## **2.4 Transgender Experience**

Transgender experience is closely related to postmodern feminist approaches because it dwells on the idea that transgender voice may be the way of constituting transgender identity. Contrary to theoretical approaches to transgender, theorizing lives may be quite useful to reveal transgender difference and subjectivity. Therefore, in this section, transgender issue is not analyzed within the foundational approaches to gender. Rather than constituting theoretical views on transgender identity, it may be claimed that transgender lives may be the productive device to construct transgender identity. Hence, this viewpoint decentralizes the theoretical foundations on transgender identity and proliferates as well as multiplies transgender difference. Within the context of this thesis, transgender experience has utmost importance for analyzing performance of experience. Esmeray, who performs her transgender experience, multiplies the transgender identity in Turkey. Moreover, Esmeray's experience indicates the possibility to constitute transgender self through theorizing her own life. Esmeray's performance of experience would be analyzed in detail in Chapter 4. Before the elaborative discussion on Esmeray's performance of experience, it may be useful to discuss theoretical viewpoints on transgender experience.

As it is stated before, postmodern feminist approach responds the demands of transgender experience. Stone states the impact of articulating the lives of transgenders as:

Transsexuals must take responsibility for all of their history, to begin to rearticulate their lives not as a series of erasures in the service of species of feminism conceived from within a traditional frame, but as a

political action begun by reappropriating difference and reclaiming the power of the refigured and reinscribed body. (1991:298-99)

As Stone points out, transgender issue should be articulated within more subject-centered framework. In order to break down the traditional and theoretical foundations of transgender, transgenders need to articulate their lives. Instead of unified theoretical discussions, transgenders start to express their lives in order to reveal the difference and subjectivity. This viewpoint can be shown as the celebration of transgender multiplicities and diversities. Transgender experience provides a critical agenda to discuss transgender theory within the context of transgender voice. Whittle points out the significance of transgender experience as:

It is now possible, simply by “telling” or theorizing my own life and the lives of other trans people, for me to build an academic career based on the fascination of the “Other” with people like me. It is their obsession that has given us an opportunity to use the power of the media to tell our stories, to theorize our lives, and to seek equality and justice. (Whittle, 2006:xii)

As far as Whittle arguments are concerned, transgender approach should confront with its own power. As Whittle (2006) claims, transgender identity may be theorized by transgenders’ own voice. Therefore, transgender experience is the mode of interrogating transgender issues through the dynamics and processes of transgenders’ own lives. This type of transgender approach provides more subjective and decentralized production of transgender identity. Stryker says:

Histories have in fact been rewritten; the relationship with prior gay, lesbian and feminist scholarship have been addressed; new modes of gendered subjectivity have emerged, and new discourses and lines of critical inquiry have been launched. (2006:2)

Therefore transgender experience chooses to write its own history based on the experiences transgender individuals live. This is quite significant to be a witness of different lives and these different lives produce new discourses on transgender

identity. Transgender experience does not only give an agenda to problematize homogeneous theorization of transgender, but also it enables to explore the ways of figuring transgender history based on oral narratives. Scott says:

Experience is not the origin of our explanation, but that which we want to explain. This kind of approach does not undercut politics by denying the existence of subjects; it instead interrogates the processes of their creation, and, in so doing, refigures history and the role of the historian, an opens new ways for thinking about change. (1998:69)

As Scott argues, experience paves the way for creating historical accounts of transgender and provides a more subject-centered approach, which is constituted by transgender subjects. Therefore, transgender experience moves beyond the theoretical assumptions and contributes to write a history by transgender own voices. Then, it may be proposed that transgender subjectivity and difference is embodied through transgender autobiographies because autobiographies are quite fundamental tools in order to hear transgender voice. Based on the viewpoints on transgender experience, Stone (1991) mentions the significance of articulating transgenders' own lives by transgender subjects. Whittle (2006) suggests theorizing transgenders' lives by transgenders for seeking equality and justice. Stryker (2006) adds the significance of transgender experience in order to construct new discourses. As far as these viewpoints are concerned, transgender autobiography, as a form, is powerful and constitutive device to reveal transgender experience in order to theorize the lives of transgender subjects and in order to produce new discourses for transgender issue. That is why; within the boundaries of this thesis, transgender autobiography is considered as productive device to constitute transgender self. Hausman point:

While transsexual autobiographies may not be the representative of the experiences of many (or even most) transsexual subjects, they are indicative of the establishment of an official discourse (or set of discourses) regulating transsexual self-representations and, therefore, modes of transsexual subjectivity. (2006:337)

Even though Hausman mentions the limitations of transgender autobiographies because of restrictive aspects of official discourses, it may be claimed that autobiographies are quite powerful and apparent mediums for distinct transgender positions. Moreover, within the context of this thesis, transgender autobiographies are not considered as breaking down the official discourses on transgender identity. That is why; as it is stated before, every particular autobiography is productive and constructive in order to construct transgender self. Therefore, transgender autobiographies challenge the idea of transgender fact or truth. Contrarily, autobiographies are the way of contesting, challenging or struggling with the homogeneous and particular transgender identity.

Transgender experience is a significant turn for transgenders in order to centralize transgenders' own voice and lives. Following these discussions, transgender identity may be constituted through experience and this approach challenges unified theoretical coherence. Contrary to theoretical foundations of transgender, transgender experience reveals potential differences and subjectivities beyond prevailing notions of transgender identity. Therefore, transgender experience may be observed as subject-centered. This approach tends to contextualize transgender approach beyond initial feminist and queer approaches. Contrarily, transgender experience does not attempt to find theoretical reference to conceptualize transgender identity. That is why; transgender autobiographies are at the core of transgender identity.

It can be concluded that attempts for contextualizing transgender issue behind transgenders' own voice is reductionist and exclusionary, which may exclude several transgender subjects. Transgender experience has utmost importance for revealing transgender difference. Rather than seeking for transgender truth or foundational approach to analyze transgender identity, it is useful to focus on heterogeneity and

multiplicity of transgender identity based on transgender autobiographies. That standpoint enriches transgender identity and broadens the territories of transgender identity through different life narratives.

Esmeray Özadikti may be shortly defined as trans woman, trans performer, trans activist, feminist activist, stage actress, theatre performer and so on... However, within the context of this thesis, Esmeray Özadikti attempts to move beyond definitive forms or foundational approaches of transgender identity. Beyond all these labels, Esmeray is a particular subject, who performs her lived experience of difference. Therefore, in this thesis, Esmeray would be produced by what she does rather than who she is because her lived experience of difference is the main focus to reveal her difference and subjectivity. Following the discussions of transgender experience, it may be claimed that Esmeray's experiences may be considered as productive disruption to prevailing connotations of trans woman in Turkey. Her performance of experience may be considered as one of pioneering methods for trans women in Turkey because Esmeray's experiences are the particular mode of producing her transgender identity. Beyond the majority of theoretical suggestions or foundational approaches, Esmeray's performances possess new and critical agenda to move beyond traditional view of gender because Esmeray's experiences pave the way for more radical agenda for transgender politics. Therefore, Esmeray undoes the boundaries of foundational approaches through theorizing her own life and shows that her transgender experience paves the way for "an ongoing production and necessarily unfixed site of engagement and contestation" (Berry & Jagose, 1996). Therefore, Esmeray's transgender experience may be contextualized as opposition or resistance, which challenges dominant social and cultural discourses on trans women in Turkey.



## CHAPTER 3

### APPROACHES TO AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Autobiography is simply defined as self-narrative form. There are several approaches to autobiography within different conceptual frameworks and the majority of them are discussed through being adhered to self. Cohesion of autobiography to the self is a quite controversial subject of inquiry because the concept of self possesses historical and theoretical alterations as well as transformations for identity discussions. Therefore, the close tie between self and autobiography has evolved and shifted since the notion of self is conceptualized and contextualized within different historical and theoretical contexts. At the very beginning, Western idea attempts to define objective and stable “I”, which is subjected to “universal Man” and his unique and authentic position. Smith and Watson (1992: xvii) says:

Powering and defining centers, margins, boundaries and grounds of action in the West, traditional “autobiography” has been implicated in a specific notion of “selfhood”. This Enlightenment “self”, ontologically identical to other “I”s, sees its destiny in a teleological narrative enshrining the “individual” and “his” uniqueness.

As far as the prevailing notion of self is concerned, very traditional self is bounded with objective and universal ‘I’, which is an endeavor for placing the subject from

margin to the center of the universe, neglects the subjectivity of the subject and solely considers Man as rational as well as uniform. Therefore, enlightened self tends to restrict potential difference by considering all subjects as homogeneous. This standpoint limits the boundaries of autobiographical self as singular and uniform since “western autobiography rests upon the shared belief in commonsense identification of one individual with another.” (Smith and Watson, 1992:xvii) Early approaches to self is reduced to essentialist and centralized aspects in order to discuss subject and its subjective form because “western eyes see Man as a unique individual rather than a member of a collectivity, of race or nation, of sex or sexual preference...” (Smith and Watson, xvii) Therefore, universal subject creates a generalized other through ignoring potential biological, social and cultural differences of the subject. Smith notes:

The history of the universal subject thereby underwrites a history of the female subject, for the architecture of the universal subject rests upon and supports the founding identifications of those that are the non universal, the colorful, among whom is “woman”. (1993:11)

Universal subject is only endowed with rules of the objective Man and that masks the position of the other. Therefore, initial approaches to self attempt to find its course through neglecting or disregarding the subjectivity and autobiographical self may be stuck into the voice of the universal subject rather than being occurred as a distinct voice of the other. Contrary to this prevailing notion of self, according to feminist literature, autobiography may be approached as the product of difference and subjectivity, which challenges traditional approaches to self. Smith and Watson notes that “in order to unstick both this Man and his meanings, we need to adjust, to reframe, our understandings of both traditional and counter-traditional autobiographical practices.” (1992:xviii) Then, to move across the uniformity and

singularity of the autobiographical self, feminism may be an agenda, which mainly proposes fragmented and multiple constitution of self. Moreover, feminism challenges the idea of uniform subject and dismantles the traditional formation of self. Within the context of feminist literature, autobiography may be a device to de-centralize and de-contextualize autobiographical self by revealing the subjectivity of the subject and its potential difference. Therefore, feminism is a significant turn to break down the prevailing notion of autobiography. Kaplan suggests, “As feminist theories have entered the debates around autobiography, the questions of generic definition and tradition have shifted in order to challenge primarily masculine conventions and canons.” (1992:115) According to feminist theories, autobiography may challenge traditional masculine bias to self, which is limited as well as centralized. Within the context of this study, performing the difference based on the other’s own voice may be the practical resolution of what feminism discusses on autobiography because autobiographical performance may be the way of display as political course of action and also may unmask the insufficiency of written form of autobiography because performing is the way of expressing the voice and body.

Autobiographical performance was regarded as a means to reveal otherwise invisible lives, to resist marginalization and objectification and to become, instead, speaking subjects with self-agency; performance, then, as a way to bring into being a self. Autobiographical performances provide a way to talk out, talk back, talk otherwise. (Heddon, 2008:3)

Autobiographical performance gives voice to “the lived other” and may challenge the political and social set of discourses, which constitutes the one as “the other”. Therefore, autobiographical performance may be considered as a communicative set of actions with the other through his/her personal display. Then, from the same line of thought, transgender autobiography may be a personal but also social and political device to reveal difference and subjectivity. Within the context of this thesis,

performing transgender autobiography may be contextualized as a political contestation against singular, uniform mode of transgender constitution or a way of tackling with set of social discourses, which are detrimental to transgenders. Here, it is vital for initially discussing what feminism suggests based on autobiography in order to reveal the issue based on traditional approaches to self and its objective, uniform as well as singular subject.

### **3.1. Feminist Approaches to Autobiography**

According to feminist literature, autobiography may be considered as a conceptual framework to loosen masculine ties and break down prevailing notions of traditional autobiography. Woman as being attached to universal Man is figured as an unsettled and indistinct other. She is “affiliated physically, socially, psychologically in relationships to others, her individuality [is] sacrificed to the ‘constitutive definitions’ of her identity as a member of a family, as someone’s daughter, someone’s wife or someone’s mother.” (Smith, 1993: 13)

As far as woman’s position is concerned, she is the female other, which is strictly defined as her relation to Man. There is no woman self, which is being liberated from universal subject and his centered position. Therefore, labeling woman as someone’s mother, sister or daughter may be seen as being exposed to masculine canons and definitions. Smith says: “She positions herself as a proper lady who surmounts her negative identification with the body through selflessness.” (1993:16) At the very stable and holistic way of thinking, “The near absence of women’s self-representational texts from the critical histories that authorize autobiography indicates the extent to which the genre that functions as the closest textual version of the political ideology of individualism is gendered as “male”.” (Gilmore, 1994:1)

Selfless position of woman and exposure of masculine canons limit the constitution of woman self as distinct from universal Man. It may be claimed that autobiographical self, primarily, has been subjected to heteronormative boundaries since woman's voice is only articulated within the boundaries of Man's authority. The universal subject appears with its authenticity and disregards the self of the other. Hence, it may be claimed that official descriptions of history, which hold back heteronormative definitions and perspectives, are restricted to define what the other is. Hence, the other's personal voice with its own articulation may be the constructive solution to dislocate the patriarchal authority. Smith explains the impact of 'other's voice as:

When these subjects [others] enter the scene of autobiographical writing, they engage dialogically with the cacophonous voices of cultural discourses... These discourses affect various technologies of subjectivity by means of which autobiographical subjects secure themselves, dislodge themselves, or refashion themselves discourses of the universal and the embodied subject primary among them. (1993:21)

Therefore, theorizing the other's life history is a considerable turn to dislodge the authoritative and patriarchal constitution of self because the other's voice may be the source of power to interrogate, destabilize, displace and decentralize prevailing notion of self. Then, within the context of feminist literature, autobiography proposes more widening agenda for the subject and its subjectivity. Autobiography may be contextualized as counter-hegemonic viewpoint in order to break down the universal rules and patriarchal strategies. Smith notes:

Confronting the mess and clutter of the many unofficial, "inauthentic", and nonidentical subjectivities available to them as well as the invitation to identification with official histories of the universal subject, women find narrative and rhetorical strategies through which to negotiate the laws of genre and the calls to provided subjectivities. (1993:22)

Feminist approaches to self may be a productive agenda, which enables women to create their own canons and perspectives to question universal subject and objective self. Initially, feminist approaches to autobiography attempts to challenge the ruling ideas of the patriarchy through positing woman as the subject rather than object of Man. Moreover, feminist literature does not only generate women's personal history, but also examine the possible ways to create its own voice. Personal Narrative Group states: "Listening to women's voices, studying women's writings, and learning from women's experiences have been crucial to the feminist reconstruction of our understanding of the world." (1989:4) According to feminist literature, autobiography paves the way for discussing subjectivity and difference and gives a solid framework to question the patriarchal construction of woman. Following several debates on feminist approaches to autobiography, it may be claimed that subjectivity initially finds its course through women's voices and experiences.

Feminist intervention to autobiography suggests groundbreaking discussion through moving beyond traditional self. Smith and Watson notes: "Crucially, the writing and theorizing of women's lives has often occurred in texts that place an emphasis on collective processes while questioning the sovereignty and universality of the solitary self." (1992:5) Therefore, theorizing women's lives is a process of inquiry of universalized forms for challenging the unified, coherent and univocal subject. Feminism attempts to challenge the masculine course of the subject through contextualizing women's experience with women's voice. As Scott states:

Among feminist historians, "experience" has helped to legitimize a critique of the false claims to objectivity of traditional historical accounts. Part of the project of some feminist history has been to unmask all claims to objectivity as an ideological cover for masculine bias by pointing out the shortcomings, incompleteness, and exclusiveness of "mainstream" history. (1998:63)

As Scott claims, experience challenges the mainstream assumptions and objective standpoints for singular mode of self-constitution. Within the context of feminist literature, experience enables to question historical objectivity and its validity. Scott notes: "By multiplying not only stories, but subjects, and by insisting that stories are written from fundamentally different –indeed irreconcilable—perspectives or standpoints, no one of which is complete or completely "true"." (1998:58) Therefore, feminist approaches to autobiography suggest that there is no complete, unified and singular self. De Lauretis notes:

To envision gender (male or female) *otherwise*, and to (re)construct it in terms other than those dictated by the patriarchal contract, we must walk out of the male-centered frame of reference in which gender and sexuality are (re)produced by the discourse of male sexuality. (1987:17)

Feminism is not simple theoretical proposition, which only focuses on woman's position or experience. Feminism should be a strategy to embrace all the marginal subjects, which are suffered from heteronormative structures. If feminism is being reduced to constitute solely female eye against dominant male eye, it may be reducing for the others, which form their identities as distinct from being woman or man. Therefore, feminist approach may be considered as an interrogation of traditional viewpoints, which also interrogates bounded, essentialized and naturalized sex/gender binary modes of thinking. Therefore, in order to go beyond sex/gender duality, autobiography may be a suggestive device to reveal potential difference of the other, which is not only woman but also the other apart from man and woman.

Gilmore states:

According to the formalist logic of gender, the binary of sex (of which there are only two: male and female) is the "natural" ground onto which gender as a cultural construction is layered. Autobiography, then, according to this logic of development, would translate the fact of sexual

difference through the experience of gender to its subsequent representation. (1994:11)

As far as Gilmore's arguments are concerned, autobiographies are translatable that go beyond binary formation of sex/gender and articulate the potential sexual or gender difference. Then, feminist literature promises every particular other to take an action theorize its own sexual/gendered difference, which is beyond biological, cultural and social boundaries. Therefore, feminist approaches to autobiography suggest more comprehensive agenda because it considers not only woman's voice but also the voice of the every sexual/gendered other. Watson states: "In women's autobiographies, naming the unspeakable is a coming to voice that can create new subjects, precisely because women's marginality may be unnameable within the terms and parameters of the dominant culture." (1992:139) New voices are the source of new subjects and according to feminism, autobiography is a productive device which considers "reconstituting the self, gender, knowledge, social relations, and culture without resorting to linear, teleological, hierarchical, holistic or binary ways of thinking and being." (Flax, 1990: 39) For that reason, the other's voice may be regarded as a resistance form to jump out of binary formation of the self. Then, feminist approach to autobiography may be seen as contestation against binary mode of self-constitution. Therefore, feminism takes an action with destabilizing and dislocating obsolete aspects of autobiographical self and reveals the subjectivity of the subject and its distinct voice beyond the limitations of man/woman binary.

Hence, autobiography reveals the limitations of sexual and gendered demarcations and shows them as complex statements that may challenge or rethink mainstream ideologies of gender (Watson, 1992). Therefore, articulation of the particular voice moves beyond sex/gender categorizations because marginalized others theorize their



own lives as a useful device to challenge sex/gender conventions and reveals the limitations of early approaches to autobiography. Therefore, the other's life story may be theorized as a resistance and the others may be self-expressive agents, who destabilize mainstream boundaries and who move beyond dominant ideologies of gender.

Here, it may be useful to analyze the relationality of the self within the context of feminism and autobiography. Feminism argues that the autobiographical self explores its own personal voice through its relation to social, cultural and political contents because personal is quite subjected to social, cultural and political boundaries. Therefore, autobiographical self constitutes itself through an interplay with social and cultural limitations. "Contemporary feminism is in the process of representing and building subjectivities which give meaning to women's identities. In doing so, we are arguing with some historical constructions of subjectivity and identifying with others." (Swindless, 1989:24) Then, autobiography is an attempt to produce subjectivities, which also considers the self in association with other subjects and subjectivities. Therefore, there is no subjective self, which moves beyond personal, social and cultural relations. If so, the self is always ongoing and reiterative process within different social and cultural contents. Smith claims:

It is as if the autobiographical subject finds him/herself on multiple stages simultaneously, called to heterogeneous recitations of identity. These multiple calls never align perfectly. Rather they create spaces or gaps, ruptures, unstable boundaries, incursions, excursions, limits and their transgressions. (1998a:110)

Then, autobiographical subject does not reach the final stage. The subject constitutes it within multiple stages. "By multiplying not only stories, but subjects, and by insisting that stories are written from fundamentally different –indeed irreconcilable—perspectives or standpoints, no one of which is complete or

completely “true”.” (Scott, 1998:58) From the similar perspective, Eakin (1998:63) claims:

We tend to think of autobiography as a literature of the first person, but the subject of autobiography to which the pronoun “I” refers is neither singular nor first...The myth of autonomy dies hard, and autobiography criticism has not yet fully addressed to the extent to which the self is defined by –and lives in terms of—its relations with others.

Therefore, the autobiographical self is not constituted as a singular mode of being. Autobiography is a personal device, which paves the way for getting in touch with other selves and being in dialogue with social and cultural contents.

### **3.2. Performance Approaches to Autobiography**

Within the context of performance studies, autobiography holds back quite similar standpoints with feminism but proposes more practical agenda than feminism discusses. Therefore, within the context of this thesis, it is useful to discuss the autobiographical performance to carry the discussion one step forward what feminist approaches to autobiography argues. Eakin states the significance of autobiographical performance as: “because our own lives never stand free of the lives of others, we are faced with our responsibility to those others whenever we write [perform] about ourselves.” (1999:159) Autobiographical performance is an ongoing dialogue or communication with the voice of others. Performing is the way of moving beyond literary form of other’s life story. Performing autobiography reveals the other’s position as displaying the subject with its particular body and voice. MacDonald points out the incapacity of linguistic autobiographical form as: “Too often postmodern approaches validate difference at a linguistic level without considering the lived experience of difference.” (1998:10) Then, autobiographical performance may be a vehicle to go beyond the solely linguistic form of difference.

Langellier suggests that “Performing personal narrative reclaims and proclaims both body and voice: the personal gives a body to narrative, and narrative gives voice to experience.” (1998:207) Then, performing is the way of broadening the territories of written autobiography as revealing the subject’s body and the voice. As MacDonald (1998) previously stated that feminist literature holds back several limitations to discuss difference because that misses the significance of the lived experience of difference. Therefore, performing autobiography may be one of the practical resolutions in what feminist literature engages. Performing autobiography possesses more viable aspects to express experience and subjectivity.

It is vital for mentioning that performance owes to theatre forms because it borrows several techniques and methods to express lived experience of difference, but performance provides more widening agenda “as a public intellectual practice with the potential to intervene in restrictive and oppressive representations of human capacities.” (Dolan, 2006: 508) Therefore, performing autobiography may be observed beyond staging autobiography because performing suggests a way for constituting self. Heddon claims:

The study and practice of autobiographical performance enables an engagement with the various discourses with which such performances are in dialogue. Second, the practice of autobiographical performance facilitates the inhabiting of a critical stance in relation to some of the dominant or commonsense assumptions. (2008:17)

Within the context of this thesis, it can be argued that performing is not solely a theoretical claim or theatrical practice, but a course of action, where the subject displays its own resistance to interrogate the social and cultural contents. Therefore, performing autobiography may be the way of dealing with univocal and fixed social, cultural and political demarcations.

The lived experience of difference and its performance may undo the position of the other. Heddon says: “Refracting one’s experiences through discourses that might include feminist and queer theory often undoes the fixed, stable and ‘given’” (Heddon, 2001) and also performance undoes the stable boundaries of the one’s experience because “performance is dynamic and generative, enabling difficult and controversial stances and poses that ultimately help us better to *articulate* our objects (and subjects) of inquiry.” (Johnson 2003:6-7) Then, performing autobiography may be the reveal of the self and enables subjects to participate in the social space and engaged with other subjects. Langellier & Peterson notes: “Performance has the potential of emergence, that is, in re-doing something one may do it differently. Emergence may refer to new text structures, event structures, and social structures, that is, to new stories, new storytelling events, and new identities.” (2006:155) Therefore, performing autobiography may be the emergence of new voices. Then, performing is likely to reveal an unfamiliar voice, which provides subjective and multiple selves.

Moreover, performing autobiography is expressive, participatory and lived process. Madison and Hamera state that “In the evolution of experience to expression, we have simultaneously crossed the threshold of performance. Experience is now becomes the very source of performance.” (2005:xvii) Performance, as an expressive device, polishes the difference of the subject and explores the expressiveness of the subject without marginalizing it. Madison states that “The experience is now made into expression is presented in the world; it occupies time, space, and public reality. Experience made into expression brings forth reader, observer, listener, village, community, and the audience.” (2005:151) Then, performing may be considered as the passing from experience to expression because performing constitutes the subject

at a quite expressive level. It is an alternative resistance form to participate in the social space. Bell notes: ““Marginalized subjectivities”, the catch-phrase for those denied subjecthood in traditional Western conceptions, move from margin to center (stage) in performance.” (2003:315) Autobiographical performance neither marginalizes nor centralizes the subject. Contrarily, performing autobiography only centralizes lived experience of difference and its potential enforcement to subjectivity of the subject. Therefore, performing autobiography may be considered as a social event where the subjectivity is formed by performances.

### **3.3 Performativity of the Autobiography**

Performativity possesses distinct connotations within the context of queer studies and performance studies. As far as queer theory is concerned, performativity is stylized repetition of acts or in other words, a reiteration of a norm or set of norms (Butler, 1988) Gender acts are bounded with social and cultural norms and then, gender expressions, postures, gestures are limited to social and cultural boundaries. Therefore, it is not possible to conceptualize gender outside of the social and cultural norms. Diamond defines performativity as “act that one does, the act that one performs is, in the sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene” (1996, 4) Then, gender acts and practices are partially embedded in reiterating social and cultural norms. According to queer studies, performativity does not define any gendered being, which is completely independent from social and cultural norms. Performativity is recitation of gender norms, which is endowed with repetitional and citational behaviors. Within these repetitional and recitational behaviors, the subject may explore performance moments in order to move beyond these cultural and social demarcations. Therefore, according to queer approaches to

performativity, gender is interplay among performance moments and performative demarcations.

Within the context of performance studies, Madison & Hamera claim that “We may also understand performativity as an intervention upon citationality and of resisting citationality.” (2005: xviii) According to performance studies, performativity may hold back oppositional aspects, which may be “as action that disturbs, disrupts, and disavows hegemonic formations.” (Bhaba, 1994:146) Madison draws upon these two perspectives and distinguishes performativity as “subversive” as well as “hegemonic” and suggests that subversive performativity can challenge the citations the hegemonic performativity that insists (2005). Within the context of this thesis, performativity may be taken as a dynamic and subversive tool to intervene in social and cultural demarcations. Therefore, performativity may be a resistance and opposition against social and cultural norms. Then, within the context of performance studies, subversive performativity produces oppositional and contestational subject position. Hence, according to performance studies, subversive performativity moves beyond the repetition and recitation of norms, as queer theory suggests. Within the context of performance studies, performativity gains more protesting ground as distinct from queer perspective. Therefore, in this thesis, subversive performativity would be used in order to analyze the impact of Esmeray’s performances.

As it is stated before, performing autobiographical self is expressive, relational, subjective and unique. It is an articulation of the self by its own voice. Every particular performance of experience constitutes the particular subject and the subject’s affiliation with the social and cultural forms. Therefore, performing

experience may be considered as subversive performative because it holds back potential oppositional aspects, where the subject contests and questions its position within social and cultural norms. Heddon says:

The vast majority of autobiographical performances have been concerned with using the public arena of performance in order to ‘speak out’, attempting to make visible denied or marginalized subjects, or to ‘talk back’, aiming to challenge, contest, problematize dominant representations and assumptions about those subjects.” (2008:20)

That is why, performing autobiography is a contestation or resistance through challenging the dominant social and cultural norms. These features of performing experience question the social and cultural boundaries. Then, autobiographical performance is a dialogic display, which does the subject and undoes its controversial position within social and cultural norms. Langellier and Peterson notes:

Performing personal narrative is also political because it does something; and in doing something in and with discourse that is neither uniform nor stable, performing may re-inscribe or resist the bodily practices and material conditions in which they are embedded. (2006: 164)

Performing autobiography may be a subversive performative act. It may be a subversive process, which challenges or problematizes what the normative is. Performing self based on autobiography may be considered as the process of constituting the self and question the social and cultural boundaries. Then, it is claimed that autobiographical self may move beyond the social and cultural definitions and conventions through performativity of autobiography. Then, could it be possible to claim that every particular performance is subversive performative? How it is possible to define performance as subversive performative or not? Langellier responds:

Without performativity, however, personal narrative risks being a performance practice without a theory of power to interrogate what subject positions are culturally variable, what texts and narrative forms and practices are privileged, and what discursive contexts prevail in interpreting experience. Without it we are vulnerable to the change that performance makes no difference, that it leaves all material and social conditions unchanged. (2009: 135)

As Langellier discusses, personal narrative needs to hold back the contestation power against social and cultural conditions. Otherwise, it may loosen the ties of transformation and may just exist as a performance practice. Therefore, personal narrative should set up the dialogic engagement with other subjects. Performing autobiography needs to be a process of inquiry that constantly interrogates firstly personal, then social, cultural and political controversies because “autobiography produces more questions than answers, more doubts by far (even of its existence) than certainties.” (Olney, 1980:5) Then, performing autobiography is an inquiry practice where the self attempts to be articulated, and social and cultural norms are contested and challenged.

In order to clarify the subversive performativity of autobiography, it may be useful to dwell on two concepts. Langellier and Peterson describe these two concepts as *identity's body* and *bodily participation* (2006:157) First concept is about a performer, who constitutes himself/herself with his/her experience and also questions the hegemonic forces of social structures. Second concept is about constituting the self with the subject's unique voice and the body in front of the audience. Langellier and Peterson notes: “Participation in a field of bodily and discursive practices begins in audiencing one's own and others' experience.” (2006:157) Then, within the context of this thesis, performing autobiography is considered as subversively performative because the autobiographical performance goes beyond theatre play



and is shaped as social event or political demonstration. Langellier and Peterson notes: “Performance as a political act emphasizes performer creativity to ground possibilities for action, agency, and resistance in the liminality of performance as it suspends, questions, plays with, and transforms social and cultural norms.” (2006:155) Then, autobiographical performance may be the source of a political act, which produces or make the audience produce more questions about what the norm is. Performing autobiography is subversively performative, if it is an oppositional, contestational, expressive event that questions social and cultural norms through very critical and subjective voice.

### **3.4 Performance of Transgender Experience**

Feminist approaches to autobiography paves the way for heterogeneous, alterable and multiple formation of self. Performance considers autobiography as a productive device, which hold back expressive, communicative and dialogic aspects. Then, performance approach to autobiography promotes the idea of giving body to experience. Performance approaches autobiography as expressiveness of experience rather than rebuilding life story solely into textual form. Beyond the textual form of personal narrative, performing autobiography has more dynamic and generative aspects because of its perpetual processing of identity construction. Feminist approaches to autobiography reveal the invalidity of true self, performance approaches to autobiography shows that the subject is constituted by an ongoing production of self. Then, feminist approaches to autobiography and autobiography’s potentiality to perform may be adapted to transgender experience because Whittle notes that “trans identity can cover a variety of experiences.” (2006:xi)

Transgender identity may hold back various personal backgrounds, which is also subjected to different social, cultural and political contexts. Then, transgender autobiographies may alter the prevailing notions of transgender self through revealing the experience. Then, transgender experience resituates transgender identity as no more essentialist but more experience-based and expressive turn. Then, articulation of trans experience enables transgender identity to reveals transgender identity as heterogeneous and multiple. Hausman says: “Without these (autobiographical) texts we would not have the phenomenon that we have today, because within their narratives live the most important assertions – as well as the most destabilizing discontinuities-within which transsexual subjectivity is constituted.” (2006:358) Therefore, autobiographical performances may increase the possibility of multiple and heterogeneous transgender self-constitution. Its subversive performativity hold back potentialities to challenge social and cultural discourses about transgender identity. Hooks points out: “Oppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subject, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, telling their story.” (1989:43) Therefore, performing transgender experience may be an efficient tool to reveal transgender subjectivity and difference. Hooks (1989) implies that performing is the embodied form of resistance. Smith also considers the political potentials of performing autobiography as: “Autobiographical practices become occasions for restaging subjectivity and autobiographical strategies become occasions for the staging of resistance.” (Smith, 1998: 434) Performing transgender experience may be a resistance through the impacts of personal voice. Moreover, performing autobiography may be ‘speak out’ practice, which is the way of resisting against social and cultural norms against transgender identity. That is why; performing autobiography does not only reveal

transgender subjectivity and difference but also constitutes a resistance and contestation. Hence, performing transgender autobiography may constitute a dialogue between the transgender subject and the audience. Then, performing transgender experience “may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to *influence* in any way any of the other participants.” (Goffman, 1959:15) Therefore, performing transgender experience may affect the audience through its possibility to alter the prevailing ideas on transgender identity.

Then, performing transgender experience may be subversive performative, if it challenges, contests and resists against mainstream and heteronormative ideas on transgender identity. However, the content and the context of performance of transgender experience have an impact whether the performance is subversive performative or not. From the performative side, the transgender performance may “appear not as the end of narrative becoming but as performative moments all along a process: repetitious, recursive, disordered, incessant, above all, unpredictable and necessarily incomplete.” (Prosser, 2006:263) Performance of transgender experience may challenge the traditional and heteronormative aspects of transgender self.

Heddon notes:

The relationship between marginalized subjects and the appeal of autobiographical performance is not co-incidental. Autobiographical performances can capitalize on theatre’s unique temporality, its here and newness, and on its ability to respond and engage with the present, while always keeping an eye on the future. (2008:2)

Therefore, performing transgender experience has the potential to perform himself /herself as a member of this culture or community with his/her “marginalized” identity through temporal and spatial aspects. Within the context of performing transgender experience, autobiography “have been an important moment for the self-

definition of formerly voiceless groups in recent years by creating a “counter-public sphere” as a genre of autobiography that both interrogates and affirms gendered subjectivity.” (Watson, 1992:165) Therefore, performing transgender autobiography may position theatre stage as contested space, where transgender subject resists, challenges, and contests the marginalization of transgender identity. Transgender subject may perform his/her potential difference through experience. Performing challenges the authenticity of transgender subject and also reveal the contradictions and ambiguities of the subject about “Who am I?”. Heddon notes: “The contradictions and ambiguities are crucially important devices in undercutting the inhabited stereotypical representations and suggesting the inherent complexity of subjectivity, of ‘being’ a person.” (2008: 44) Therefore, performing transgender experience provides a critical agenda for revealing complexities of transgender identity. Bell states:

Performances that feature the processes of identities are ways to question, play and applaud the gap between “appearances” and “reality.” These processes are important for postmodern approaches to identity as performed, not solely founded in biology, culture, roles or psyche. (Bell, 2008:185)

Then, transgender performance constitutes a political space among the lived experience of difference and breaks down the singular transgender reality. Performance is the sum of subjective and unique moments that constitute the transgender self. Performing transgender experience is quite critical and radical tool, where transgender identity constitutes, resists and contests. Then, transgender identity is not limited to fixed state rooted in the binary system, but a system that can be moved beyond any gender categorization.

Therefore, performing transgender experience is beyond staging transgender subject because performing attempts to explore the constitutive potentials of transgender identity through using theatre as a medium. Performing may be considered as creative resolution for experimenting transgender identity within the context of transgender experience. McNamara notes:

The act of articulating an expression of transgender relies on playing with what you 'are' and what you 'are not', and calling those boundaries into question, calling the boundaries of woman and man into question, and not necessarily exchanging one thing for another, or refusing one, and choosing to use another. (2009:125)

Beyond theatre experience, the context of performance contributes to the wider discussion by questioning and constituting transgender identities. Therefore, performance of experience provides being playful with the boundaries of transgender fact or truth. "To perform is to carry something into effect." (Kaphcan, 1995:479) Then, performing transgender experience has the potential to constitute transgenders who are performing and participating in the performance. Theatre space provides the transgender subject with exploring their identities and shares these moments with the audience. Dolan says:

Theatre can be a mobile unit in a journey across new geographies, a place that doesn't center the discourse in white male hegemony, but a space that can be filled and moved, by and to the margins, perpetually decentered as it explores various identity configurations of production and reception. (1993:436)

Hence, performing transgender experience is a political, communicative and dialogic performance event, which holds back critical aspects of homogeneous transgender identity. Performing autobiography enables transgender subject to process his/her transgender self and reveals the complex and relational aspects of transgender identity. Within the context of transgender experience, theatre may be considered as

a medium or productive device to perform. These performance events, transgender subject gives birth to de-centralize and de-essentialize transgender identities. Performance, main source of passing from experience to expression, may be observed as a resisting form against heteronormative boundaries of transgender identity. Therefore, performance of transgender experience is quite social and political display, where both transgender self and the public interrogates, criticizes and undoes transgender issue through the one's life story.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE CASE OF ESMERAY ÖZADIKTI

Esmeray is not simply a storyteller of her life. She does not attempt to share her experiences through creating a written form of autobiography. Rather than creating an autobiographical text, she performs her experiences as the oral presentation of her everyday life. Since 2015, she has continually performed three different solo performances, titled as *Witch's Bundle* (Cadının Bohçası), *Ragged Bundle* (Yırtık Bohça) and *Before Cutting Stories* (Kestirmeden Hikayeler). There are also other solo performances she has played based on her life story but these are solely staged for special events a few times. One of the most significant ones is Dario Fo's play adaptation to her being raped experience (Cumhuriyet, 2009) but she performs this play twice. Therefore, within the content of this thesis, three main plays would be considered as her autobiographical performances. She briefly explains these three performances as:

“Witch's Bundle” is mostly the story of the transsexual woman and the social aspects of transgender identity. “Ragged Bundle” is mostly queer stories and certainly it also holds back social aspects. “Before Cutting Stories” is about trans woman body and mostly about the experiences within the period of body transition. (Akpınar, 2015)

This chapter initially discusses the form and the content of Esmeray's performances. Such an analysis of her performances gives an agenda to discuss Esmeray's performance of experience and its performativity. Her performance of experience will be considered as a form of communication with the audience and a particular expression her transgender identity. As a consequence, Esmeray's contribution to transgender politics in Turkey will be discussed.

#### **4.1 Esmeray's Performances**

Within the context of this thesis, Esmeray's theatre performances will be analyzed in detail in order to reveal her performance of experience. Her performances will be discussed under three headings. The content of her performances aims to analyze how she establishes a bond with the audience. The form of her performances aims to show the forms she borrows from theatre. The components of her performances aims to analyze the elements of theatre she uses and how she uses them in these performances.

##### **4.1.1 The Content of Esmeray's Performances**

Esmeray quietly comes closer to the theatre stage behind the audience. Theatre hall is quite dark and it is lightened only with the candle she holds. She whispers... What she whispers are not clearly heard. When she comes closer to the theatre stage, it is understood that she tells something in Kurdish. She maintains this Kurdish story, when she gets on the stage. When the story ends, the spots light up the stage. Then, we start to listen to the same story in Turkish. The story belongs to her childhood. When she was a child, her grandmother told her to become a girl, if she passed from under the rainbow. She says that she always sought a perfect rainbow, when there was a rain.



Another story from *Ragged Bundle* also reveals her one of the childish wishes and attempts to become a woman. There is a common superstition in Turkish culture, which is about ladybirds. You hold one of the ladybirds and make a wish. If it flies when you count until nine, your wish comes true. Esmeray tells a story that she held a ladybird several times, when she was a child and she wish she could become a woman. She says: “It did not fly...”

In *Witch's Bundle*, she gets on the stage and smiles to the audience. She does not directly start to tell what she has lived before. Then, she starts to the performance as: “Ladies and Gentlemen! I am from a central village of Kars...” As far as opening scenes of these performances are concerned, Esmeray starts her performance through revealing, where she comes from or which identities she belongs to. Her hometown and her mother language are introduced to the audience at the beginning of the play.

Esmeray is quite relaxed on theatre stage. She does not attempt to be a child, while she is telling her childhood experiences. She is still Esmeray and she stands on the stage as Esmeray. As far as the initial scenes of *Ragged Bundle* are concerned, the audience starts to watch her performance as being aware of her transgender and Kurdish identity. Beyond these identities, she directly establishes cultural bonds with the audience. Her transgender or Kurdish identity does not constitute her as other. But rather, she expresses particularities of her different belongings because she was a child at one time and she is related to shared cultural values as the other children did. This brief but influential beginnings of *Witch's Bundle* and *Ragged Bundle* show that Esmeray is a part of this culture. Beyond her gender or ethnic identity, she is now on the theatre stage and we are somewhat a part of her performance. Through recalling our childhood memories, we participate in her performances and engaged with her experiences. Throughout her performances, she tries to show that she is quite same

with the members of this society but she is also quite different. Therefore, she makes herself similar to but also different from the audience. At the end of the ladybird story, she says: “Finally, the ladybird flied and I have become a woman.”

As it is observed from the initial scene of *Ragged Bundle*, her affinity to her childhood makes her from one of the individuals belongs to this culture. Therefore, her performance is somewhat a way of communicating by expressing particular cultural belongings. From the same line of thought, in one of the other performances, named *Witch's Bundle*, she says: “I turned 13. Boys of that age had to go to Istanbul to work. I found myself on a street in Istanbul. Damn the day that I stepped my foot in Istanbul.” Her adolescent experiences still protect the cultural ties to other people, which are obliged to come to one of the big cities to work. She still produces herself as the member of this society. Therefore, Esmeray's performances extend outside the theatre stage and they are conceptualized as the common statements of this culture.

After she establishes a cultural tie with the audience at the initial scenes, she differentiates herself through what she has lived as trans woman in Turkey. Therefore, at the beginning, she reveals that she was one of us, when she was a child but then, she explains what makes her different from us. While performing the times after she quits being a sex worker, she still establishes a personal bond as:

I made my final decision! I quit being a sex worker. I started to look for a job. So many people around me! Not even one of them would hire me. Some say that they're worried about me. I might bother because of their special clientele! Well, leave that up to me won't you? I'm starving in the meanwhile. (Önel, 2009)

Beyond her gender or ethnic identity, when she quits being sex worker, she is starving. Contrary to directly negating prevalent social discourse on transgender women in Turkey, which is being a sex worker as it is stated before, Esmeray

challenges normative views on trans women through revealing the personal causes why it is quite difficult to leave sex work for trans women in Turkey. Then, the audience questions the prevalent connotations of trans women in Turkey and problematizes the reasons why trans women are forced to work as a sex worker in Turkey. In one of the performances, while she performs how she accepted her gender identity:

I went to Kadikoy for a stroll in the park, I realized men were staring at me! (turning to one man) Just like you, doctor! (Laughs) I saw a group of men approaching. My God! They look strange. They came closer. Oh my God! They're all crazy. Made up hair... Long nails... One of them opened his chest, two nipples. God damn you! Men shouldn't have breasts! (Laughs) Well, I slowly developed a friendship with them; a platonic one! Because I was still in denial. For a month they tried to convince me that I was gay. I constantly denied it. They insisted. Then an older fag about 45 came up to me, He said: "Mehmet, my son, you're in denial in vain... It's obvious; you're such a coquette. Just accept it! You're a faggot (Laughs). I don't know what came over me, I burst out: "Yes I'm a faggot!" What a relief to come out and say it! Oh, from now on, I am a fag. We're no longer platonic friends! Finally we hug and kiss. I started to swagger even more than they did. Then suddenly I come to my senses. (Önel, 2009: 19.15)

She attempts to create a parodic attitude about herself through her confusion and astonishment. She performs her gender confusion with prevalent connotations such as "Men shouldn't have breasts". She performs herself on the basis of shared beliefs and behaviors on traditional views of gender. At these times, these also look strange to her, as it is the same for the majority of people. Therefore, she warmly shares her initial ideas and feelings about unconventional modes of gendered being to the audience at those times. These shared behaviors as well as responses constitute social and cultural affiliation to the audience. Long nails or made up hair was also quite extraordinary based on social roles and expectations for her in those times.

Therefore, Esmeray tells the story of different stages of her life and she starts to perform from her childhood in both *Witch's Bundle* and *Ragged Bundle*.

In order to understand the content of Esmeray's performances more deeply, it is useful to discuss her mode of performing. She impersonates, mocks, laughs, needles, converses with the audience. In *Witch's Bundle*, while she tells the story of quitting sex work and starting to sell mussels on the street, she impersonates the landlady and needles the ones, who behave quite politely:

Then, one day she [landlady] brings a tray with newly cooked mussels in it. She says: "Go sell these." I am sitting by the tray on the street, Then all of a sudden, people buy me tea, coffee, etc. Who is sending me all this? There is an incredible solidarity with me from the fascists on the street who spit when they see transvestites. Cause I'm "chaste" now. Strange solidarity. (Öztek, 2009)

She is not angry, while she revives her feelings as she has lived in those times. She deridingly smiles to the audience and only reveals the hypocrisy of the people, who behaves differently because of quitting sex work. In *Before Cutting Stories*, while she tells the story of peeing at the first time after sex change operation, she laughs with the audience and impersonates the phone call with her one of the woman friends:

The doctor said: "Ms. Esmeray! Please stand up... We will try out one more thing. Ms. Esmeray, you will pee now." I went to the toilet several times but there is no pee. I said: "Dear Doctor, there is no pee inside. What can I do?" then, the doctor said: "If so, go home, try it out. If there is a problem, you can call me." I came home, and still there was no pee and finally, it came at 2 a.m. I went to the toilet and I sat on the closet. Oh my! Pee was coming... But I did not realize where it comes from. It goes right first and then upward. Ah! I called one of my woman friends. She told me before the surgery that "I can not stay with you but you can call me whenever you want." When I called her at 2 a.m. she is freaked out and said: "I can call the ambulance. Are you calm? Do I need to go to pharmacy?" and I said: "No just calm down!" she said: "Then, why did you call me?" and I said: "Honey, I am peeing and I don't get where it comes from. It is going right and then up." Then she said: "Did you call me

for this? I have been peeing like this for 43 years. Hang up the phone now.” (24 Nisan Arka Bahçe’si, 2015)

Therefore, as far as the content of Esmeray’s performances are concerned, Esmeray both similarizes and differentiates herself from others. She initially constitutes cultural affiliation to the audience through articulating common cultural statements, as the audience has already known. Moreover, She explains the causes, how she produces her life through sex work. Beyond all these, she makes the audience question about what they know and about what they do not know about trans women in Turkey.

#### **4.1.2 The Form of Esmeray’s Performances**

Esmeray generally messes with the audience. One of the performances, she says: “I went to Kadikoy for a stroll in the park, I realized men were staring at me! (turning to one man) Just like you, doctor! (Laughs).” (Önel, 2009) or she interrupts the audience, if she disturbs from something along the performance. In one of the performances of *Witch’s Bundle*, the one was smoking, while watching the performance in one of bars in Ankara. She warned that man instantly in order not to smoke inside during the performance. Moreover, while she shares her experiences from the time of being sex worker, She looks at her transgender friend, named Selay, and asks: “Do you want me to tell, dear Selay? Do you want me to reveal our experiences?” Therefore, she interrupts, messes with and scolds the audience. How she says or what she says is based on the audience. Therefore, the dialogue between Esmeray and the audience is quite significant in order to make her performances dynamic, dialogic and participatory.

At this point, cabaret form holds back several similar standpoints with Esmeray's performances. That is why; form of Esmeray's performances will be discussed within the context of cabaret form. Moreover, the potential differences of her performances from Huysuz Virgin's performances would be considered.

Cabaret is defined as a form, which satisfies the sensual and artistic needs of bourgeoisie audience (Lareau, 1991: 471). It is shown as aristocratic and noble, on the other hand it serves to popular and commercial entertainment business. Cabaret performances become more popular at time of World War I and World War II. The time period that cabaret performances become more demanding is not such an unpredictable coincidence because Lareau asserts: "It is a means of escape from political and economic chaos thanks to light literature and topical humor." (1991: 474) Therefore, the cabaret performance initially aims to serve the vulgar consumption and mass entertainment. McNamara also states the similar viewpoints of cabaret performances for transgender performances as:

There are also examples of cabaret-style performance where the story is recounted in a fairly simple way, using direct address to an audience where telling is an explicit part of the social event. The performer is telling the spectator about his life. Here the performances contain a story that is usually told within approximately five minutes to a noisy audience with partial attention who may not have even known they were going to be presented with this story. (2009:20)

Following the general overview on cabaret-style performances, it is useful to examine how the cabaret style is adapted to Turkey through the figure of *Huysuz Virgin*, which is embodied by Seyfi Dursunoglu. Cabaret style and the figure, named Huysuz Virgin, guide us to observe the forms of Esmeray's performances.

Seyfi Dursunoglu is an artist, who embodies the character, named Huysuz Virgin. Based on his cross-dressing performance, Huysuz sings, dances and communicates with the audience on stage through using the components of theatre. As a performance form, Huysuz also mocks, laughs, needles, and converses with the audience as Esmeray does because cabaret form is quite suggestive for creating the performance with the audience. However, Esmeray uses this mode of communication as a form and this form enriches her performance in order to interrogate what she lives as a trans woman in Turkey. That is why; the form Esmeray uses does not shadow the content of her performances because the form Huysuz uses is solely defined as “entertaining comedy performance” (Selen, 2012: 742). Therefore, the elements such as mocking, needling and conversing with the audience is quite central in Huysuz’s performances. Contrary to Huysuz’s performances, Esmeray uses these elements in order to make the performances entertaining. On the other hand, Huysuz uses these elements in order to create an entertaining comedy performance.

Seyfi Dursunoglu draws a strict line between his performance on-stage and off-stage. As far as the form of Huysuz’s performances is concerned, there is an illusion of gendered self, which is bounded with the grotesque display of the character. Gulturk also states that Seyfi Dursunoglu distinguishes his gender identity and the character he stages (2011). Moreover, Dursunoglu says: “I only wear women’s clothes. Neither my voice, not my gestures are womanly.” (Atay et al., 2004: 260) Then, Huysuz Virgin does not attempt to reveal anything about the politicization of gender self. Contrarily, Esmeray’s performances find its course through the politicization of her transgender self. She embodies on theatre stage as trans woman and she shares what she lives as a trans woman in Turkey. Therefore, there is a dialogue between her on-stage and off-stage performances.

Huysuz's performances are the instances of grotesque display, where she does not indicate any transgender self. These performances are mainly to entertain with the elements of grotesque display since she stages theatrical elements of cabaret performance. The term, grotesque, refers to extravagancy, extraordinariness as well as being unconventional within the context of Huysuz's performances. She performs in an ostentatious dress, professional make-up as well as blonde wig, which are the significant components to make her performance grotesque and entertaining. Her mode of dressing, make-up and expressions constitute the character quite extraordinary and distant from the audience. Selen says:

Notably, the sexualized space between Huysuz and her audience grants visibility to an otherwise unacceptable role. No woman in Turkish society would be permitted such behavior. Yet, the man from the audience was thrilled and actually thanked Huysuz and kissed her hand before leaving the platform. (2012: 743)

Then, even though Huysuz performs through the unusual gender figurations, which are denigrated in Turkish society, she is appreciated by the applause and show respect from the audience. Then, Huysuz holds back the authority and authenticity on-stage and being forgotten after she comes off the stage. Dursunoglu says: "I always make what the society likes. Rather than being a cross-dresser, people accepted me because what I said or did was interesting." (Atay et al., 2004:259-60)

Therefore, the humorous and entertaining form of performance moves ahead of Huysuz's cross-dressing appearance. Esmeray's performances possess significant form of humor but Esmeray does not solely aim to entertain the audience. Within the context of Esmeray's performances, humor is shaped by what she lives in her daily life. She does not find out the humor outside of her experiences. Contrarily, Huysuz does not share any experience from her daily life. Esmeray's performance of experience possesses a significant form of humor. She considers humorous



expressions as the way of her individual resistance. Erdogan claims that sense of humor is the opposition, because it distorts the known information. It relativizes the monologic language of power through deriding. It is a way of resistance because of responding against all social privileges, norms and prohibitions. (1994:44) Then, Esmeray attempts to challenge the normative and monologic language on transgender identity through the impacts of humor. Esmeray notes:

I could write what I lived before. But I'd prefer to perform. I knew that I have the ability to perform. I'd like to make people laugh. What I lived is always funny but also tragic... I reveal what I lived with humorous expressions. (Gündüç, 2007)

Then, humor as a form breaks down the monologic language and normative boundaries of trans women in Turkey. Esmeray's performances relativize, differentiate and proliferate the transgender subjectivity within the context of humorous resistance. Therefore, sense of humor is a productive form, which challenges the prevalent connotations of trans women in Turkey.

Huysuz Virgin tends to create herself through the parodic language and humorous expressions, which are similar to cabaret form. Her cross-dressing performances create a gender illusion to entertain the audience with grotesque elements. Contrarily, Esmeray's performances are eliminated from grotesque elements. As it will be discussed within the components of Esmeray's performances, her make-up or the dress she wears do not move ahead of her main focus, which is to reveal her transgender identity and the experiences she lived.

She does not produce or articulate herself as a marginal or grotesque being. As it is discussed in the content of her performances, she challenges the marginality of her being through establishing cultural bonds with the audience.

As far as all interrogations on cabaret performance and the similar as well as different segments of cabaret style on Esmeray's and Huysuz's performances concerned, it may be concluded that Esmeray performs her experiences through using theatre as a device. The form she uses reveals her transgender identity more than it masks. That is why; cabaret form does not fulfill the way she performs. However, the way she communicates with the audience holds back several similar viewpoints with the cabaret form.

#### **4.1.3 The Components of Esmeray's Performances**

In this part, theatrical elements that Esmeray borrows and how she uses these elements will be discussed. Music, costume, make-up, lighting and setting will be shortly analyzed in these performances. Moreover, beyond all these components, the impact of theatre stage will be explored.

Esmeray does not use recorded music in her performances. However, there is sometimes a live music, which she herself makes on the stage. In one of her performances, she comes to the stage through playing frame drum and sings a Kurdish folk song. Therefore, music is not one of the major elements for her performances.

Esmeray wears a local dress in *Witch's Bundle* and *Witch's Bundle* is the only performance that she wears the same costume in every performance. The costume she wears is not extravagant or ornamental. However, the costume holds back several ornaments from Eastern Anatolia. Therefore, in *Witch's Bundle*, the costume provides her with being a part of this culture. In *Ragged Bundle* and *Before Cutting Stories*, she wears the costume, which can be also worn in her daily life. That is why;

in these performances, the costume is not one of the major elements for her performances.

Esmeray only wears make-up to make her facial expressions more visible on theatre stage. There is no any other reason to wear make-up for her performances.

In Esmeray's performances, lighting is also quite simple. There is no luminous effect in order to make her performances more theatrical and the lighting is not an signal to start or finish the performance. In these performances, Esmeray comes to the stage, while the lights are being switched on. *Ragged Bundle* is the only one, which starts when the lights are switched off. Esmeray comes to the stage to the candle she holds and the lights are switched on, when Esmeray stops telling the story in Kurdish.

Esmeray does not use a proper setting on theatre stage. There are several accessories she uses on the stage. Moreover, in these three performances, there is a chair as an object she uses during her performance. Only in *Witch's Bundle*, there is a tray with cooked mussels and headscarf in addition to the chair object. Therefore, Esmeray has an insignificant relationship with the theatrical elements. She attempts to minimalize the theatrical elements in order not to create a theatrical illusion.

Esmeray does not only perform her transgender experience on theatre stages. She also performs her transgender experience on bar's or pub's stages. That is why; where Esmeray performs is her space to perform her transgender experience. The slogan of *Witch's Bundle* is:

Are you brave enough to let a transvestite break your prejudices? A story on womanhood, manhood, transsexual life; a journey from East to Istanbul... Women, men, queers, streets, bars, political, a-political and anti-political ones, the backstreets of sexuality; the facets men hide from women; things that women overlook in the mirror; secrets that women and men hide from one another. "The Witch's Bundle" - A crowded show (Önel, 2009)

Esmeray's performances are crowded because she does not only introduce who she is. Based on what she lives, she also reveals different forms of womanhood, manhood and transsexual life. Therefore, *Witch's Bundle* invites the audience to the discussion in order to question their prejudices. She also shares her ideas about her performances as:

The majority of people come to my performances with too much prejudices. They think like: "What could a transvestite tell? She tells what she lives on the streets or how to have sex. They come to the performance with this kind of prejudices. When they see actually it is not, at the end of the performance, they're quite confused. (24 Nisan Arka Bahçe'si, 2015)

Therefore, Esmeray's performances may be considered as the interrogation of prevalent connotations of trans women in Turkey because the audience initially thinks that Esmeray stands on theatre stage as a trans woman, who maintains the social discourse about trans women in Turkey. Contrarily, Esmeray confuses the audience through breaking down these prejudices. Therefore, she challenges the social and cultural discourse on trans woman in Turkey. That is why; theatre stage is contextualized as social space, where she challenges the general ideas on trans women.

Therefore, theatre stage is also a political space where she contests and resists against prevalent connotations of transgender identity because Esmeray problematizes, questions and contests the prevalent ideas on trans women in Turkey and shows the possibility of transgender difference. Moreover, Esmeray politicizes her transgender self through revealing her experiences and expressing her transgender identity. As Selen notes:

A stage is as much private as it is public. For instance, a stage is a part of building which is considered to be public space and yet it has, and is, a private interior. During a performance, however, the space of the stage remains private, as it is exclusively reserved for the use of the performer; nonetheless, it is simultaneously retains its public exterior, and thus presents us with the interconnectedness of public and private space by being both open and closed and hence both vulnerable and secure. (2012:733)

Within the context of Esmeray's performances, theatre stage has an utmost importance because of being conceptualized as both social and political space. Antonin Artaud says: "I maintain that the stage is a tangible, physical space that needs to be filled and it ought to be allowed to speak its own concrete language" (1970:27) Then, within the context of Esmeray's performances, theatre stage creates its own language by suggesting social and political space.

#### **4.2 Esmeray's Performance of Experience**

Esmeray performs what she lives and Esmeray lives what she performs. On the stage, she does not build a trans woman character as distinct from her transgender self. Therefore, she moves beyond the context of theatre because she is not a trans woman character in one of the theatre plays. She lives as trans woman and she performs what she lives as trans woman. Therefore, she performs her transgender self through utilizing the forms of theatre. In other words, she uses theatre as a vehicle for politicizing her transgender self.

In Turkey, trans women are commonly labeled as sex workers. That is why; they are solely considered within the boundaries of morality rather than being regarded as sexual/gender identity. Elif Şafak (2004:26) touches upon the same issue in Turkey within Middle East Report as: "For if there were a couple of certain truths we knew without knowing about transvestites, it was, first and foremost, that they were all

whores...” Esmeray states the same issue as: “Trans women are very much known as sex workers. There is a common perspective that our bodies are easily accessed by, easily criticized by and easily interfered with other people.” (Akpınar, 2015) However, Esmeray does not attempt to challenge the social discourse through directly negating the common knowledge on trans women in Turkey. She only implies that what the audience knows about trans women is controversial. Therefore, she reveals the controversies and inconsistencies of what the society creates as a discourse of trans woman. She attempts to show “the backstreets of sexuality; the facets men hide from women; things that women overlook in the mirror; secrets that women and men hide from one another” as she stated in *Witch’s Bundle*. Therefore, Esmeray relativizes what she lives based on experiences from her daily life.

Esmeray is only a particular instance of trans women in Turkey. Even though what she lives is similar to other trans women in Turkey, she is also different from other trans women based on her experiences. Therefore, when she reveals her experiences on theatre stage, she produces transgender difference and subjectivity. In one of the interviews, she says:

If sex work is a crime and immoral, how come the state has legalized it? They put the police at the gate and charge the highest tax. Then, the concept of sex work, prostitution is vague. Whom do we call a prostitute? What do we call someone who marries a 60-year-old just for money? What do we call a mistress? And models on top of the cars with their tops off? She also sells her body somehow. (Öztek, 2009)

In this statement, Esmeray reveals the hypocrisy of the state or the ambiguity of prostitution. However, the statement is not based on her experiences. It is solely Esmeray’s political interrogation of prostitution. Contrarily, Esmeray’s performance of experience does not state anything beyond the experience. Contrarily, she only

tells and reveals what she lives based on her experiences. Therefore, Esmeray politicizes her experience through revealing “I live this” rather than “I think this”. As it is discussed in the previous chapter, the other’s voice may be expressive and communicative. Therefore, Esmeray expresses herself based on her own voice. Experience is the performance text to express herself to the audience.

Esmeray’s voice may also be considered as a contestation or a resistance. As it is discussed in queer approaches to gender, Esmeray challenges the heteronormative organization of trans women in Turkey. She attempts to displace the social norms, struggle against traditional views on trans women in Turkey. She performs her experiences after she quits sex work in one of the plays, named *Witch’s Bundle* as:

I made my final decision! I quit being a sex worker. I started to look for a job. So many people around me! Not even one of them would hire me. Some say that they’re worried about me. I might bother because of their special clientele! Well, leave that up to me won’t you? I’m starving in the meanwhile. (Onel, 2009)

She attempts to constitute personal ties with the audience when she mentions, “I’m starving in the meanwhile.” Contrary to directly stating any political statement about trans women in Turkey, she challenges traditional views through expressing the personal causes why it is quite difficult to leave sex work for trans women. For Esmeray’s performances, these performances do not only help the audience to be a witness of what Esmeray has lived since she was a trans woman in Turkey, but also these performances show the contestable potentialities of transgender voice.

Esmeray’s performance of experience may constitute her gender identity because “performance is a contributory factor to identity formation” (McNamara, 2009: 10). For that reason, it is useful to discuss what Esmeray does rather than who she is

because what she does is the main source to observe Esmeray beyond her transgender identity. Butler claims:

Within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be... There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results. (1990:25)

Esmeray is not simply a gender being. There is no essential transgender identity or natural expressions of trans woman. Esmeray constitutes her gender identity through repetitive and reiterative process of production. As a result of her unique mode of expressions, her gender identity is constituted. Therefore, it may be claimed that Esmeray’s gender identity is particular. Within the context of Esmeray’s transgender identity, her performance of experience may hold back potential to constitute her transgender identity because from the viewpoint of performance studies, Esmeray is in the ongoing production of transgender self. She is always in the process of constituting her gender identity. Her performance of experience is the ongoing process of exploring her transgender identity. Butler says: “(it is) not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to displace the very norms that enable the repetition itself” (1990: 148) Therefore, Esmeray repeats and reiterates her performance of experience in every particular staging practice. Therefore, reiteration and repetition of her performance of experience may be the way of exploring her transgender self. McNamara says:

Performance is a key factor in the ways that people construct themselves and are constructed by the world. Through performing, whichever form that performing takes, a performer is experimenting with re-presenting ways of being. One is selecting what works and what does not work, evolving the practice over time and doing all of this in relation to other social beings, which in turn and at the same time contributes to the making the person. (2009:19)



Therefore, what Esmeray does is beyond solely building the archive of transgender autobiographies. What Esmeray does is to reveal the expressiveness of transgender self. What Esmeray does is to explore the alternative form of resistance and contestation based on performance of experience through politicization of her daily life. Esmeray notes that “Right now, I am living out the woman that the society teaches us With all my being... I live it in my daily life, in the streets but I also question; is this what it means to be a woman?” (Önel, 2009) Therefore, Esmeray is always in the ongoing production of her transgender self. *Witch’s Bundle, Ragged Bundle* and *Before Cutting Stories* are all based on Esmeray’s experiences. There is no only one performance she produces based on her life story. Then, her experiences are ongoing and continuous. Therefore, ongoing production of her experience produces her transgender self as process.

### **4.3 Performativity of Esmeray’s Performances**

From the viewpoint of performance studies, performativity holds back oppositional aspects, which may be “as action that disturbs, disrupts, and disavows hegemonic formations.” (Bhaba, 1994:146) Madison draws upon these two perspectives and distinguishes performativity as “subversive” as well as “hegemonic” and suggests that subversive performativity can challenge the citations the hegemonic performativity that insists (2005).

Within the context of performance studies, Esmeray’s performances may be considered as subversive performative. Beyond theatricality of transgender representation on stage, her performance of experience produce social and political arguments on trans women in Turkey, which challenge the mainstream ideas that hegemonic structures sustains. Yılmaz Cantekin, the volunteer in *Climate of Peace*

Association, states: “The fact that Esmeray quit sex work and got involved in political endeavor, useful for the society, cause us to come here and watch her play comfortably.” (Öztek, 2009)

Esmeray’ performance of experience touches upon personal issues, when she states: ““I realized I had a lot to say and I wanted to scream into people’s faces.” (Önel, 2009) As distinct from her transgender identity, what she has lived as an individual is the personal reason why she performs her experiences. Moreover, she articulates her own life through her personal voice. This may be observed as the way of performing difference.

Esmeray’s performance of experience touches upon political issues because it produces a different political form to resist against transgender discrimination in Turkey. She enriches the trans politics in Turkey through producing different form of political manifestation, which is based on politicizing experience. Belgin Celik, transgender volunteer in Lambda Istanbul, states that “When I consider transgender, she teaches a lot of things. She taught us what a stance is.” (Öztek, 2009) Therefore, she does not only break the prejudices on trans women in Turkey. Her performance of experience produces an alternative resistance form to trans politics.

Esmeray’s performance of experience touches upon social issues. When she states: “I made my final decision! I quit being a sex worker. I started to look for a job. So many people around me! Not even one of them would hire me.” (Önel,2009), she touches upon the social issue that trans woman can not easily find a job, when the one quits sex work. Therefore, her performances destabilize the prevalent connotations of trans women in Turkey. It is a way of resisting against social demarcations, which limits the social boundaries of trans women in Turkey.

Esmeray's friend, named Nilgun Yurdalan says, "While everyone was laughing, I wanted to cry. But I guess, all those experiences could only be told as Esmeray did. Esmeray could have told what she and her trans and gay friends went through, only like this." (Öztek, 2009)

Esmeray's performance of experience possesses particular cultural belongings to other people. As it is indicated in the content of Esmeray's performances, she uses cultural references to establish a common ground with the audience. Telling the story of rainbow, the superstition on ladybirds or when she says: "I'm from a central village of Kars. Back there, girls of seven must learn some things to become teenagers. What do young girls learn? Weaving carpets, knitting, crocheting!", she produces her as one of the members of this society.

Esmeray's performance of experience is subversive performative because Esmeray's performances may be considered as cultural act, social event or political demonstration. That is why; Esmeray's performance of experience is multi-dimensional because of challenging social, cultural and political boundaries through expressing, articulating and producing transgender voice.

#### **4.4 Esmeray's Contributions to Transgender**

In the documentary, titled *Me and Nuri Bala*, one of the nights while Esmeray sells mussels, one of the guys on the street is staring at her. Esmeray says to him: "What are you looking at, you idiot?" Then she says: "Whether you like it or not, one uses the street language out here. You know, we're trying to create a feminist language to change the language of patriarchy. But on the streets, you just can't stop yourself." Even though Esmeray struggles against masculine conventions and canons, she is sometimes limited to masculine language. Therefore, Esmeray does not completely

escape from social and cultural constraints, which is dominated by masculine language. Esmeray expresses her transgender identity with its ambiguities and inconsistencies because as far as postmodern approaches to feminism are discussed before, gender holds back complex, contradictory as well as controversial aspects. Then, Esmeray does not attempt to draw a solid, fully edged trans woman identity in Turkey. She embraces the potential controversies as well as ambiguities and shares them with the audience. Therefore, Esmeray uses her experiences as a performance practice in order to go beyond traditional approaches to transgender identity.

Esmeray attempts to move beyond the essentialist viewpoints on transgender identity. She does not only contribute to transgender politics through articulating her own voice, but also she inspires other trans women in Turkey to produce themselves through their own voices. Therefore, Esmeray's performance of experience provides distinct political form for trans politics in Turkey. As Belgin Celik, transgender volunteer in Lambda Istanbul, states, "When I consider transgender, she teaches a lot of things. She taught us what a stance is." (Öztek, 2009) Therefore, Esmeray's performance of experience builds a connection between personal and political, and reveals the possibility of transgender difference. She shows feminism as an instructive tool for herself to constitute distinct form of language. She says:

I paid attention not to rearticulate patriarchal conventions, which is generally used in art forms. I have already been "natural feminist". Patriarchy has been constituted in care of men but women may be mostly yielded to this system. I do not want to connive at this patriarchal language for my performances. (Gündüç, 2007)

As it is stated before, Esmeray's performance of experience should be considered as social event or political manifestation beyond theatre play because she tries to articulate her own voice through moving beyond heteronormative language. She does not only contributes to transgender difference and subjectivity, she also makes a

major contribution to theatre norms through indicating the hegemonic language in the art forms.

She carries on the stage what she lives. Therefore, she forms a political, cultural or social affiliation with the audience. Therefore, her experience is a productive guide for her to articulate her own voice. As it is discussed in the previous chapter, autobiographical performance is the performance of the other's voice, where voice of the self is in dialogue with voices of others. Performing experience is a display through revealing its body and voice. From the same perspective, Esmeray says:

Written form of my experiences is quite significant. If it is not written, it may not be permanent. These performances should be written. However, what I have done is the [expressive] act at the same time. I would like to say all these while I am looking at people's eyes. All these performances should be written because they have to create a history. (Aşan & Gümüş, 2007)

Esmeray politicizes her experiences and use them as a political act in order to communicate with people. "Performance as a political act emphasizes performer creativity to ground possibilities for action, agency, and resistance in the liminality of performance as it suspends, questions, plays with, and transforms social and cultural norms." (Langellier & Peterson, 2006:155) Therefore, her performance of experience contributes not only to make visible transgender issue in Turkey, but also to reveal the possibility for other trans women to find their own political course of action.

Esmeray is a trans woman, who goes beyond conventional biological and social descriptions of transgender theory. Rather than finding a new description of what transgender is, her performance of experience gives an agenda to discuss what transgender lives. As far as Esmeray's statements are concerned, it is also useful to discuss her affiliation with feminism. She notes that feminism is a significant turn for her to re-construct her transgender identity. She says:

There is nothing worse than basing politics on victimhood. [people say:] “we were the most oppressed.” Why? Since I knew this constant politics of victimhood would never work, feminism is vital for me. If you object to militarism and violence, if you are a feminist, language is very important, too. First, we have to deal with language. I don’t want to use the language that men use. (Öztek, 2009)

Esmeray consider feminism as a life long experience, which hold back potentials to break down the masculine conventions and canons. She disagrees with the politics of victimhood and attempts to challenge the masculine language. Therefore, performing experience may be a practical resolution for her to challenge the essential formation of transgender self. She tries to explore a distinct methodology, what feminist literature argues. As it is discussed in feminism and autobiography chapter, feminist intervention to self may be considered as the theoretical inquiry of male-centered discourses, which also questions bounded, essentialized and naturalized modes of thinking. Therefore, in order to go beyond sex/gender duality, feminist autobiography may be a suggestive device to reveal potential difference of the other.

Esmeray lives and Esmeray performs... This is the way of articulation and expression of who she is. She is a trans woman in Turkey. However, how she produces her transgender identity, how she articulates her life and how she struggles with the social discourse on trans women in Turkey goes beyond who she is. Esmeray notes that “I would like to perform through catching the people’s eyes. Theatre is something like this. Expressing... Revealing...” (24 Nisan Arka Bahçe’si, 2015) Therefore, Esmeray contributes to transgender politics through questioning and performing what she questions.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

In this thesis, transgender experience is contextualized in a performance-based approach to discuss transgender identity and this can be constituted through expressing and articulating the transgender self. Transgender experience gives a chance to theorize the lives and hear the voices of transgender people in order to reveal transgender difference and subjectivity. Therefore, beyond foundational approaches to trans theory, transgender experience is the way of indicating difference through expressing one's transgender self. In doing so, initial approaches, queer approaches and feminist approaches to transgender are discussed in detail. Initial approaches to transgender are analyzed in order to reveal the incapacity and insufficiency of early approaches to transgender, which are mainly based on biological aspects. Attempts to define what transgender is, is a restriction to discuss transgender identity. Moreover, queer approaches to transgender are discussed to reveal the impacts of queer studies for challenging the complete categorization of gender. However, it can be concluded that queer approaches to transgender do not provide a solid agenda because transgenering implies the way of destabilizing

normative boundaries of gender rather than a particular gender identity. Then, feminist approaches to trans theory pave the way for revealing possibilities of difference, openness for multiplicity and potential for decentralization of the transgender self. In this section, transgender experience provides an agenda to move beyond the prevailing notions of trans theory because contextualizing transgender identity behind transgenders' own voice is considered as reductionist and exclusionary, which restricts the political and social boundaries of transgender identity. Beyond questioning what transgender is, transgender experience shows the significance of what transgenders go through. Therefore, transgender experience challenges, contests, and struggles with the heteronormative assumptions on transgender identity.

Moreover, performing transgender experience is considered as the way of expressing and articulating the transgender self. It is beyond the textual form of the transgender experience because performing reveals the transgender self through the particular body and voice of the subject. Moreover, performing transgender experience is the way of participating in social space and engaging with the others through the body and voice. Therefore, performing transgender experience materializes the lived experience of difference and constitutes the transgender subject as particular and different. It is useful to emphasize that performing is beyond merely staging the transgender experience because performance has the potential to interrogate social structures and political discourses through new stories. Therefore, performance of transgender experience crosses the boundaries of theatre and is considered as a social and/or a political event. Initial and feminist approaches to autobiography are analyzed in order to reveal how the concept of the self has altered and evolved within different theoretical contexts. At the very beginning, the self is subjected to an



objective, universal and singular form. Therefore, the cultural, biological and social differences are not taken into consideration and the subject is conceptualized within fixed boundaries. Therefore, initial approaches do not consider the subjectivity of the subject and its potential difference. Contrarily, feminist approaches to self intervene in the initial approaches through revealing the heteronormative limitations for constituting the self. The other's voice has the power to interrogate, destabilize, displace and decentralize the prevailing notion of self. Within this context, feminist literature considers autobiography as the source to challenge the patriarchal viewpoints of the self. Feminism challenges the authority of the subject through contextualizing the other's life by the other's voice in order to constitute new voices and new subjects. Then, within the context of this thesis, transgender autobiography is the source of moving across the definitive forms or foundational approaches to transgender and reveals that transgender self-constitution is a complex and continuous process because experience is an ongoing production of the self and performing transgender experience is the implementation to reveal the constitution of this self.

Esmeray, is a trans performer, who expresses her transgender self in Turkey. Esmeray notes that "I would like to perform through catching the people's eyes. Theatre is something like this. Expressing... Revealing..." (24 Nisan Arka Bahçe'si, 2015) She performs what she experiences, and she experiences what she performs. Therefore, her performance of experience holds dialogic and communicative aspects to create a way of contesting and resisting prevalent connotations of trans women in Turkey. Moreover, beyond a storyteller of her life, within the context of this thesis, Esmeray produces her transgender self through performance of experience. She interrogates and makes people interrogate the social, cultural and political boundaries

based on her transgender identity. She attempts to displace the social norms, struggle against traditional views on trans women in Turkey by revealing what she lives rather than what she thinks. As it is discussed in Esmeray's performances in detail, She makes herself similar to but also different from the audience. She establishes a cultural bond with the audience by showing the particularities of her different belongings. As a form, in these performances, she impersonates, mocks, laughs, needles and converses with the audience. Therefore, what she performs finds its course through communicating with the audience. However, the form of her performances does not make them solely entertaining comedy performance. Contrarily, Esmeray uses humor as an opposition and contestation against normative and monologic language of what trans women experience in Turkey. Therefore, her performance of experience is a political device, which proposes different agenda, regarded to be experience-based and subject-based. Esmeray's performance of experience is a social event, which enables her to participate in the society as a trans woman in Turkey. Moreover, her experiences challenge the social discourse, which is limited to sex work in Turkey. Esmeray does not challenge the social discourse through directly negating the common knowledge on trans women in Turkey. She only shows what the audience knows about trans women is controversial. Therefore, she reveals the controversies and inconsistencies of what the society creates as a discourse on trans women. Her performance of experience enables her to do this through revealing, "I live this..." rather than "I think this..." Therefore, her own voice reflects her personal and political struggle against the social discourse she is exposed to.

Following all these discussions, Esmeray's performance of experience is subversive performative for several reasons. Initially, it is a distinct way of contestation and

resistance against heteronormative language on trans women in Turkey. Moreover, Esmeray's performance of experience is subversive performative because her performance of experience enables her to suspend, question and play with the social discourses on trans women in Turkey. Again, it is subversive performative because Esmeray's performance of experience also reveals the social and political power of transgender experience through theorizing her life, articulating her own voice, and expressing her identity. Therefore, her performance of experience manifests an exemplary agenda for other trans women in Turkey. Her performance of experience broadens the territories of transgender politics through its distinctive resistance and contestation based on her transgender experience.

Esmeray contributes to transgender politics in Turkey through indicating the politicization of experience. As distinct from collective voice of transgender politics, Esmeray shows the potentiality to contest and struggles against the social discourse on trans women in Turkey through her own voice. Transgender difference and the articulation of this difference through her own voice proliferate, multiply and diversify the content of transgender identity and politics.

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