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# **Vasiyetimdir:** Leman Sevda Darıcıoğlu

It's believed that birth and death are the only definite common denominators among all living beings. Certainly, this would be a correct proposition only if we were able to speak of a world where the lives of all beings were respected equally. But one cannot think of the recognition of death separately from the recognition of life and the norms that regulate it. And it's for that reason that birth and death are never common denominators, even if it's true that we, as biological living creatures, are all born and eventually die.

It was through trans women's funerals that I realized for the first time that norms not only regulate our lives but also our deaths. There I learned that hate-motivated killing wasn't a simple crime but an "issue" with repercussions: Would the family receive the body? If they do, would they come to the city where the trans woman had lived? If not, who would take the body? Would the State let us hold a funeral for our friend? Who would pay for the expenses? If the deceased doesn't have a pink (female) identity card (and many trans women wouldn't be able to receive these cards, as they often have to go through their gender confirmation processes before going through the difficult legal gender recognition process in Turkey), the tombstone would have the name on the blue (male) identity card; breast implants would be removed; and she would be washed and buried as a man. We would have to face all these as unavoidable facts rather than debatable questions. I've never forgotten the impact of these "technical details" on my own body—the "details" I never thought of before going to a trans woman's funeral for the first time.

And also, the sense of desperation that comes from our inability to prevent death in trans lives because transphobia would make the funeral homes of trans women different from familiar funeral homes. In these homes, there were no imams doing Islamic memorial service, no mothers lamenting for the deceased,

no one crying out loud, suffering from the pain of death.

As I write these thoughts, I realize once again that every death is a loss, every loss is a trauma, and that it's necessary that the conditions causing the trauma have to change so that the mourning process—which is also a first step into resolving trauma and going back to a healthy life—begins. At the funeral homes of trans women, mourning would be impossible because of the reality that the "next one" could potentially be you. Then again, living as a trans person in a country where people killing trans people are set free with reduced jail times due to "unjust provocation" was a path taken at the risk of dying, and every murder was a precursor for the next murder. Given these conditions, how would it be possible to open one's self up for pain and mourning anyway?

In 2013 when we lost a trans man who was a long-time friend, we faced similar "issues" even if he had come out to his family. Would his family accept to write the name we called him by, the name he defined himself with on his tombstone? If they don't, what would we do? Would we be able to hold his funeral as a man? What would happen to the rights to his furniture, to the articles he wrote?

In 2015, we once again went through similar "issues" when we lost two homosexual friends in a car accident, who had dedicated years to the LGBTI+ movement and who had come out to their families. What were we supposed to do if the images we wanted to use to call back to life conflicted with the images their families wanted to remember? Who then held the rights to the articles, poems, photographs, and artworks they left behind?

Here is what I've learned from all these: The straight world designates the family with blood ties of the deceased as the inheritor of what remains behind—even the no-more-living body—, whereas death in the queer world leaves many "issues" behind and is never experienced as the same. (Although I give examples from the queer world, we could make this statement for all marginalized lives that remain outside the privileged world.)

So what will be written on my tombstone, of someone who added a name (not legally recognized yet) to the name given by my family with blood ties? What will happen to my artworks? Who will keep my memory alive, using what kind of image?

I'd like my artworks to be accessible to people. I have no problem with people who want to re-enact and to experience my performances. On the contrary, that would be lovely. If I have unrealized projects, they could be open and accessible to people interested in realizing them. That would be lovely, too.

So far, I haven't had any property but if I have reasonable funds by that time, you could use it to create a nonprofit queer art collective. I'd very much like a collective that produces a lot of performances, but create whatever you'd like to create. Whatever you do, if my funds are enough to create a space with a publicly accessible library focusing on queer theory and art, enabling collective productions, all these would be wonderful. If you can create such a space, my works could be publicly accessible there, the space could hold the rights to these works, and if the space could ever become self-sustainable like this, that would be amazing. The more people use the space and contribute to collective works, the more amazing that would be. If it comes to that (meaning if you could have a collective and a space, using my funds), let my works be shown at nonprofit spaces and my performances be open and reproducible in nonprofit contexts. But ask for a fee from large-scale art institutions or for for-profit use to keep the collective and the space alive. Don't set a standard fee; instead, use a policy that changes relative to the organization's structure and budget. Be transparent with your finances. Support people to make art. Don't discourage anyone who wants to make art. For me, it's perfectly fine if you want to give a bit more support to *lubunyas* (a term used by LGBTI+ people to describe themselves—t.n.), non-white people, and "non-man" people. Sometimes, positive discrimination is the only way for an equality of rights.

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In this period of my life, I believe that however and whomever I've touched before, that would stay there—whatever is shared and lived won't be erased and will become whatever it takes. Perhaps I want to believe in this against death the most. Eventually all rivers will fall into the sea. I wish that both life and death became like a river for all of us.

Warmly, with love,
Leman Sevda Darıcıoğlu

*Translated from Turkish by Özge Ersoy*

*For the original text, click here.*

*Leman Sevda Darıcıoğlu is a member of Performistanbul. Mainly using performance as a medium, the artist views the body as a "resource to be unraveled." She sees private lives as a manifestation of social lives, and often creates projects inspired from her personal life and experiences. She likes using art as a tool for transforming herself, her limits, and her subjectivity. She serves in the advisory board of* Queer Düş'ün *(Queer Fantasy/Thought) —a queer theory series published by Sel Publishing House since 2012. She edited and compiled a queer theory book titled* Queer Temaşa *(Queer Contemplation/Spectacle), published by the same publishing house in 2016.*

*Vasiyetimdir** is a publication project that aims to explore how art works will subsist over long periods of time. Art works live in artist studios, private collections, museums, storage spaces, or simply in memories. But how far do the artists want to control what happens to their works when they are no longer? How do they want to exert their control? We directed these questions to the artists we are in dialogue with. We are accumulating their answers through m-est.org.

*Vasiyetimdir is a Turkish phrase that can roughly be translated into English as "It is my will that…" The phrase holds a tint of the melodramatic, mixed with a sentimental flair.

*Vasiyetimdir* was conceived by Aslı Çavuşoğlu, Özge Ersoy, and Merve Ünsal.

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