 1. The characters in *Dust Cloth* are extremely convincing and real characters. Could you talk a little bit about how you shaped them? To what extent were you inspired from your own life, from the people you knew and observed in real life?

Dust Cloth *actually started with a female relative of mine who visited me while I was working on a totally different script. Everything started with this woman saying "Actually, we’re Circassians". I laughed for days at what she said, then left the script I was working on, and started writing* Dust Cloth. *What she said was her way of escaping her Kurdishness with quite a talent; and this woman stood before me like a surreal character very much in the flesh. This incident drew the rough outline of the character of Hatun. I made good use of this outline while writing the character of Hatun because for this character I could get inspiration from both my mother and myself. Nesrin, on the other hand, is closer to being a victim and she was probably a culmination of my feelings of lack and depravation that came from deep inside me, from my subaltern part, as it were. Both characters are inspired from people I personally know. It is precisely because of this that they were constructed out of my characteristics which remained on my shallow depths when I did not face them, but which I could make out and capture as I confronted them. The middle-class female characters in the film are also women I have observed in real life. These characters were composed of elements from my female co-workers but also from my own self, who left behind her poverty-stricken childhood, and from my own experiences.*

2. Gender, ethnicity, and class relations and identities form a triangle that shape the film’s story and characters. How did you work on the interaction of these three layers in the script-writing stage?

*My starting point in writing the screenplay was a woman who was trying to evade her Kurdishness. This character being a cleaning woman, a labourer who works in homes, has to do with to the fact that my aunt was also a cleaning woman and that I always felt her story was like a pain that could only go away if I narrated it. I thought I could get over this burden on my conscience if I made these two characters cleaning women. Also, this combination is not impossible or uncommon. It is mainly Kurds who wander about in the bowels of the city. It is very usual to see Kurdish people who collect paper and cardboard (from rubbish bins to sell to private recycling companies),* *Kurdish cleaning women, Kurdish construction workers, and so forth. These people's struggle to exist creates areas where they encounter Turkishness, middle and upper classes. The fact that my characters are women, Kurdish and cleaning women made it possible for this self-evidently weighty encounter to come to life on that line.*

3. Is it possible to say *Dust Cloth* is as much about Kurdish women who, having been disconnected at some point in their lives from their hometown, are trying to cope with life in the big city and re-acknowledging their ethnic identity there as it is about cleaning women, or even more about the former than the latter?

*I wanted to show a segment of women who have been disconnected from their hometown that I know about. There are much more tragic and pain-filled lives. These were the stories I could tell best. Although I am asking whether there is a home that these women who have been torn away from their hometown can return to, I really think that this return could only remain a fantasy. In the chaos of the city, even the idea of a hometown seems to suggest a utopian place. Even though you were right in leaving your home and coming here; when there is nowhere to go and you are humiliated because of your hometown and identity, even if you first avoid that identity, there is something you know all too well deep inside: that you cannot ever truly escape it. Assuming you did escape, those who hold the identity under which you want to take shelter are very good at making you remember that you don't belong with them. What I wanted to show in the film was beyond the acknowledgement of one’s identity but rather that one cannot escape it, without concealing the wish to do so.*

4. Recently, Kurdish films have become an important and powerful component of the Turkish cinema. Many of these films prefer to tell stories directly about the Kurdish issue or take a clearly visible and audible political stance. Compared to these films, *Dust Cloth* touches on the Kurdish issue in a much subtler way. What would you like to say about this? Where do you put this film in reference to the Kurdish cinema in Turkey?

*Even though I would refrain from making an analogy between the Kurdish presence in Turkish cinema and the existence of Kurds in Turkey, I still see a resemblance. The Kurds saying “I exist, and I am here" is translated into film-making as "I am here with my story". Kurds’ experiences in real life and Kurdish films seem to suffer the same fate: What Kurds go through is not recognized or disbelieved and Kurdish films go unrecognized and unseen. It's the same kind of ill fate in that the real-life experiences which themselves go unheard result in the stories in the films to go unseen. The region went through such a heavy, unbearable and traumatic period, such as the one right now, that I notice in the audiences a sense of not being able to stand the narration of these stories or saying "it's the same old boring story". The needs of the audience asking “who would tell this story, and why?” and the needs and the sense of compulsion of the film-maker asking “who would understand my story?" are not aligned, and this is not fair. The film-maker shooting these films do not have a purely artistic concern. They are also in haste to unload their first burden. But because the first scars are political ones, that's where you have to start. You have to start with the pains in your conscience. Therefore, political films which are functional and say “I’ve experienced this, come and see” and try to weave a bond between peoples are very valuable. Coming back to* Dust Cloth*, what we focus on here is the hushed-up issue of Kurds’ experiences and Kurdishness in the big city. In daily life, people just live in accordance with their identities, never stopping to think about them. You start to think on your identity, propelled by a sound, a look, a touch; and maybe even establish your identity because of that. Because my characters work in homes, they meet middle-class White Turkish (urban, secular, Republican elite) women*

*In these encounters, the attitude they come across is not one that denies the existence of Kurds but rather one that acknowledges their existence while finding it unpleasant or dirty. I’ve encountered direct expressions of this attitude in sentences such as "These filthy Kurds come here and...", or otherwise I've experienced it in people's looks and gestures. I was very right in being angry at somebody uttering the words "filthy Kurds" due to its overtly fascistic nature, but I wanted to project on the screen the insulting and malignant attitudes that are not easily seen and are considered ordinary. On the other hand, there is also the situation that this issue is less visible and less deserving of mention, alongside all the other problems. We’ve gone through such difficult times. As the circumstances stand, these are not the foremost issues that the Kurds must get off their chest, of course. But we could not even start to talk about concealed problems like the ones I'm telling about before those issues were ever addressed. Therefore, I am saying something from sort of a detached standpoint.*

5. The centre line of the film is the cleaning women going to work in a class-coded neighbourhood like Moda. However, there is no excessively explicit imagery or dialogue in the film to indicate that class gap. How did you strike this balance?

*When I first started the treatment of the subject matter, I came up with stories much more serious in tone. For instance, I wanted to show the employers of these cleaning women only allowing them to eat and drink off plastic plates and cups or not allowing them to use the toilet. There is a gap lost between reality and art. It is of course impossible to tell everything in one film but I thought must tell it in such a way that the audience will not be able to escape from reality. I thought that because we live in a world where everything we try to avoid as clichés are actually more real. Although clichés offer a more direct confrontation space, the first thing you try to escape is confrontation. So, these two layers came on top of one another and pushed me down to tell the story from greater depths. Another matter is a paradox I discovered when I focused on the relations between these women from two different classes: The shift of the class conflict from an employer-employee dichotomy to a slippery big sister-little sister dynamic, and the concealment thereof, not to be seen. I mean, exploitation is in a way slipped under the rug through the re-positioning of employer women as “big sisters”. That’s the thing I spent the most time on. I wanted to show the situations and behaviours in which the insult and the exploitation are accidentally blurted out, not easily seen, are not initially deemed hurtful but sink in later on, esoteric and in between the lines.*

6. Would you say that one of the coping mechanisms suggested for these women who have to live on the outskirts of the city with extremely low pay is solidarity and watching over one another?

*Spivak talks about the cyclical nature of power. Everybody builds this hierarchical power with their subaltern; a cycle of power going from Ayten to Hatun, from Hatun to Nesrin, and from Nesrin to Asmin. Though I have tried to avoid this reality, I ultimately projected this power cycle on the screen. However, as a woman who believes that women are going to save the world, solidarity between women and women watching over one another is something that I have experienced, something that really saved my life. It was impossible for me not to have that in the film.*

7. Were you concerned that Nesrin's problems in the city starting with Cefo leaving her could symbolically be construed so as to argue that these problems were the result of the absence of the man in the house and that the woman was left all on her own?

*Yes, I had that fear. However, I believe that I prevented that with the negation by means of the character of Şero, a man who is physically there but is in fact absent. That was not an aspect I particularly worked on but from the beginning of the story the one who left was Cefo, and the one left behind was Nesrin. I never gave up on that idea just to dissipate this fear. I do believe, however, that through the Hatun-Şero relationship I get the audience to ask "What would be different anyway if Cefo were around? Would anything be different if he had stayed?" Ultimately, we learn that Nesrin pushed Cefo out of her life and the reason was just that. The fact that he was physically there but not actually present... For me, the institution of marriage represents a bond in appearance, I've seen many times how great a distance there is between two people in matrimonial union. Therefore, the questions of "what is marriage or family, or does marriage or family really exist?" were more important for me than the possibility of being misunderstood.*

9. Although *Dust Cloth* narrates a heavy and a hard-to-digest story, the film also has a strong sense of humour. A humour that especially emerges in the dialogue. How did you achieve the right tone of humour?

*Humour is a source in my life that exists with my mother. Even after very bad episodes in our lives, my mother recovered us from the situation with her original language, jokes and impersonations. Although I sometimes feel that laughter is another form of scream, it makes those moments or scars bearable. Despite only to a certain degree, that humorous vein is also present in Hatun. If there is humour unlocked in the situations in the film, it is not humour that extends to Hatun from the story line; on the contrary, it is humour that creates the plot through Hatun. Therefore, I did not really search and settle on a particular tone. This humorous vein came into existence of its own with the development of the character, or by going deeper into the character.*

10. The film generates a map of Istanbul with different neighbourhoods and houses that are visited. A map where class and ethnic distribution can be observed, a representation of the city... How much did you focus on the representation of Istanbul in the pre-production and production stages of the film?

*The outskirts and the centre of the city are in a way the spatial representation of class issues. We worked diligently on every aspect for this effect. We made immense effort on each house. Instead of projecting a uniform class, we sought to generate tones in line with the characters. All this can be a picture of Istanbul. There are so many Istanbuls; each has their own, and each with their particular Istanbul chaos, never the same as one another. To some extent, this is the Istanbul I see.*

11. How did you decide to use a hand-held camera all through the film? How do you think this aesthetic preference supports the story and affects the world built in it?

*While I was imagining the film during scriptwriting, the scenes were coming to life on their own. When I first thought about this, I realized that my characters did not have fixed constants in their lives. There were two classes I was going to show. I pondered many times whether I could narrate the stories of those who have constants and those who don’t using the same camera style, and if I did, what kind of a feeling it would generate. I first thought to have the camera steady in middle-class houses and have it mobile in our ladies' flats but later on I opted for a perpetually mobile camera, remembering that I was to show the middle-class houses from the perspective of the poor women. The actual camera was to bring onto the screen the inability or the pell-mell struggle of getting a foothold in life, as related to lower classes, which was my motivation for this preference. My cinematographer, dear Meryem, also encouraged me a lot to do it this way. So, we had to work a great deal on a cinematographic language that is not independent from the film's content. Instead of putting on grandiloquent plans and imagery, we worked hard on a language that could convey all that distress. I could say this for the whole process of the film; what I was looking for was not a culmination of impeccable aesthetic choices, but rather a plain style with its flaws that could convey the feeling of the film.*

12. Directing the cast can be one of the areas where directors debuting their first feature-length has the most difficulty. *Dust Cloth*, on the other hand, is a film that stands out with the performance of its cast. How did you work with your actors? How did you approach directing the actors?

*We worked hard with the actors beforehand. I was lucky that I worked with a superb cast, but perhaps they were also fortunate because I knew my characters very well. I believe this made it easier for the actors to place themselves in the characters. I think the biggest challenge for an actor must be to try and play a role that is only a half-baked character. For instance, because my mother gave the inspiration for Hatun, Nazan spent a lot of time with my mother to get both the accent and the soul of the character right. But I believe that it came much more easily to Nazan to knead this dough I gave her into a character as her repertoire was already packed with ingredients. Asiye is also very strong. She didn't have much difficulty playing Nesrin as she was in familiar waters. It was only that Nesrin’s soul tired her sometimes, which she mentioned from time to time. I think I provided the actors with the bold outlines, the contours of the characters. They filled these in with what they had. On the set, I was always at their disposal for their input; so I think they had considerable freedom. But in instances when I did not particularly like a performance, we got repeated takes, which must have been tiring for them. Sorry! ☺*

13. *Dust Cloth* also stands out with its strong dialogue, realistic accents and the way Zaza words are used. In this respect, it constructs an unprecedented way of speech in Turkish cinema, especially in Kurdish films. How did you work on this language?

*Maybe the first thing that alienates me in the cinema of Turkey is the dialogue. Characters say things that are clearly not their own, and sound completely unnatural. I know it’s the director’s own words and they really want to have these words heard, but because that way of speech is clearly not how the character would naturally speak, the lines just fall out of the film’s universe and linger on blank space. Perhaps because of this dissatisfaction, I asked myself with every line I wrote whether the character would really say it. Even the feeling that originates from me needs to enter into the system of the character and come out of their mouth with their own words so that their own reality is not punctured.*

*Nazan worked for over a year with my mother to get the accent right. She recorded her voice and listened to it constantly. Asiye did not have an accent problem, already having good command of it. She just worked with dear Deniz Gündüz for the Zaza language. My obsession with this may have been tiring for the actors, but language was something about which I did not want to make any compromises.*

14. The story you narrate, the characters you build and the dialogue get their strength from extremely local elements. Yet, you also focus on universal issues. Have you ever thought that some of the elements that give its power to the film might not be understood or missed out on by audiences outside Turkey?

*I think cinema, like all other artistic expression, becomes universal when its local roots are powerful. Besides, all stories are built upon basic drives; in that respect, they are all universal but they find their own soul. The local elements in this film are exactly for that, for the film to have its own soul; so I never had any concerns about it.*