From Converging Roads to Narrowing Grounds:
The Struggle for Peace by LGBTI+ and Women's Organizations in Turkey

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Research Association for Democracy, Peace and Alternative Politics

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Peace vigil organized as part of the "We are for Life, Not Death: We Defend Our Right to Peace and Truth" campaign launched by the Women for Peace Initiative, Diyarbakır, 2016
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I. Introduction

Source: *Çatlak Zemin*

Towards the end of 2012 when the Kurdish conflict in Turkey had been ongoing for nearly forty years with bitter consequences, an important step was taken to resolve the conflict through negotiations: The Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) government and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê, PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan started peace negotiations on the island of İmralı. State delegations and representatives from the Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP, and before the HDP had been founded, the Peace and Democracy Party or BDP), publicly announced that they were to attend the meetings in İmralı on January 3, 2013. After two years of negotiations, on February 28, 2015, representatives of the government and the HDP delegation came together and were broadcasted live at Dolmabahçe Palace. At a moment when the process was to evolve into a peace agreement, a text known as the Dolmabahçe Agreement was publicly read by both delegations. The agreement consisted of ten main topics to be addressed within the scope of a solution to the Kurdish issue. However, shortly afterwards, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan gave a statement invalidating the Dolmabahçe Agreement. In April 2015, a controversial internal security law draft granting unlimited powers to police forces was issued to the Parliament by the government. Turkey went to the polls for a general election on June 7th,

and the HDP, who entered this election under devastating attacks,[1] received a significant enough percentage of votes to become the second largest opposition party in the Parliament of Turkey. The success of the HDP caused the AKP to lose the parliamentary majority it needed to change the constitution alone. In parallel with the increasing tension in politics, armed clashes started in the Kurdish region. And with the suspicious assassination of two police officers in Ceylanpınar on July 22, 2015, the ceasefire ended.

When the collapsed peace process is examined from a gender perspective, neither the demands of women and the LGBTI+ community nor their gender-based experiences can be seen in official mechanisms. The process instead featured a male-dominated approach.[2] Three official mechanisms established during the peace process paint a clear picture: women's participation and policies in these mechanisms were limited, while the participation of those openly identifying as LGBTI+ and their demands for peace were completely absent. The first official mechanism was the negotiation delegations. Not one female participant took part in the talks on the state side, nor were the demands of women or the LGBTI+ community represented in the discourse of the delegation. As the HDP adopts a women's quota in all representation, MP Pervin Buldan joined the HDP delegation as a women's representative from the outset. Later on, with the efforts of the Kurdish Women's Movement (KWM), Ceylan Bağrıyanık joined the delegation as its representative. The second mechanism was the recently founded parliamentary commission, which was briefly called the Resolution Commission. The commission was assigned to draft a report based on the opinions by the victims and related non-governmental organizations to contribute to a democratic resolution of the Kurdish conflict. The resulting report failed to serve any useful purpose and ignored the resolution proposals and demands of women to a large extent.[3] No LGBTI+ organizations were consulted by the commission, so the report had no information on LGBTI+ peace visions or the harm LGBTI+ people suffered due to the conflict. The third and last mechanism was the delegation of "Wise People" who held public meetings with locals to contribute to the peace process. Among 63 delegation members, only 12 were women.

During the peace process, two major events affected the outcome of negotiations. The first was the 2013

1 *7 Haziran 2015 seçimi öncesinde HDP'ye yapılan saldırıların kronolojisi* (Chronology of attacks on the HDP before June 7, 2015 election) T24, May 18, 2015.

2 For a feminist evaluation of the peace process, see. Nazan Üstündağ, *Feminist Bir Bakış Açısından Barış Süreci, Çatışma Çözümleri ve Barış* (Peace Process, Conflict Resolution and Peace from a Feminist Perspective, ed. Murat Aktaş), İletişim, 2014.

3 The Grand National Assembly of Turkey, *Toplumsal Barış Yollarının Araştırılması ve Çözüm Sürecinin Değerlendirilmesi Amacıyla Kurulan Meclis Araştırma Komisyonu Raporu* (Report by Parliamentary Inquiry Committee for Mechanisms of Societal Peace and Assessment of the Peace Process), 2013. BDP published an alternative report and included gender as a separate topic title. *BDP'den "Çözüm Süreci Önerileri"* (BDP's Suggestions for Peace Process), *Bianet,* November 29, 2013.

Gezi resistance: Protests initiated by citizens who opposed the government's decision to build a shopping mall in Istanbul's central Gezi Park spread throughout Turkey in a matter of days.[4] The government responded harshly with brutal attacks on protesters by police forces. After more than a month of demonstrations, the government backed down from its decision. It is not a coincidence that this resistance took place during a period of ceasefire. It was during the Gezi resistance that discussions regarding a peaceful coexistence of Kurds and Turks began to take place, perhaps more than ever before and especially among younger people. At the same time, the starting point of the Gezi resistance was itself a demand for decentralization: The people of Istanbul should decide the fate of the park, not Ankara. It was also significant in that it paralleled Kurdish demands for decentralized self-rule, a demand raised during the peace process.

The second major event which jeopardized the peace talks were the 2014 Kobanê Protests. When the Islamic State (IS) commenced attacks[5] in Kobanê, Syria in September 2014, it marked the start of a politically-critical period for Kurds around the world. Protests began in the Kurdish cities of Turkey. Kobanê was a part of Rojava, where Syrian Kurds were establishing autonomous self-rule. Kurdish institutions in Rojava and the HDP in Turkey issued a global call and also invited Turkey to stop IS and support Kobanê. When President Erdoğan said "Kobanê is about to fall" in a statement, street clashes broke out in Kurdish cities. As a result of the clashes between October 6-7, 2014, a total of 51 people lost their lives. At the same time, IS attacks forced thousands to move from Kobanê to the Suruç district right on the Turkish side of the border. This wave of mass displacement mobilized people from Turkey and various other countries who wanted to both support the refugees and the Kurds. Soon after this global show of support, Kurdish forces retook control of Kobanê and purged IS with significant success.

The Kobanê Protests were a major breaking point that hindered the peace process. The armed conflict, which began in 1984, entered one of its most destructive periods. The curfews declared in the region the summer of 2015 continued until 2017 with quite severe consequences.[6] In the aftermath of the curfews declared in more than 11 Kurdish cities, some of which lasted more than a year, 1200 people died and thousands more were forcibly displaced.[7] During the blockades, people could not access their most basic needs such as food, electricity and water for days, funerals could not be

4 Ayşe Betül Çelik, *Agonistic peace and confronting the past: An analysis of a failed peace process and the role of narratives*, *Cooperation and Conflict* 56(1), 2021.

5 Nesrin Uçarlar, *Quest for the Infrastructures for Peace in Turkey,* 2016.

6 Nisan Alıcı, Güley Bor & Güneş Daşlı, *Turkey's Missing WPS Agenda and Implications for the COVID-19 Pandemic*, *LSE Women, Peace and Security Blog*, 2020.

7 OHCHR, *Report on the human rights situation in South-East Turkey: July 2015 to December 2016*, 2017.

held and journalists were not allowed in the neighborhoods, preventing people from seeking information. Gender-based violations also increased during this period. Women were targeted with sexist writing on walls and became vulnerable to violence on their routes of migration or in their temporary homes. On the other hand, in western Turkey, tens of thousands of people gathered to demand peace in Ankara on October 10, 2015 by the call of KESK, the Confederation of Public Employees' Trade Unions, and the participation of many democratic mass organizations. 103 people lost their lives as a result of a suicide bomb attack on the peace rally, which was later shown to be carried out by IS. The Ankara Massacre was a brutal response to the most massive call for peace to ever come from western Turkey, taking place soon after the peace process, and prompting further allegations of the state's deliberate lack of security measures. In the period to come after the massacre, some efforts to return the state to peace talks continued, such as upwards of 2000 academics signing a petition for peace, but the government's reactions to these efforts were harsh. As the case of the Academics for Peace points out, voicing the demand for peace can itself be criminalized.

Parallel to the return to armed conflict, the political regime started to become increasingly authoritarian. Presidential powers were further increased after a presidential referendum in April 2017. The AKP left parliament with mere symbolic value and made amendments to the law effectively preventing opposition parties from having any strength. Using the coup attempt on July 15, 2016 as a pretext, the government declared a state of emergency (olağanüstü hal) that lasted until 2018. The AKP government used the state of emergency to suppress opposition groups and to replace elected Kurdish mayors in the region with state-appointed trustees.[8] Dozens of non-governmental organizations were shut down by presidential decrees (kanun hükmünde kararname, KHK), hundreds of dissidents were arrested or detained on trumped-up charges with no due process.[9] Subsequently, a government alliance of the AKP and the Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP) began constructing a regime of repression that spread throughout the society.

During this period of authoritarianization, the government specifically targeted women and LGBTI+ individuals. After the state of emergency, within the framework of the policies of repression and violence towards the Kurdish political movement, many women from the KWM were arrested, and many women's

8 Hişyar Özsoy, *"Trustees" appointed to Kurdish Municipalities of Diyarbakir, Mardin and Van, again!*, *Peoples' Democratic Party,* 2019.
9 Human Rights Watch, *Turkey: UN Review Should Address Sharp Decline on Rights,* 2020.

institutions were closed by decree. In addition to violations of the right to assembly and demonstration, such as prohibition of the Istanbul Pride March since 2015 and the police attacks on the March 8th and November 25th protests, pressure on organizations engaged in gender-focused activities has increased.[10] By the same token, conservative-Islamic policies in the fields of family, education and health aimed to confine women to the family and reinforce traditional gender roles also increased. A limitation on alimony and an offer of amnesty to those convicted of child sexual abuse were brought up repeatedly by the government but were not enacted as a result of women's strong reactions. The most recent and concrete example of attacks on the achievements of women and the LGBTI+ community was Turkey's withdrawal from the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention) with a decree produced quietly at midnight but at a time when public visibility of gender-based violence was increasing in the country. Turkey was the first signatory to the Istanbul Convention, which prohibits all forms of discrimination including discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and holds the state responsible for the prevention of violence. However, the state's top-level officials exhibited nothing but LGBTI+phobic hate speech when attempting to explain their reasons for withdrawal, devolving into assaults and even criminalization of the rainbow flag itself.

In spite of it all, the KWM, feminist, LGBTI+ and women's movements in Turkey continue their struggle and are not giving up on their achievements. Many women and lubunyas[11] organized in these movements also fight for equality and democracy on a larger scale. Activities focusing on peace are not as common as they once were during the times of the peace process, when there was a ceasefire and the possibility of a peace agreement was on the agenda. These days, when violations of fundamental rights and freedoms are so common, LGBTI+ and women's organizations' reduced dedication of time and effort to the struggle for peace is a result of a mandatory change in strategy. However, the work of these organizations around the peace process provides a roadmap of experiences for the days when the demand for peace can once again be voiced emphatically. Under today's highly challenging conditions, looking back to the days when peace felt so close may be conducive to both seeing what could not be seen in the heat of the peace process and to keeping the hope of

10 Alev Özkazanç, *Gender and authoritarian populism in Turkey: the two phases of AKP rule*, *Open Democracy,* February 3, 2020.

11 Initially referring to feminine gay men and trans women in queer slang (Lubunca) in Turkey, lubunya has come to refer to a wide range of sexual orientations and gender identities in recent years. It can be loosely translated as queer.

peace alive.

This report examines women's and LGBTI+ organizations' activism around and conceptions of peace by focusing on the process that aimed to transform the Kurdish issue from a matter of conflict into one of peaceful discussion. The research sheds light on an area that has not been extensively studied before, evaluating efforts focused on the peace process between 2013 and 2015 and the alliances established along the way through the perspectives of the women and LGBTI+ organizations who were actors in the process. Some key concepts used throughout the report are detailed first, and the focus and limitations of the study are described. The policies that shape the peace activism of the LGBTI+ and women's organizations we interviewed are then examined. This is followed by a chapter focusing on the creative peace activities and achievements of these organizations in the space opened up by the Gezi resistance and enriched by the peace process. Afterwards, the report examines how newly-formed alliances were affected by the political framework LGBTI+ and women's organizations adopted in their peace activism. Finally, the challenges of waging a joint struggle for peace in the face of conflict and authoritarianism are discussed. In the conclusion of this report, we summarize the results of the research and provide recommendations on how to move forward.

II. Methodology and Concepts

This study is based on interviews with nine peace activists. Eight semi-structured, in-depth video interviews were conducted online between January 30 and March 25, 2021, and one interview was conducted in writing.[12] Participants were members of at least one of the following organizations: Women for Peace Initiative, Hêvî LGBTI+ Association for Rights Equality and Existence, Kaos GL Association, KeSKeSoR Amed LGBTI+ Platform, LGBTI Peace Initiative and Tevgera Jinên Azad (TJA).

Although difficulties in conducting fieldwork during a pandemic posed obstacles to increasing the number of participants, collecting data online enabled the researchers, who reside in three different countries, to effectively communicate with participants from several cities in Turkey.[13]

Source: *Çatlak Zemin*

12 One participant is in prison and responded to the interview questions in writing.

13 Marnie Howlett, *Looking at the 'field' through a Zoom lens: Methodological reflections on conducting online research during a global pandemic*, Qualitative Research, 2021.

Name of organization[14]	Brief on the organization[15]
Women for Peace Initiative (Barış için Kadın Girişimi, BIKG)	The initiative, formed by women who believe that both the conditions of peace and peace itself can only be achieved by bringing the words of women into action, primarily protests against the reallocation of public resources from women's education, health, security, self-improvement. It also seeks the protection of the earth from warfare, and decries military operations, bombs, landmines, and death by the exclusionary decisions taken by governments against women, with policies that exclude women.
Hêvî LGBTI+ Association for Rights Equality and Existence	HÊVÎ LGBTI+ Association aims to produce policies in the areas of gender, sexual orientation and gender identity for LGBTI+ individuals' social welfare and access to rights. HÊVÎ LGBTI+ adopts a mission to combat phobias against LGBTI+ people and communities.
Kaos GL Association	Kaos GL Association organizes social, cultural and academic activities to promote the human rights of LGBTI people in the face of discrimination, and aims to create a basis for discussion and visibility of discrimination against LGBTI individuals in Turkey.
KeSKeSoR Amed LGBTI+ Platform	This LGBTI+ organization works against heteronormativity in Amed and the surrounding cities.
LGBTI Peace Initiative	The initiative was formed to raise the urgent demand for peace with the participation of various LGBTI organizations and individuals.
Tevgera Jinên Azad (TJA, Free Women's Movement)	TJA, despite being officially founded in 2016, is an organized structure of Kurdish women with vast experience in resistance. They take a universal approach to building democratic modernity as a response to capitalist modernity by inviting women in the struggle from all organized structures in the world to unite against systems of male-domination.

14 "Organization" does not only refer to legal entities such as associations or foundations, but includes all social movements and initiatives that have come together for a certain purpose.

15 Here, we stayed loyal to the definitions and explanations used in organizational documents such as the organizations' websites, social media accounts or press releases.

Although the report discusses the peace activities of the aforementioned organizations, due to concern for safety risks, anonymity of the organizations and organization members was maintained in relation to interview references. For the same reason, we anonymized and numbered all the interviews and referred to participants as they wished to be addressed.

An important limitation of the study that must be pointed out is that the interviewees were not required to officially represent their respective organizations. This decision was influenced by the choice of several participant organizations to not designate a representative, as well as by the challenging nature of this task due to the fact that their activities are either on hold or infrequent. By taking the organizational experiences of the participants as a basis, instead of representation, we had the opportunity to diversify our examination to include the activities of other organizations. In doing so, we were able to witness the collective memory of organizations which conduct peace activism with a focus on gender. Not all of the views expressed in the report may directly reflect the individual views of all those involved in the activities of the organizations included in the research. Although participants explained the meaning of peace for them, often relating it to the work of their respective organizations and by referring to their collective discussions, it should still be underlined that some of the organizations mentioned have more than a thousand members and therefore include much more diverse understandings of peace in comparison to the descriptions in this report.

This report includes several concepts which require advanced explanation and periodic problematization.

The authors do not seek to position concepts of "women" and "LGBTI+" in non-intersection by using the conjunction "and." Constructing such a dichotomy would mean obscuring the existence, experiences and struggles of LBT+ women who exist at the intersection of both women and LGBTI+. Taking "women" and "LGBTI+" as separate concepts would also mean ignoring the intertwined foundations of patriarchy and cisheterosexism,[16] as the former refers to a gender identity and the latter embraces various sexual orientation and gender identities without stabilizing them. For this reason, we use the expression "women and LGBTI+" in the report as an umbrella term covering those who are subject to (cishetero) patriarchal oppression.

This understanding reflects the gender

16 The ideological system that oppresses and marginalizes persons, practices and communities who are not cisgender and heterosexual. As it reinforces static and essentialist male-female roles through compulsory heterosexuality, it can not be deemed separate from patriarchy. Deniz Gedizlioğlu, *Glossary for Translation in the field of LGBTI+ Rights*, *Kaos GL Association*, 2020.

perspective that DEMOS has embraced since its establishment and transformed over time.[17] For DEMOS, a gendered lens expresses a spectrum, not just a sexual orientation/gender identity (i.e., non-trans hetero women, as is often done), and requires focusing on everyone who is marginalized for not conforming to the gender roles of their society. In doing so, it aims to make visible the intersections of gender, sexual orientation, gender identity with race, ethnicity, religion, language, disability, etc. In this manner, gender analysis emerges as a way of thinking about building lasting peace by making visible different ideologies of domination such as sexism, nationalism and militarism and their interactions with one another.

Women's peace activism is another issue that needs to be problematized as urgently as binary gender opposition. It is often addressed with an essentialist understanding, such as women are more peaceful by nature. As pointed out by feminist theory, it is necessary to go beyond the victim and peacebuilder dichotomy when analyzing conflict and peace from a gender perspective.[18] All gender identities can take active roles in surviving, supporting or resisting violence.[19] In this case, women and LGBTI+ individuals can be guerrillas, soldiers, activists, politicians, movement or community leaders, organizers as well as victims/survivors and peacebuilders in both conflict and peace.

In this report, we especially focus on the roles of peacebuilders. Women and LGBTI+ individuals have experience in struggling for peace that almost dates back to the history of armed conflicts in Turkey. Their experiences and joint struggles in this area have not been adequately addressed within the framework of peace efforts until now. Although there have been some studies focusing on women's peace activism,[20] there are hardly any resources on the peace efforts of *lubunyas*. This is partially due to the dominant approach in peace studies to refuse to see grassroots social movements and other civil society actors as direct actors of peace.

However, in order to even talk about a genuine and lasting peace, it is essential to have multiple social segments embrace peace. Parallel to

17 Nisan Alıcı, *Dün, bugün, yarın: Kesişimsellik ekseninde toplumsal barışı yeniden düşünmek* (Yesterday, today, tomorrow: Rethinking societal peace at the axis of intersectionality), *DEMOS Research Association,* Araştırma Derneği, 2020.

18 Dyan Mazurana and Keith Proctor, (2013) *Gender, Conflict and Peace, Occasional Paper, Word Peace Foundation,* 9.

19 Byrne, B. (1996) *Towards a Gendered Understanding of Conflict,* IDS Bulletin, 27(3), 1996.

20 Zehra Yılmaz, *Olağanüstü Savaşın, Olağanlaşan Barışı: Kadınların Gözünden Barış Süreci* (Desensitizing Peace of an Extraordinary War: Peace Process from the Eyes of Women), *Fe Dergi* 5(2), 2013; Handan Çağlayan, *Kürt Kadın Hareketi ve Feminist Hareketin Deneyimleri Bağlamında Barış Talebi* (The Demand for Peace within the Context of the Experiences of the Kurdish Women's Movement and the Feminist Movement), *DEMOS Research Association,* 2021; Hülya Osmanağaoğlu, *Barış Süreci'nde Kürt Kadın Hareketi ya da Önce (Neden) Kadınları Vurdular* (Kurdish Women's Movement in the Peace Process or (Why) They Shot Women First), *Heinrich Böll Stiftung Association Turkey Representation,* 2014; Nisa Göksel, *Peace and Beyond: Women's Activist Alliances under Turkey's "Regime of Emergency", Critical Times* 1(1), 2018.

this, for peacebuilding, it is necessary to consider the experiences, needs and demands of groups that have heavily experienced the multidimensional effects of war. It is very important to understand the struggle of LGBTI+ and women's organizations that strongly voice their experiences, needs and demands. The experiences of these groups, therefore, have a critical place in drawing a road map for the future of peace activism in Turkey.

While looking at this struggle, we focused on the 2013-2015 peace process, in which official peace talks were ongoing, and included in our research those women and LGBTI+ organizations that had worked for this cause. We identified these organizations through desk research on activities carried out during the peace process. Certainly, the peace efforts of these organizations cannot be limited to their impact on the official process. The reason we focused on the peace process was that we wanted to see how the demand for peace was shaped at a time when the possibility of peace was already so strong. Because when the conflict ends, even if temporarily, the demand for peace goes beyond silencing guns and spreads to a much broader area. Looking at how organizations from the LGBTI+ movement, feminist movement, KWM and Turkey's women's movements combined and raised their demands for peace during and after the peace process with their own policies allows for a rich and nuanced analysis. In this study, we aim to reflect this richness and nuance. We think that witnessing the expansion of experiences and possibilities in the common struggle during the peace process will shed light on the future struggle for peace.

In addition to their various roles in conflict and peace, the collective imagination regarding peace for women and LGBTI+ individuals is also diverse, and the methods of their struggle for peace may differ accordingly. This makes it difficult to describe a peace struggle delineated with clear lines. To this end, we limited the research to organizations that carry out policies for women and the LGBTI+ community, define themselves as women or LGBTI+ organizations, put gender at the center of their actions and purpose in coming together, and combine their efforts for the peace process with the former. As such, the focus of the research is not women/LGBTI+ individuals fighting for peace, but the struggle for peace by women/LGBTI+ organizations. The reason why we decided to examine the work of several organizations in a single study was to address the gendered understanding and actions regarding peace within a holistic framework by making commonalities--and at times differences--visible.

Due to this focus, we did not, for example, include the Saturday Mothers (or Saturday People) and the Mothers for Peace, two organizations that have

long been fighting for peace and are predominantly made up of women. It is possible to find many examples of the gender perspective when the discourse and actions of these two movements are examined. We also know that women who organize by coming together as mothers, sisters and spouses transform traditional gender roles and increase their strength by becoming effective political actors.[21] However, carrying out a gender policy is not at the center of these organizations; therefore, it is almost impossible to isolate from their repertoire of organizational practices a gender focus. Instead, we observe the gender-based dynamics that are limited to the context of a single dimension or the social impact of such struggles.

Another dichotomy that should be approached cautiously is expressions of "region" and "west" that are frequently used in the report. Within the framework of a study that examines commonalities in the demand for peace, we problematize the positioning of actors as apart/distant/opposing each other through the geography and ethnicities that go along with it. This duality is based on orientalist and colonial origins as much as it is reductionist. Furthermore, it makes those of Kurdish descent fighting for peace in the west invisible. However, it should be noted that conflicts and policies of war have been experienced daily for decades in the cities predominantly populated by Kurdish people and, as a result, have shaped the struggle for peace of the people living in that region. Likewise, as stated by the participants, although some policies of war (such as the criminalization of the demand for peace) affect those living in the west of Turkey as well, it can be said that not being directly affected by the heat of the conflict on a daily basis is one of the factors that shape the experiences of the peace struggle in the west. For this reason, we were careful to include what participants expressed specific to the geography they were organized in, and we used this duality from time to time in order to avoid equalizing the differing effects of the war and to point out the effects of this difference on the peace movement.

The report mentions the prominent social movements in the narratives of its participants; the KWM, the feminist movement, Turkey's women's movement and the LGBTI+ movement. We consider the KWM as a movement nascent through the 1970s to then encompass the participation of women as guerrillas in the Kurdish national struggle, and one which further expanded its field of activism in the 1990s. The KWM is a movement that has developed women's policy through the various institutions it has

21 Emine Rezzan Karaman, *Remember, S/he was here once: Mothers call for justice and peace in Turkey, Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 12(3), 2016; Nisa Göksel, *Losing the One, Caring for the All: The Activism of the Peace Mothers in Turkey, Social Sciences* 7(10), 2018.

established, has prioritized taking an active role in legal politics, and has become politicized with the ideology (jineoloji) and women's academies it has created.[22] By the feminist movement we mean the sum of many feminist groups, large and small, which came into focus in the 1980s when activities in the public sphere began being organized through various magazines and collectives coalescing around campaigns from time to time.[23] Turkey's women's movement denotes a heterogeneous structure that does not define itself within the two movements we have mentioned, the KWM and the feminist movement, yet focuses on women's politics and includes all women and groups that fight in hybrid opposition organizations as well as self-organizers on issues such as women's rights, femicide, women's labor, and gender equality. As for the LGBTI+ movement, we refer to all individuals and institutions that have organized since the 1990s and whose core agenda is the liberation of sexual orientation and gender identity and LGBTI+ equality.

Finally, we must touch upon the positionality of the researchers. The research team consists of feminists working on peace, transitional justice, and gender organized within the DEMOS Research Association. Two of the researchers are long-time participants in the peace struggle and one is a part of the LGBTI+ movement. The experiences of both DEMOS and the two researchers in the struggle for peace have undoubtedly influenced the study's methodology, from research design to the writing process. Certainly, one of the examples of this is us remembering those times when hope was at its highest, documenting the work we witnessed or were involved in, and the lessons learned from the experiences of LGBTI+ and women's organizations for an eventual peace process.

We find it important to point out this positionality. As a matter of fact, throughout the research we witnessed that the duality of inside and outside became unclear, and that our intersecting identities made it impossible to maintain a fixed position.[24] Our previous institutional or personal contacts with participants and being a part of the studies we reviewed undoubtedly brought an "insider" perspective and brought the researcher and participant closer. That interviews sometimes turned into reminiscing is also indicative of this. However, we cannot claim that this completely eliminated the researcher-

22 Umut Erel & Necla Acik, *Enacting intersectional multilayered citizenship: Kurdish women's politics,* *Gender, Place & Culture* 27(4), 2020.
23 Aksu Bora, *Kadın Hareketi: Nereden Nereye* (Women's Movement: From Where to Where), *Birikim Dergisi* 83, 1996.
24 Amanda L. Couture, Arshia U. Zaidi & Eleanor Maticka-Tyndale, *Reflexive Accounts: An Intersectional Approach to Exploring the Fluidity of Insider/Outsider Status and the Researcher's Impact on Culturally Sensitive Post-Positivist Qualitative Research*, *Contemporary Issues in Qualitative Research* 8(1), 2012.

participant hierarchy. Being the ones asking the questions while not currently being active in said organizations, as well as the fact that two members of the research team live outside of Turkey, allowed for a certain degree of distance despite past commonalities. For example, as researchers, we may not experience the difficulties and risks faced by activists while carrying out their work. The participants were thus included at different stages of the research process, keeping this detachment and the hierarchy of research relationships in mind and only proceeding with their consent.

Another consequence of having an emotional or political affinity for this subject matter is the risk of romanticizing the struggle and solidarity work being studied. From time to time, we may have yielded to the temptation of romanticism. However, our "outsider" positions also limit our ability to pass judgement on these same struggles and organizations, as we are not active participants in them. In addition to balancing these concerns, carrying out this research under the patronage of DEMOS—an institution whose dream is a society where societal peace is established and all identities live in equality—was instructive. Recognizing that lessons learned from previous peace efforts and the strengthening of alliances around the demand for peace are indispensable in the process of establishing societal peace, we left it to the participants to evaluate the positive and negative aspects of their experiences. As such, the report focuses on how actors in the peace struggle evaluate these findings rather than on making judgments or generalizations about the gains, challenges or inclusivity of peace initiatives.

III. Policies that Shape the Peace Struggle by Women's and LGBTI+ Organizations

One of the most important contributions to the field by feminist peace studies is the understanding that gendered experiences cannot be separated from each other with sharp boundaries based on periods of conflict/war and peace.[25] As a matter of fact, although women and LGBTI+ people are exposed to many direct and indirect violations during periods of conflict, even in times often referred to as "peace"—during ceasefire or non-conflict—violence and domestic labor exploitation as well as difficulty accessing justice and protection measures continue to exist. Discrimination and violence against LGBTI+ individuals often lead to systematic violations in various spheres; starting with the family and extending to education and the right to health.

Although gender-based violence and discrimination change form and scope from time to time, it is nonetheless sustained; it is the feminist position that a "negative peace" where direct violence during conflict ceases to exist is insufficient. Indeed, "'peacetime' itself is a site of gendered violence."[26]

The understanding of peace of the participants we interviewed within the scope of this research also reflects this feminist criticism related to the continuum of violence. The demand for peace by women and LGBTI+ organizations does not only include silencing the guns in the face of the continuum of violence during both conflict and ceasefire, but also the aim to eliminate the inequalities that lie at the root of the conflict, the causes

25 Cynthia Cockburn, The Continuum of Violence: A Gender Perspective of War and Peace, *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones* (ed. Wenona Giles & Jennifer Hyndman), *University of California Press*, 2004.

26 Punam Yadav & Denise M. Horn, Continuums of Violence: Feminist peace research and gender-based violence, *Routledge Handbook of Feminist Peace Research* (ed. Tarja Väyrynen, Swati Parashar, Élise Féron & Catia Cecilia Confortini), Routledge, 2021, p. 110.

of violence which are often further deepened by the conflict, and the establishment of a "positive peace."[27] Therefore, the struggle for peace also includes the struggle for equality, freedom and democracy. According to a participant from the KWM:

> *Talking about a peaceful environment in its genuine sense requires talking about a libertarian system in which all diverse circles of the society participate in public life and express themselves equally and freely, and the whole of society benefits equally from all historical, social, cultural--and especially--economic resources, where nature is accepted to have certain rights, as a vital part of life.*[28]

A feminist participant involved in peacebuilding politics adds:

> *If we can dream of a day in which we are not surrounded by various types of violence, we are not exposed to violence at any time, or we do not live side by side with a threat, or at least the probability of violence, the way to achieve that day is not only to end the current war, but also to confront and repair the forms of violence produced by the ongoing war.*[29]

Gender inequality ranks high among the inequalities that conflict produces and fosters. Therefore, the struggle for peace must also include the struggle against patriarchy. According to a participant who is an LGBTI+ activist:

> *It must be noted that a component [of peace] is definitely gender, definitely sexual orientation, and gender identity. Peacebuilding not only refers to a ceasefire, but certainly, that is a prerequisite. [...] [Armed conflict] is of course a problem of both feminism and the LGBTI+ movement, but [...] peace cannot be built in a world where anyone is blocked from reaching medical services, food, nutrition or housing because of their gender. That's why I see them as natural components of the peace process.*[30]

According to a participant from the KWM:

> *Peace is not just silencing the guns. In many regions where there is no armed conflict, we know that women face a multitude of issues such as sexual and physical violence, discrimination, poverty, forced migration, exploitation of labor, etc. In that perspective, the demand for a peaceful life for women also means creating solutions for them and many other problem areas they face. While it is an important demand that women be able to build a life in safety where guns are silent, they are also aware that a long-term struggle is needed to ensure a genuine, peaceful environment.*[31]

27 Johan Galtung, *Violence, peace, and peace research*, *Journal of Peace Research* 6(3),1969; Johan Galtung, *Cultural violence*, *Journal of Peace Research* 27(3), 1990.
28 Interview no. 9, 25.03.2021 (dd/mm/yyyy), written response.
29 Interview no. 2, 03-06.02.2021, online.
30 Interview no. 3, 08.02.2021, online.
31 Interview no. 9, 25.03.2021, written response.

Therefore, peace manifests itself as a process that includes the establishment of freedom and equality for all rather than a fixed and one-shot situation. While it is imperative that arms be laid down in this process, it is only one of the important steps that needs to be taken. For peace, in addition to the end of direct violence, the intertwined forms of domination and exploitation that lie at the root of the conflict —such as gender inequality, racial and ethnic discrimination, and socio-economic inequality— must also be eliminated.

The continuum of violence has a specific face in the geography primarily inhabited by Kurds. This violence appears in different forms: direct violations including physical and sexual violence and torture towards women during the blockades,[32] attacks against the KWM and their achievements since the state of emergency, or situations such as the case of İpek Er, who was sexually assaulted and then driven to death by suicide by Musa Orhan, a sergeant in the Turkish Armed Forces in the city of Siirt in 2020.[33] A participant who is a women's rights activist states:

> *For example, I am active on several platforms. It is very easy and comfortable to do activism on behalf of that platform, you can operate with no problems at all. But when it comes to the Kurdish women's movement, it is perceived as a crime, or rather, it is criminalized. Even a political party is being gradually made illegal today. From that point of view, this is not some ungrounded policy. Actually, the system sustains itself in times of conflict and organizes itself in that chaos. This is the patriarchal system of power.*[34]

For this reason, the struggle for peace in the region is a long-term, comprehensive and dynamic struggle that cannot be reduced to a single period or form. According to a participant from the KWM:

> *As the Kurdish women's movement, throughout our decades-long struggle for peace, we have been and are trying to organize for the liberation of Kurdish identity, for the freedom of our people who are subjected to discrimination and violence due to their ethnic identity, and to eliminate the violence, discrimination, poverty and deprivation, and to end the domestic violence that we experience as women, while we are fighting to develop the consciousness of freedom for women. We have also experienced that peace and peace policies play a very important role in both areas of activism. It is not easy for women to exist in the public sphere anyway. The increasing violence in times of war and*

32 İlyas Erdem, Yeter Tan & Zana Kibar, *Sokağa Çıkma Yasakları ve Zorunlu Göç Sürecinde Kadınların Yaşadıkları Hak İhlalleri ve Deneyimleri Raporu* (Report on the Violations of Rights and Experiences of Women During the Curfews and Forced Migration Process), *Migration Monitoring Association,* 2019.

33 Gülizar İpek, *Bölge'de şiddet, istismar, tecavüz, kadın intiharları ve cinayetleri...* (Violence, abuse, rape, female suicides and murders in the region...), *Evrensel,* August 16, 2020.

34 Interview no. 1, 30.01.2021, online.

conflict and sexist, nationalist, religious and militarist policies cause more women to stay home. In such times, it becomes more difficult for women to take part in organized structures.[35]

Even if the conflict takes place in only one part of the country, the nationalist and militarist environment needed and reproduced by the conflict affects the whole country. As rising militarism strengthens the dichotomy of constructs of femininity-masculinity and stereotypical gender roles, it also affects the geography beyond the conflict and reinforces gender inequality. A feminist participant involved in peacebuilding politics describes it in this way:

> *The language of male-chauvinistic hype in social media, pictures of special operations troops, images of weapons, hashtags which read "we are with our police forces," or "we are with our state," "let our forces march, rear up!" etc... That's an implausible macho performance, a sort of an expression of masculinity, even if the person is living under the threat of the very same violence or not. And that certain kind of masculinity defines a certain kind of femininity before itself. She has to obey him, she has to look to him for her basic needs, she cannot say no to him, she has to do that.*[36]

It is conceivable that the participants from women's and LGBTI+ organizations in western Turkey have positioned themselves as actors in the peace struggle and formed alliances with organizations in the region. In other words, the fact that various systems such as militarism, sexism, racism and cisheterosexism nurture and reproduce each other is one of the reasons for the participants who are not directly affected by the conflict to embrace the demand for peace. This indicates that the participants have adopted an intersectional understanding, and formed various coalitions around the demand for peace in line with this understanding.[37] The same participant talks about her experience in the platform she has mobilized in:

> *We have very much been establishing the connection between how the militarist-patriarchal language and attitude raised higher by the war turns back into our daily lives as violence, and we saw so many shared traits with male violence against women. We have been [trying to make] it an agenda for the whole of Turkey by describing how the funds for war are in fact stolen from women's lives.*

According to a participant who is an LGBTI+ activist:

> *We know that with discrimination in Turkey... things that get intertwined. I mean, every type of discrimination; like, on*

35 Interview no. 9, 25.03.2021, written response.
36 Interview no. 2, 03-06.02.2021, online.
37 Patricia Hill Collins & Sırma Bilge, Intersectionality, 2nd ed., *Polity Press*, 2020.

the one hand, racism feeds homophobia and sexism. Therefore, you cannot get up and say, "I'm going to solve just this problem here," when the discourses that are so interactive and produced by the same mechanisms, that is, the discourses regulating sexism and regulating nationalism, are so interrelated.[38]

common political ground in the demand for peace for the participants organized in western Turkey as well as those in regions more directly affected by the conflict. A feminist participant involved in peacebuilding politics puts it this way:

> *I don't want to be making a grandiose statement but now every struggle for democracy feels like working for peace. Because the scope of the war has expanded so much. I mean our daily lives are a battleground now... [The state] has declared war on everyone. It has declared war on everyone who does not think like it or does not belong to it.*[39]

"End the undeclared war against LGBTI people!" September 1 World Peace Day gathering, Ankara, 2013
Source: Kaos GL

Deepening gender inequality, violence against women and LGBTI+ individuals, and hate speech produced by state authorities themselves along with the conflict and authoritarianism have an impact in the west of Turkey as well, albeit in different forms. In this sense, the struggle for democracy against the continuum of violence emerges as

On the other hand, it is understood

38 Interview no. 3, 08.02.2021, online.
39 Interview no. 2, 03-06.02.2021, online.

that there is a delicate balance between embracing and loudly voicing the demand for peace and overshadowing the experiences of Kurdish women and LGBTI+ people directly affected by the conflict. Again, according to the same participant, it is important that the organizations in the west do not establish hierarchical relations with the organizations in conflict-affected regions, that the impact of the conflict on Kurdish women in particular is discernible and that it makes room for the political agency of the KWM:

> *[The initiative I'm a member of] is on one hand an actor in the demand for peace by associating how [peace] is a personal issue, but on the other hand also one that stands in solidarity with Kurdish women and the [Kurdish] women's movement who are living under a hot war, facing the oppression and attacks of the state when they speak out against it and having to deal with all kinds of discrimination, experiencing racism and violence, unlike anything I have ever experienced.*[40]

For all participants, it is understood that the struggle for democracy and the struggle against patriarchy pave the way for establishing alliances around the demand for peace. For participants from LGBTI+ organizations, there is another unique political channel of agency in the struggle for peace. According to one LGBTI+ activist participant, having an identity other than what is imposed as the "norm," that is, having made peace with yourself as an LGBTI+ individual constitutes one of the common grounds established by the struggle for peace:

> *Peace is not an alien concept within the LGBTI+ movement anyway. I mean making peace with yourself, being a lesbian or gay person who is at peace, has been something we have always talked about. It still is. There were many situations where we said, "They could not reconcile with themselves." "To come out, you must first make peace with yourself; as we come out, we will make peace with ourselves," is one of those things that is talked about and actualized a lot in the movement. Therefore, peace, in all senses of the word, is inherent in the LGBTI+ movement and in being LGBTI+.*[41]

Queer theory can help conceptualize this alliance that LGBTI+ organizations have established with the struggle for peace. Queer theory which "reveals itself not by what it is, but by what it is against" objects to the normalization of any identity, criticizes LGBTI+ identity politics on this basis and proposes non-identitarianism.[42] Thus, militarism, one of the most important means of constructing the "norm", is

40 Interview no. 2, 03-06.02.2021, online.
41 Interview no. 6, 15-18.02.2021, online.
42 Sibel Yardımcı, *Ne O! Ne Bu! Ne Şu! Queer Kuramı ve Kimliksizleşme* (Neither This! Nor That! Nor It! Queer Theory and Non-identitarianism), *Skop Bülten*, 2012.

problematized.[43] After reconciling with oneself, it is time to reconcile with those that militarism deems the Other.[44]

At this point, it should be noted that not even the constitutional demand for equality of LGBTI+ individuals has been met in Turkey, and that violence and discrimination against the LGBTI+ community are on the rise on a daily basis, with LGBTI+ people even having been pointed out by the government as a reason for withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention. As an LGBTI+ activist participant puts it, even if *lubunyas* make peace with themselves, it's impossible to talk about a lasting peace based on solid foundations until the state and society make peace with LGBTI+ people whom they've instead tried to make "utterly unacceptable."[45]

Indeed, the discourse of societal peace has an important place in the memory of Turkey's LGBTI+ movement. It is noteworthy that one of the first public events of the LGBTI+ community in Turkey was a symposium titled "The Problems of Lesbians and Gays and Their Search for Solutions for Societal Peace" organized by Kaos GL in 2003.[46] This policy, which advocates that there can be no societal peace without reconciliation with LGBTI+ people, aims at positive peace and has shaped the peace struggle of the participants from LGBTI+ organizations.[47]

43 Erkan Eroğlu, *Queer politikalar ve militarizm: Vicdani ret örneği* (Queer policies and militarism: The case of conscientious objection), *Kaos GL Dergisi,* 2014.

44 Also worth noting is the symposium titled *"Ölülerimiz, Biz // Öteki Olarak Ölmek"* (Our Dead and Us // Dying as an Other) jointly organized by Kaos GL Association, Hacı Bektaş Veli Anatolian Culture Foundation, and the Association of Bridging Peoples in 2015. Also see Butler, *Violence, Mourning, Politics, Precarious Life The Powers of Mourning and Violence*; Judith Butler, *Queer-Yoldaşlığı ve Savaş Karşıtı Siyaset* (Queer Comradeship and Anti-War Politics), *Anti-Homofobi Kitabı 2* (The Book of Anti-Homophobia Vol. 2), Kaos GL Association, 2010; Merin Sever, *Queer teori ekseninde LGBTİ hareketi ve feminizm* (LGBTI movement and feminism at the axis of Queer Theory), *Birikim Dergisi* 308, 2014.

45 Interview no: 6, 15-18.02.2021, online.

46 Güler Emektar, *Cinsel ayrımcılığa karşı, toplumsal barış* (Societal peace in the face of sexual discrimination), *Bianet,* May 20, 2003. "The reason we called it societal peace was because we thought peace was not really possible by ignoring homosexuals." Umut Güner: Her yeri afişledik, *Patikalar: Resmi Tarihe Çentik* (We Hanged Posters Everywhere, *Paths: A Nick in Official History*), Kaos GL Association, 2019, p.93. To give an example from the recent past, in February 2021, 12 LGBTI+ organizations called for "living together in societal peace" in the statement they issued regarding the attacks against LGBTI+s at Boğaziçi University. *LGBTİ+ dernekleri: Göğe bakalım, gökkuşağına bakalım!* (LGBTI+ associations: We look to the sky, we look to the rainbow!), *Bianet*, February 2, 2021.

47 *'Toplumun LGBTİ'lilerle de barışması gerekiyor'* (Society need to make peace with LGBTI+s, too), Kaos GL, September 2, 2014.

IV. From Traditional Methods to Creative Action: Peace Activities of Organizations

A. A Struggle That Precedes and Succeeds the Peace Process

The peace process was officially carried out between 2013 and 2015. This process, like the struggle for peace, is a complex and difficult time to delineate. Our interviewees referenced different time periods while describing their activities in the peace process. In our interviews, members of the KWM referred to the beginning of the peace process as 2010. This pre-negotiation period is related to the democratization steps of the Kurdish Political Movement, its emphasis on legal politics and the mechanisms created by the women's movement.[48] The reference to that period draws attention to the fact that a kind of preparatory process was in effect leading up to 2013 and the grounds for discussing peace were underway. A participant, who is a women's rights activist, drew attention to the fact that this process started before the peace talks and referred to the years from 2010 to 2014 when talking about the peace process.[49]

Likewise, more than one participant pointed to the 2014 Kobanê Protests as the time when the talks ended. It is not surprising that attention was drawn to 2014, the year the peace process became fragile. It was also discussed in public that the National Security Council (Milli Güvenlik Kurulu, MGK) meeting on October 30, 2014, which took place right after the Kobanê Protests, was in preparation for the cessation of the peace talks.[50] Thus, it is understood that the end of the period was also

48 Interview no. 1, 30.01.2021, online.
49 Interview no. 1, 30.01.2021, online.
50 Ezgi Başaran, *Çözüm süreci ve 'o MGK toplantısı'* (Peace process and 'that National Security Council meeting', *Radikal,* January 19, 2016.

experienced as a process and that the social event that triggered this period was the 2014 Kobanê Protests. Contrary to what is often stated, this period of cessation does not end sharply with the general elections of June 7, 2015 or July 2015. When we look at that period retrospectively, we understand that the organizations we interviewed kept their hope of reviving the peace process for some time. However, as the findings of the research reveal, this hope was lost with the onset of the state of emergency.[51]

In order to understand the peace process, it is necessary to recognize that history does not progress in the same way for the official parties of the negotiation and civil society actors. Because, although the peace process is discussed as between the years 2013 and 2015 in many studies and publications, this research revealed a different period and temporal framework. We know that history does not transpire in isolation from social dynamics. It should be kept in mind that that history, especially at the social level, was created by a long-term effort. Understanding the timeline of the interviewed organizations allowed us to see the scope of their struggles. That is why while looking at the peace process, we took the timeline of the organizations that are actors of peace, not the dates that are frequently mentioned in the public. Although the peace process expression we use in the remainder of the report focuses on the years between 2013-2015, rather than pointing at a linear and chronological time frame, it recognizes the impact of the 2014 Kobanê Protests which initiated the cessation process but also covers the previous preparatory timeline and extends beyond June/July 2015 to encompass a flexible period. Thus, in line with the purpose of the report, we choose to emphasize the time period created by the individuals and organizations included in our research.

B. Opportunities Provided by the Peace Process

The ceasefire period that began with the peace process was a period of alliances, rapprochement, banding together and mutual learning between the KWM, the feminist movement, Turkey's women's movement and the LGBTI+ movement. A participant from the KWM stated that with the respite from the conflict, women waging the struggle for peace were able to reach women from a much greater number of segments of society, perhaps more so than ever before.[52] For example, women who were previously indifferent or politically distant to the Kurdish issue

51 Efforts to maintain the peace process after June 7, 2015 and the discussion on the state of emergency becoming a breaking point is detailed in section VI.

52 Interview no. 9, 25.03.2021, written response.

and conflict began to come to rallies of the peace platform which were mostly organized in Turkey's western cities. Furthermore, the Women's Freedom Assembly (Kadın Özgürlük Meclisi, KÖM) played an important role in these gatherings by enabling different women to come together.[53] A women's rights activist participant recalls that at that time many Turkish women also learned Kurdish in order to better associate and become closer with the KWM.

Another example of this is that LGBTI+ organizations found the opportunity to partner with people and institutions during the peace process that they otherwise could not come together with under other circumstances. An LGBTI+ activist mentions this while recalling a solidarity event held on one of the important political and humanitarian agendas of the period:

> *When you say "Oh, they're doing this," the arrival of others, the arrival of people with whom we did not stand together or have fun with previously... And when they come, they feel as if they have not fallen from space, and are not shocked; The feeling of "Oh, this is actually not such a strange place, they're dancing to the same tune," was a good experience for me at the time. But we can't do that now.*[54]

As mentioned in the introduction, the Gezi resistance took place shortly after the peace process began. It is not a coincidence that this resistance, which is unique in terms of the history of social movements in Turkey, took place during the peace process. While talking about the intersection of the peace process and the Gezi resistance, Nazan Üstündağ draws attention to the fact that such a popular uprising would have been impossible under the conditions of war:

> *Gezi could only have taken place when Turkey's foremost agenda was no longer life or death and the tension of the conflict was relatively overcome. Otherwise, neither standing side by side in Gezi nor the political formation of a truly demilitarized protest area would have been possible.*[55]

The intersection of the peace process and the Gezi resistance was an important agenda for women's organizations at that time. Female peace activists pointed out the common demands of both Gezi and the peace process, demands for human rights and protests against state violence and establishing a relationship between the two.[56] An instance where this intersection could be seen was when BIKG published a text in the first days of the resistance, drawing attention to the

53 Interview no. 5, 17.02.2021, online.
54 Interview no. 3, 08.02.2021, online.
55 Nazan Üstündağ, *Gezi Parkı Direnişi ve Çözüm Süreci* (Gezi Park Resistance and Peace Process) , 2013
56 *'Gezi direnişi ve çözüm sürecinin talepleri aynı'* ('Demands of Gezi resistance and peace process are the same'), Demokrat Haber, July 7, 2013.

connection between the peace process and the Gezi resistance on the need for peace and democracy:

> *Today, Turkey is more ready than ever for peace and democracy. Millions of people from all walks of life demand peace. It has been only four months that this country lost no one to the war. We all know what this is worth. We want the state to see it as well... The obvious fact that peace cannot be achieved without a real democracy once again clearly manifested in the Gezi resistance. These social demands will not vanish without a demonstration of will for rapid democratization, peace and the inclusion of the whole of society in decision-making mechanisms about their own lives.*[57]

A feminist researcher we interviewed describes this coexistence:

> *I attended that [Turkish Grand National Assembly] Peace Commission meeting and that was exactly on the day of the Kabataş march. At that time, those two agendas were very hot and very together. We were constantly contemplating the relationship between Gezi and the peace process at that time. The relationship between them was the most pondered issue.*[58]

The social opposition area opened up by the peace process, which became more dynamic with the Gezi resistance, proved to be fertile ground for the intermingling of different movements. Especially during the course of Gezi, people from different classes, cultural and ethnic affiliations came together. One of the important consequences of this was that the feminist movement and the LGBTI+ movement interacted effectively with the broader leftist opposition.[59] Another result was that the groups who were convinced for years of the official ideology that the Kurdish issue was one of "terrorism" began to question this during the Gezi period and some prejudices were overcome.[60] However, what is meant within the scope of this study is more than the passive overcoming of prejudices but organizations actively organizing together and developing joint mechanisms for effective involvement in the peace process. For example, women from BIKG, despite their ideological, political, ethnic and religious differences were able to come together with different women's organizations and act in unison for the urgency of peace.[61]

One of the more important effects of this period on the LGBTI+ movement was the increase in organizing; notably, the effects of the Gezi period on this

57 Women for Peace Initiative, *Barış toplumsallaşabilir* (We can make peace grassroots), Everywhere Taksim, June 6, 2013.

58 Interview no. 7, 24.02.2021, online.

59 Alev Özkazanç, *Türkiye'de Kadın Hareketleri ve Kesişim Alanları Yaklaşımı* (Women's Movements in Turkey and Intersectional Approaches), *Duvarları Yıkmak, Köprüleri Kurmak: Yeni Küresel Feminizmin Yükselişi ve İmkanları Konferansı* (Conference titled *Breaking Walls, Building Bridges: The Rise of the New Global Feminism and Its Opportunities)* [presentation], Heinrich Böll Stiftung Association Turkey Representative, 2017.

60 Buket Türkmen, *From Gezi Park to Turkey's transformed political landscape*, *Open Democracy*, July 7, 2015.

61 Göksel, supra n. 20.

were brought up frequently in the interviews. The establishment and struggle of the LGBT Block during the Gezi resistance played a major role in increasing the LGBTI+ movement's visibility as a social movement.[62] The voice of the LGBTI+ movement on the demand for peace at that time was also very strong. For instance, the press release of the 21st Pride March in 2013 discussed police violence and the killing of Medeni Yıldırım in the Lice district of Diyarbakır and emphasized the demand for peace.[63]

After Gezi, various LGBTI+ organizations were established in many parts of the country.[64] According to participants involved in the LGBTI+ movement, one of the reasons for this was that many LGBTI+ people who once felt more likely to reach safe havens when migrating to big cities then felt safer than before and took the opportunity to get involved in the LGBTI+ struggle in the small cities where they resided. This not only increased individual visibility, such as being able to openly live as an LGBTI+ person, but also increased the visibility of LGBTI+ policies through organizations:

I mean there were dozens of marches on May 1st in every city — that is, in dozens of different cities. For example, it led the way for several LGBTI+ organizations in Dersim, Antep, Diyarbakır, Van, Trabzon, and Bursa... In other words, it spread to so many parts of the country that people were actually less anxious about expressing themselves. They could openly carry out LGBTI+ activism, they were able to speak up.[65]

It is understood that this situation occurred in a similar way in Kurdish regions as well. A Kurdish LGBTI+ activist living among the diaspora says that LGBTI+ individuals started to say "we are in it for peace, too"[66] especially after Gezi. It can be said that with the increase in mobilization, visibility within the struggle for peace also heightened. The statements of the participants point out that the intersection of the Gezi period and the peace process led to a powerful transformation:

If there had not been that societal peace movement during the Gezi period, maybe, if the LGBTI+ conversations and questions were not being discussed publicly, perhaps I would've gone on as a closeted lubunya. In this respect, I am talking about the importance of the existence of the LGBTI+ community and the LGBTI+ struggle in

62 Bade Okçuoğlu, The LGBT Block, *Talk Turkey Conference: Rethinking Life Since Gezi Conference* [presentation], The New School, Jadaliyya Reports, 2013

63 21st Istanbul LGBT Pride Week Commission, *Onur Yürüyüşü Basın Açıklaması* (Pride March Press Release), June 30, 2013.

64 e.g. Hêvî LGBTI Association was founded in 2013 by activists who came together in the LGBT Block as Hêvî LGBTI Initiative. Fidan Mirhanoğlu, *İstanbul'da Kürt LGBT'ler için bir umut: Hêvî LGBTİ* (A hope for Kurdish LGBTs in Istanbul: Hêvî LGBTI), *Bianet*, September 26, 2013. Also see Zülfukar Çetin, *The Dynamics of the Queer Movement in Turkey before and during the Conservative AKP Government*, Working Paper, Research Group EU/Europe, SWP Berlin, 2015, p.15.

65 Interview no. 3, 08.02.2021, online.

66 Interview no. 8, 10.03.2021, online.

societal peace, in that fight for peace.[67]

C. Activities and Achievements During the Peace Process

Participants from the women's and LGBTI+ organizations that we interviewed carried out various activities related to peacebuilding and gained achievements. Highlights can be summarized as follows: First, women carried out activities aimed at being involved in the negotiation process and bringing their agenda to the peace table. Secondly, women's and LGBTI+ organizations used different methods and tools in their activities with significant benefits. Third, feminists debated involvement as a "third observer" in the negotiation process. Finally, Kurdish women in particular organized activities within the framework of the relationship they established between peace, women's politics and democracy.

a. Involvement of women at the negotiating table

Women organizing for peace sought meaningful participation in the official negotiation process. Two concrete steps were taken towards this goal. The first step was the inclusion of a woman in the HDP delegation: Ceylan Bağrıyanık was included in the delegation representing the KWM. The next step was the establishment of a mechanism that would establish a link between the female representative involved in the negotiation process and the women who came together around peace. To this aim, the KÖM was established in Istanbul; as a result of workshops, the negotiation process was intensively discussed on May 10-11 2015 with more than 200 women coming from various parts of Turkey. A declaration was published at the end of the workshops to announce the birth of the assembly which emphasized: "During this democratic resolution and negotiation process, it is of great importance for us to stand together by preserving all our differences, both for the effective participation of women in the process and to shape the process with a women's emancipatory perspective".[68] Unlike other organizations operating during the peace process, KÖM clearly took the official negotiation process as its main agenda.[69] Had the process continued, KÖM would have supported the demand for the establishment of the Monitoring and Truth Commissions agreed upon in the peace talks, and would have worked on equal representation and the participation of women of their own will in these mechanisms.[70]

The addition of a female representative to the negotiation

67 Interview no. 8, 10.03.2021, online.
68 Kadınlardan Barış İçin "Kadın Özgürlük Meclisi" ("Women's Freedom Assembly" for Peace), *Bianet,* May 11, 2015.
69 Interview no. 5, 17.02.2021, online.
70 Kadınlardan Barış İçin "Kadın Özgürlük Meclisi", supra n. 68.

delegation and the establishment of the KÖM were two important achievements for women. Women focusing on gaining participation in the negotiation process in order to include their agenda in the process is a common phenomenon globally.[71] In the case of Turkey, the women who led the discussion put as much importance on the mechanism itself as they did on the *representation of the women's movement* by the woman who gets access to the process. **In other words, it is both equally important to have women at the negotiation table and to have them as representatives of women's politics.**

Indeed, there has been a long debate about meaningful participation in peace efforts around the world; and there is a strong demand to go beyond reducing women's participation in negotiation processes to mere numbers. It is possible to evaluate the debate in Turkey in this context, as well. An independent feminist participant puts it this way:

> *Eventually, what Ceylan was saying was "I am the representative of the women's movement, not just the Kurdish women's movement." And we agreed, "yes, you will represent us and we will work together. We will establish our demands together, we will do something big..." We were having meetings with good participation, people were coming from other cities. This is a win on its own.*[72]

b. Different ways of demanding peace

All organizations have applied conventional methods such as press statements and used forms of action that can be defined as civil

Peace Point event by women, Taksim, 2011
Photo: Nilgün Yurdalan

Kaynak: Kaos GL

71 Güneş Daşlı, Nisan Alıcı & Ulrike Flader, *Kadınların Barış Mücadelesinde Dünya Deneyimleri: Sırbistan, Kosova, Sri Lanka, Suriye* (Global Experiences of Women in Struggle for Peace: Serbia, Kosovo, Sri Lanka, Syria), *DEMOS Research Association*, 2017, p.116-117.

72 Interview no. 5, 17.02.2021, online.

disobedience at different times. A prominent series of events was the "peace point" actions organized by feminist women.[73] Peace point protests emerged as events where women went to various neighborhoods and sat around a round cloth banner to voice their demand for peace.

Peace vigils were another common form of action taken in which women gathered in a public space such as a square and usually stayed awake until morning. When Kurdish women held a peace vigil in their region, feminist women in Istanbul held a similar demonstration simultaneously.[74] Thanks to such forms of action, they found ways to tell both the state and society that they opposed war. With the concurrency they created, this message was conveyed not only where the war was raging, but also in western Turkey.

In peace activism, the street has always held an important place for the women and LGBTI+ organizations we interviewed. Two LGBTI+ activist participants stated that they preferred to focus on explaining the need for peace to the west when describing their peace activism. They mentioned that they organized activities such as setting up stands in Istanbul[75] and going to the Kurdish region to participate in Newroz[76] events to meet this aim.

Newroz, Diyarbakır, 2013
Source: *Kaos GL*

73 Interview no. 5, 17.02.2021, online.
74 Interview no. 5, 17.02.2021, online.
75 Interview no. 4, 14.02.2021, online.
76 Interview no. 8, 10.03.2021, online.

With the space opened by the cessation of hostilities, women's and LGBTI+ organizations were able to express their demands for peace in a more dynamic and productive way. Different organizations concerned with peace put forward a wide range of discourses and actions, ranging from conscientious objection to the reform of laws regulating the powers of the police,[77] from how alternative street protests can be organized to transitional justice mechanisms[78] that can be applied in the post-conflict period. Therefore, the activities mentioned in this section are not only diverse in form but also vary in terms of to whom the action is aimed (state, society or both) and the use of different tools (for example, turning a piece of fabric into political space).

More importantly, these creative forms of action by organizations have opened up new means to communicate their discourse on peace to society at large. For example, women's organizations went beyond the traditionally-used form of action such as press releases and organized tents and peace vigils where they created synchronicity, raised the demand for peace, and where passers-by could come and chat and discuss peace. These new methods of action helped reach women in neighborhoods who were previously uninvolved with the peace issue. At the same time, it made it easier for these women to join the plea for peace in a simple and accessible way such as sitting around a round piece of fabric. Thus, they explored alternative ways of opposing militarist violence and expanded the repertoire of voicing peace.

It is understood from the interviews that the ongoing peace process and the work around it, albeit slow, created a feeling of being very close to attaining peace. Indeed, the work at the time covered both women's demands and how they could be reflected in the peace process as well as lengthy discussions on what needs to be done for an honorable peace in general. The fact that transitional justice mechanisms that could be implemented following the conflict were also discussed shows that women and LGBTI+ organizations working on peace adopted a long-term perspective.

c. Women are candidates to be a third party to the process

Another prominent activity and discussion mentioned by a feminist participant is the claim of being a "third observer" and the efforts towards this objective.[79] Although there were discussions regarding a third-party during the negotiation period– the involvement of a third actor in the

77 Interview no. 6, 15-18.02.2021, online.
78 Dila Gürses, *Barış İçin Kadın Girişimi "Kimin Hakikati" Dedi* (BIKG Asks: "Whose Truth?"), *Bianet*, June 28, 2014.
79 Interview no. 2, 03-06.02.2021, online.

negotiation which has frequently been put to use in other experiences around the globe– the state did not favor this.[80] Thus, as social actors from within, women forced the issue of being the third eye which can both monitor the process and be a guarantor of sorts. For example, feminist women visited the province of Dersim and the district of Lice to observe the fragile ceasefire at that time and shared the reports they prepared by sporadically monitoring the withdrawal activities of the guerrillas.[81]

d. Kurdish women's struggle for peace progressing in harmony with democracy and women's policies

As explained above, the fight against patriarchy always had a prominent position in the peace agenda for the KWM. It can be said that the interconnectedness they established between peace, democracy and equal participation in politics is based on an intersectional approach. A women's rights activist participant pointed to 2010 as the onset of the peace process and talked about the work of

Women from the HDP protest the draft internal security law in the General Assembly of Parliament with purple scarfs, Ankara, 2015.
Source: Pervin Buldan, Twitter

80 Nazan Üstündağ, *Dünyada Barış Süreçleri ve Çözüme Giden Yolda AKP ve Kürt Hareketi'nin Çatışan Toplumsal Tahayyülleri* (Peace Processes in the World and Conflicting Social Imaginations of the AKP and the Kurdish Movement on the Road to Solution), *Çatışma Çözümleri ve Barış (Conflict Resolution and Peace)*, ed. Murat Aktaş, İletişim, 2014.

81 Interview no. 2, 03-06.02.2021, online.

the KWM on issues such as women's participation in politics and transforming local government along the lines of women's liberation. Kurdish women's neighborhood organizations not only empowered women politically but also amplified their voices in relation to solutions to the Kurdish issue and peace.

The most concrete outcome of these efforts in the peace process was the transformation of an actor in the peace process, the HDP, into a women's party.[82] Women from the HDP achieved significant gains in terms of equal representation and carried women's policies to the parliament with the implementation of equal quotas, autonomous women's assemblies and the co-chair system. This made it easier for women to get involved rapidly when the HDP became one of the main actors in the peace process. A woman deputy participated in the delegation from the onset along with women MPs from HDP participating in the Resolution Commission established under the roof of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. Finally, women from HDP, who were active from the very beginning of the procedures, reacted quickly and visibly when there were developments that hindered the peace process. One of them was the action of the HDP woman deputies against the Draft Security Law, a subversion of the peace process, which went on for days in the General Assembly.

82 Interview no. 1, 30.01.2021, online.

V. Joint Struggle for Peace: Alliances and Divergences

Section III of the report presented the framework of the political grounds that paved the way for women's and LGBTI+ organizations to unite in their demand for peace. This section focuses on important findings on the practical reflections of alliances established by the organizations interviewed within the scope of the study on the demand for peace and the points of divergence. To begin, the platforms that bring women and LGBTI+ people from various identities and political views together around peace point to an important unifying experience in this demand. Despite a consensus being reached on the basis of the peace demand, differences of opinion in terms of the method lingered on. In addition, while establishing the common political framework of the demand for peace, women's organizations were apt to refrain from discussing their particular gender policies so as not to adversely affect this alliance. This condition emerges as a factor affecting the meaningful participation of LGBTI+ activists in the peace struggle. On the other hand, Kurdish LGBTI+ activists also criticize organizations and activists in the west for not allocating the requisite sensitivity to the specific situation of Kurdish *lubunyas* in their policies and actions. We discuss these in the remainder of this section.

A. Two Prominent Organizational Experiences in Getting Together for the Demand for Peace

BIKG stands out in bringing women from different backgrounds together by having created a common ground for women to embrace the demand for peace. Discussing why ending the war was also an issue for women in the west and establishing a political approach that showed that women were affected by the war in different ways were

influential in this alliance. A striking example of this is the fact that women in BIKG carried out studies to establish that the war budget was stealing from the lives of all women; they carried out analyses presenting what could be done to achieve gender equality using the budget allocated to the war; and they organized forums to discuss these.[83] Through these discussions on the war budget, BIKG pointed out that women in the west were also affected by this war. This same process reminded the participants that they too were the actors in the demand for peace.

Maintaining this political framework for all types of activities, from street action to a campaign to collect menstrual pads for those affected by the conflict, appears to have played a role in establishing a strong link between BIKG and the KWM. The fact that feminist women from the west of Turkey repeatedly visited the region also contributed to the strengthening of these ties. A feminist participant involved in peacebuilding politics points out that these visits were different from going to and from the war zone for a daily activity; it was aimed at building a close-knit, meaningful bond by staying in women's homes for days and carrying out voluntary work.[84]

"We are here to sing together / We witness Cizre / We stand for peace"
Group visit initiated by the call from BIKG, Cizre, 2015
Photo: Evrim Kurdoğlu
Source: Bianet

83 Women for Peace Initiative, *Çözüm Süreci Raporu* (Report on the Peace Process), 2013.
84 Interview no. 2, 03-06.02.2021, online.

Another dimension in establishing partnerships was the shaping of this peace platform as a flexible, dynamic and open-door movement. Although the platform does not define itself as feminist, this property is evident both in the language used and in its horizontal and flexible organizational structure. It is understood that the feminist political line and the intersectional approach adopted over the course of events facilitated the formation of alliances.

The LGBTI Peace Initiative, the first LGBTI+ organization dedicated to peace, is an important example of a platform that creates a meeting space on a common ground. Established in August 2015, the initiative was founded by representatives from the HDP, the CHP, LGBTI+ and conscientious objection associations, student societies and independent activists stating "When violence entered our agenda in a more pressing way, we took action. We need to continue with the self-critique that we were not as supportive as was necessary in the struggle for peace during the peace process."[85] The founding declaration first commemorated the Suruç Massacre and went on to demand a return to the basis of a democratic resolution to the Kurdish issue and stated that "the common cry for peace of LGBTI society and all segments of society [was] to build peace."[86]

The LGBTI Peace Initiative played an important role in establishing a common voice among LGBTI+ people and organizations from different cities in the struggle for peace. The framework of this common statement is expressed in the founding declaration as "The war and violence of the palace are also fed by the patriarchal mentality and militarism, it consecrates masculinity and strengthens hate speech."[87] The initiative's activities to build coalitions on this ground are multifarious. For example, the initiative urged "all LGBTI people, organized or not; who are living under war conditions, be it at home, at school, at work, on the street and in all areas of life" to speak for peace and embrace the demand for peace.[88] It organized a symposium titled "Being an Actor for Peace" attended by deputies from both the CHP and the HDP.[89] Following the October 10th Massacre, it spearheaded a declaration undersigned by 18 LGBTI+ organizations stating that the struggle for peace would continue.[90] It also discussed the struggle for peace during

85 Yıldız Tar, *'Barış şimdi değilse ne zaman?'* (Peace, when, if not now?), *Kaos GL,* October 4, 2015.
86 *LGBT Barış Girişimi yola çıkıyor* (LGBT Peace Initiative is born), *Kaos GL,* August 24, 2015.
87 Ibid.
88 *LGBTİ'ler barış için buluşuyor!* (LGBTIs gather for peace!), *Kaos GL*, August 19, 2015.
89 Tar, supra n. 85.
90 *18 LGBTİ örgütünden açıklama: Barış ısrarından vazgeçmeyeceğiz!* (18 LGBTI organizations state: We will never stop insisting on peace), *Kaos GL*, October 13, 2015.

Pride Week,[91] became a member of the Peace Block and took joint actions with BIKG.[92] In other words, the initiative aimed to organize LGBTI+ individuals around peace on one hand, and to build bridges between the actors of the peace struggle and LGBTI+ activists on the other. To achieve this, it was organized horizontally with an awareness of being a platform that includes LGBTI+ people from different segments of society, and aimed to reflect the culture of peace in its organizational model.[93]

It becomes evident with the conflict and authoritarianism mentioned below that the activities of both BIKG and the LGBTI Peace Initiative have become sparse over time. However, these two organizational experiences and their unique contributions to the struggle for peace as platforms that mainly work in western Turkey, embrace the demand for a democratic resolution to the Kurdish issue, and raise the voices of women and lubunyas from different walks of life, are very important.

B. Discussions on Methods to Raise the Demand for Peace

Although the political framework based on the agency of peace was effective in the establishment of partnerships, debates on the methods of actions and discourses to achieve the objectives continued. An example of this is given by a feminist participant involved in peacebuilding politics who conveys her experience of organizing, mostly in the western cities, on the peace platform:

> *"There were ideas and views to meet with various families of soldiers. Therefore, we wanted to see how this war actually affected everyone, particularly in the west. In fact, we all wanted to. This was not a very fundamental difference of opinion, but about the method, how to go about it... And on the other hand, there is a lot of work you can do but the people who can do it are limited.*[94]

According to the same participant, another contradiction is inherent in forming a voice as distinct from the KWM while stating highly related positions. We understand that it is difficult at times to find the means to verbalize "silence the guns, let peace do the talking" without equalizing the two sides of the conflict yet appealing to both. The participant explains that from time to time, Kurdish women activists expect feminist women to be a platform for women in the west that raises their voice for peace on the one hand, and to politically align with them on the other. The negative outcome of the similarity of political views but an inability to

91 Yıldız Tar, *'Yaşam için oksijen neyse barış da odur'* ('Peace is like oxygen for life'), *Kaos GL*, June 21, 2016.

92 Webiztv, *Kadınlardan Barışa Çok Ses'in konuğu; LGBTİ Barış Girişimi'nden Esra Ece Kutlu* (From Women to Peace, Many Voices hosts Esra Ece Kutlu from LGBTI Peace Initiative), *YouTube,* February 28, 2017.

93 Yeşim Tuba Başaran, *Barışın Öznesi Olmak Paneli* (Panel titled Being an Actor of Peace) [presentation], LGBTİ Peace Initiative, *YouTube,* 2015.

94 Interview no. 2, 03-06.02.2021, online.

establish a separate discourse was the insufficiency in appealing to certain segments:

> *On the one hand, when we sat at a table and talked politics, [we were saying] "Look, we really think like you as well". Sometimes it was like, I mean, sometimes you may not think like them, but sometimes you really say, "Look, we think like you, but we have to choose our words differently. If we say the same sentences, well, there's already you for that." So, if we're the same, it won't do much good. We need to establish this voice from another perspective.*[95]

C. Silences and Debates Regarding Gender and Sexuality

It seems that women from a variety of sociopolitical backgrounds sometimes shelve discussions of gender politics for the benefit of a shared demand for peace. According to a feminist participant involved in peacebuilding politics:

> *Where we meet as women in peace politics is also a conservative place. I mean, the women of the AKP, the Kurdish Women's Movement, the women of the CHP... What all these women have in common is their conservatism. They're all conservative to certain extents. Therefore, [the peace platform that I am organized in] is not a place where people bring up feminist family politics and the official family policies, or the imposition of the "acceptable" family and the "acceptable" woman for discussion.*[96]

One of the most difficult issues to discuss is sexuality; peace activists often deal with sexuality only in the context of violence. This can lead to the exclusion of various LGBTI+ identities. According to an LGBTI+ activist participant:

> *So first of all, of course, being LGBT cannot be reduced to sexuality and so on. We often hear "what they do in the bedroom is nobody's business." Of course, that's not the issue, but on the other hand, sexuality... A person active within a struggle is often seen as detached from their gender and sexuality... Peace, or anti-militarism activists tend to harbor their discourse in a non-sexual and genderless perspective. The state is a colossal entity and a struggle against it neutralizes all these and this begets standing together under one grand unifying statement. And this hinders any discussions about all the other elements of the war and conflict.*[97]

For this reason, LGBTI+ individuals may sometimes be forced to act like "palatable (makbul)" LGBTI+ people in order to be accepted in the peace struggle by other actors in the struggle. In this sense, the struggle for peace has not been able to fully include the "squeaky"[98] *lubunyas*. As one LGBTI+

95 Interview no. 2, 03-06.02.2021, online.
96 Interview no. 2, 03-06.02.2021, online.
97 Interview no. 3, 08.02.2021, online.
98 Interview no. 4, 14.02.2021, online. The participant describes "squeaky" (zırıldayan in Lubunca) as "a proudly feminine, sharp-tongued, sometimes sassy attitude."

activist participant put it, it is not uncommon to think that [*lubunyas*] "water down a serious issue such as war."[99] For instance, during the March 8th demonstrations in the region, LGBTI+ organizations and the KWM could stand side by side and put forward a joint stance for peace. However, both the women's rights activist participant and the LGBTI+ activist participant stated that alliances could be interrupted at other times.[100] In addition, the widespread LGBTI+phobia throughout society affects the unity of the actors in the peace struggle with LGBTI+ communities, especially on a "serious" issue such as peace. For example, the women's rights activist participant mentioned that those who actually oppose the struggle for gender equality often attack the KWM through their actual or perceived alliances with LGBTI+ organizations.[101] This, in particular, isolates LGBTI+ activists in the region and prevents them from being recognized as equal actors in the struggle for peace.

It should also be mentioned that discussions about visibility in these alliances can turn into dialogues that offer important opportunities for improving inclusion in mixed peace initiatives, with the resistance of LGBTI+ activists and sometimes with the support of feminists. An LGBTI+ activist participant stated that the recognition of LGBTI+ people as a part of the peace struggle, limited only by their sexual orientation and gender identity, was also problematized through these discussions:

> *"Going there and saying "we are not a dog and pony show "helped us to cease just being sexualized groups for [other actors in the peace struggle]. Of course, this is not something that has been finalized, there are still those who do that to us. We are only invited to talk about our lesbian experience, or our trans experience... We are never invited as equals to fight against militarism together... However, we have always tried to be comrades, I think we managed to kindly force it... I think that the constant "sexualization" of the LGBT movement, which I criticize, has become a "bug" [of the peace struggle].*[102]

D. Criticism of the LGBTI+ Movement's Approach to the Kurdish Issue

On the other hand, participants who are Kurdish or close to the Kurdish Political Movement and also organized in the LGBTI+ movement have brought a similar criticism of tokenism[103] in the LGBTI+ movement and especially

99 Interview no. 3, 08.02.2021, online.
100 Interview no. 6, 15-18.02.2021, online.
101 Interview no. 1, 30.01.2021, online.
102 Interview no. 3, 08.02.2021, online.
103 Policies and practices adopted for disadvantaged groups as a showpiece, without causing any change in power relations that lead to disadvantage. *Tokenism,* Library for Gender-focused Journalism, *Bianet*.

regarding LGBTI+ organizations in the west. According to an LGBTI+ activist participant:

> *The LGBTI+ movement in Turkey also needs to be able to say something about the democratic resolution of the Kurdish issue, [to clarify] their perceptions on this matter and to put their policies on the agenda, at least in certain areas. In other words, making a website in Kurdish is not an effective thing on its own... I mean, among your employees, those you employ, the activities that you do... How do you approach the Kurdish issue or the Kurdish existence, how engaged are you?* [104]

Criticisms have been voiced for many years about representation of Kurdish *lubunyas* in the movement, the movement's inclusiveness of Kurdish *lubunyas* and its embrace of the Kurds' demand for equality.[105] For this reason, Kurdish LGBTI+ activists have been establishing self-led organizations to make policies reflecting their demands for peace more visibly. Nonetheless, they continue to work for the transformation of the LGBTI+ movement in Turkey. The Kurdish LGBTI+ community organized events in the region involving activists and institutions from the west of the country,[106] shared experiences at Istanbul Pride Week,[107] and conducted research on the continuum of violence against LGBTI+ people in the region.[108]

The peace process and the opportunities discussed above created by the Gezi resistance have indeed opened up a space for LGBTI+ organizations to establish important partnerships around peace and to discuss an inclusive LGBTI+ peace. Critics of the movement point out, however, that there is not always room for those who raise the demands of Kurdish *lubunyas*. Of course, it is not possible to talk about a monolithic LGBTI+ existence, and it is not possible to talk about a homogeneous LGBTI+ movement where all components have the same (queer) politics. However, this criticism directed by the Kurdish LGBTI+ community to a movement that has long embraced the discourse of societal peace is vital.

The reason why the LGBTI+ movement does not raise its voice louder on the Kurdish issue is beyond the scope of this study. Although the ground opened up by Gezi and the peace process seems important for internal discussions on this issue (keep in

104 Interview no. 6, 15-18.02.2021, online.

105 Remzi Altunpolat, *Kürt Fobisinden Kurtulmak, Dayanışmayı İnşa Etmek* (Letting Go of Kurdish-phobia, Building Solidarity), *Kaos GL*, January 4, 2011; Sever, supra n. 44; Yıldız Tar, *Şugariyet ve madilik*, *Kaos GL*, November 6, 2020; Figen Güneş & Meral Candan, *"Ne yalnızız ne de yanlış"* (Neither lonely nor wrong), taz.gazete, June 25, 2020.

106 Zerşin Nazlı, *Keskesor LGBTİ+ kamp düzenledi* (Keskesor LGBTI+ holds retreat), *Kaos GL,* October 1, 2018.

107 *Onur Haftası'nda "işgal altında LGBTİ olmak" tartışıldı* ("Being LGBTI under occupation" discussion at Pride Week), *Kaos GL,* June 27, 2016.

108 For a significant example, see Atalay Göçer & Aysel Fidan, *Savaşta ve Barışta LGBTİ+'lar : Geçiş Dönemi Adaletine Diyarbakır'dan Bakmak* (LGBTI+s in War and Peace: A Gaze at Transitional Justice from Diyarbakır), *DEMOS Research Association,* 2021.

mind the LGBTI Peace Initiative's self-criticism mentioned above), it is understood that the end of the process and the developments in its aftermath described below have proven an obstacle for the LGBTI+ movement in finalizing these internal discussions. Moreover, it should be noted that studies focusing on the experiences of Kurdish lubunyas are few and far between. The areas where the stance of the LGBTI+ movement is openly discussed in the context of the Kurdish issue are also limited; it is possible to observe that those that exist were created as a result of recent efforts by Kurdish lubunyas. In other words, the establishment of safe spaces where the promise of the LGBTI+ movement regarding peace and the Kurdish issue can be discussed from a place centered on Kurdish LGBTI+ experiences with connected studies focusing on this issue emerges as important needs.

VI. "Something like war": The Impacts of War and Authoritarianism on the Joint Struggle for Peace

A. From Blockades to the Criminalization of Peace

The resumption of conflict combined with increasing authoritarianism severely undermined the gains made during the ceasefire period. More than one participant who was active during the peace process stated that they could hardly remember many of the actions of that period. One of the LGBTI+ activists we interviewed described the HDP crossing the electoral threshold and the Suruç explosion as a "wrecking ball"[109] smashing the opportunities opened up during the ceasefire period.

However, according to the participants, the resumption of the conflict did not immediately end the struggle for peace. The belief that the peace process could resume continued for a while. Meanwhile, women's and LGBTI+ organizations fighting for peace focused on putting pressure on the state for the resumption of negotiations and voiced their stance from this perspective. One of the clearest examples of this is the LGBTI Peace Initiative, which was established in 2015 to amplify the voice of peace. In its founding declaration, the initiative states:

> *"We want an immediate return to the resolution grounds where guns were laid down and we spoke of politics. During the Gezi resistance, we grasped the power of talking with each other, listening to each other and making contact. This is why today we say "no more!" to the deafening drums of war. A democratic resolution to the Kurdish question is possible through politics, talking, listening and understanding in peace. The deaths of soldiers, policemen, guerrillas and*

109 Interview no. 3, 08.02.2021, online.

civilians must stop immediately. We know that as the language of peace – free from violence – comes to the fore, war enthusiasts will grieve and humanity will win.[110]

Although it was difficult to take action at that time, campaigns and street protests were organized for peace. For example, during the blockades, BIKG said "We are in favor of life, not death!" and started a petition "One Thousand Women for Peace" with the title "We Defend Our Right to Peace and Truth" and held a peace vigil in Diyarbakır in February 2016.[111] More than 500 women from different parts of Turkey came together with the women of the Free Women's Congress (Kongreya Jinên Azad, KJA)[112] and the Peace Mothers in Diyarbakır for this vigil.[113] At that time, the blockade was ongoing in many places and a press release of BIKG, who initiated the peace vigil, was read in Turkish and Kurdish and stated that women were the witnesses of the war and were on guard against the war:

> *We have come from cities besieged by lies to be the voice of cities and neighborhoods besieged by tanks and artillery. We are here because we refuse to turn our backs on justice, truth, life and peace. We are here because we rebel against those who dehumanize the streets, those who are hostile to life, and those who think justice consists only of power.*[114]

Handan Çağlayan draws attention to the fact that during the heat of battle, BIKG struggled both to draw attention to the

1000 Women for Peace gathering, Kadıköy, 2016
Source: Sendika.org

110 LGBT Barış Girişimi yola çıkıyor, supra n. 86.
111 *'Barışa bin kadın 1000 imza' kampanyası sürüyor* ('1000 women for peace' petition continues), *Yeşil Gazete,* January 26, 2016.
112 KJA was established in 2015 as the umbrella organization of Kurdish women, and closed down in 2016 by decree.
113 Çiçek Tahaoğlu, *Diyarbakır'dan Barış Nöbeti Notları* (Notes from Diyarbakır Peace Vigil), *Bianet,* February 7, 2016.
114 Çiçek Tahaoğlu, *13 İlden Kadınlar Barış İçin Diyarbakır'da Buluştu* (Women from 13 Cities Met in Diyarbakır for Peace), *Bianet,* February 6, 2016.

destruction in the region and to show solidarity with the women in the conflict area.[115] This peace vigil was conducted under the sounds of explosions while the conflict raged on in Sur. It is very important in this sense.

The state of emergency declaration following the coup attempt in July 2016 created a serious breaking point in the peace struggle that affected many segments of society. **As the interviews show, the complete loss of hope for peace coincides with the state of emergency, not the end of the ceasefire.** The demand for peace was one of the most attacked and criminalized demands during the state of emergency. This period played an important role in shaping the experiences of women who weren't in a conflict zone and were struggling for peace. A feminist researcher put it this way:

> *"The period of fighting merged with the coup attempt. Then came the issue of the Academics for Peace. From there, many women who were also involved in [a peace platform] entered the litigation phase. So, somehow that conflict got a lot bigger and it happened...we stopped being women watching a war pass us by from the outside. In an instant, the scope of the war expanded.*[116]

Indeed, punishment and pressure against the Academics for Peace was one of the important factors that hindered the peace struggle, especially in the west. A situation where "even the use of the word peace is equated to committing a terrorist act"[117] points to a completely different reality than the environment during the ceasefire. As a matter of fact, while the participants mentioned that many people who were involved in the peace effort at the time were concerned that they would be detained or arrested if they talked about peace. A feminist researcher we interviewed stated that those concerns have not changed much today.[118]

The systematic violation and prevention of freedom of expression and the right to assembly and demonstration by state forces together with the state of emergency made it difficult to raise one's voice for peace. For example, the Ankara Governor's ban as of November 2017 on all types of LGBTI+ activities directly affected the field and forms of activity.[119] The fact that peace activities were self-censored and invisible, not only in the context of street protests but also in areas that would attract less attention such as email groups, brought

115 Çağlayan, supra n. 20.
116 Interview no. 7, 24.02.2021, online.
117 Interview no. 2, 03-06.02.2021, online.
118 Interview no. 7, 24.02.2021, online.
119 For the practical ongoing effects of two prohibitions lifted by the court verdicts, see Kerem Dikmen, *Ankara Yasakları Bitti Mi?* (Are Ankara Prohibitions Over?), *LGBTİ+'ların Hukuk Gündemine (İçeriden) Bir Bakış: 2019-2020* (A(n Insider) Look into the Legal Agenda of LGBTI+s: 2019-2020), *SPoD,* 2020.

about an obligatory silence. As social media, which was the most effective method for organizing and announcing activities, had become risky, the practice of self-censorship on social media posts made it almost impossible to organize and call for events in the field of peace. An LGBTI+ activist described this situation as follows:

> *When we could not carry out the activities we had easily done during the peace process, we had to change our way of organizing. We had to stop posting our events online and on social media because the police were flooding the venue before us, at our own events. It was something like war.*[120]

Controversies such as the coup attempt, the state of emergency period, the closing of NGOs, and the academics who lost their jobs or were prosecuted for being peace signatories made it almost impossible to continue the call and struggle for peace in an organized manner. During this period, Kurdish politicians and activists, including many women, were detained. At the same time, many people who took part in the peace struggle or supported the peace initiative faced the reality or risk of losing their jobs, being taken to court or having to move abroad. Vital issues such as survival and security made it difficult to speak up on behalf of the peace agenda.

In addition to these, it should be noted that punishment for waging a political struggle related to the Kurdish issue is not a new development for the Kurds, those living in Kurdish regions and those active in the Kurdish movement. Punishing the struggle for peace and democracy and trying to suppress it with violence and oppression has a long and storied history. Kurdish politicians and social movements such as the Peace Mothers and the Saturday Mothers have been fighting for peace for years despite this. However, for those who became politicized during the peace process, participated in the peace struggle during this period, and were involved in the Kurdish issue and a wider range of issues pertaining to the Kurdish region and the Kurdish issue at that time, this intense pressure was a new experience. As we mentioned in section II, the way these people experience war is significantly different from the way those living in conflict areas experience it.

Although oppressive policies affect the whole country and the effects of authoritarianism and violence go beyond the borders of Kurdish geography, the way this is experienced, its intensity and reactions to it are different in the west of the country. As an example, on January 4, 2016, three Kurdish women politicians, Seve Demir, Fatma Uyar and Pakize Nayır, were killed in Silopi where the blockade

120 Interview no. 3, 08.02.2021, online.

was ongoing.[121] On January 11, 2016, Academics for Peace undersigned a declaration stating that, "We will not be a party to this crime!" and demand an end to the hostilities. Immediately afterwards they were targeted by both the government and media close to it and what followed was a lynch campaign, dismissals and lawsuits.[122] Among those who signed the declaration were academics who were present in organizations engaged in the struggle for peace. As such, the government's war policies were harshly targeting different parts and segments of the country. However, while those who raised their voices against the war outside of the Kurdish geography were punished with a kind of "civic death", those in the Kurdish geography experienced both civic death and direct armed conflict and the militarization of daily life.

B. Withdrawal, Conservation, Survival

According to the participants, these intense attacks against the social opposition and civil space together with the conflict and the state of emergency led women and LGBTI+ organizations to struggle for their existence and survival. When government trustees were appointed to the HDP municipalities, they terminated all women's projects in the city. When presidential decrees ordered the closure of women's organizations including the KJA, it had a direct impact on the narrowing of safe spaces women struggled to build and aggravated the impact of the conflict on all women in the region. The rising militarism and nationalism that came with the closure of non-governmental organizations where women could once safely get support in various areas--from violence against women to finding a job--caused women to stay away from the public sphere. A participant from the KWM stated that this was closely related to the increase in sexist policies during periods of conflict.[123] In addition, the repeated arrests and detentions of Kurdish women politicians and activists made it too difficult to properly maintain an organization:

> *"We are actually struggling for our existence, honestly. I mean, our survival... Let's put it this way: a wave of arrests starts, all our friends are taken under police custody, they get arrested, they are put in detention... And then new-comers start trying to understand how to organize and how to conduct fieldwork, what relationships they can develop and what they can achieve... But before you know it, another wave starts.*[124]

Another reason for the focus on survival

121 Hatice Kamer, *Silopi'de üç kadın siyasetçi öldürüldü* (Three female politicians killed in Silopi), *BBC News Türkçe*, January 6, 2016.

122 *Barış İçin Akademisyenler Vakasının Kısa Tarihi: 11 Ocak 2016-11 Ocak 2019* (Short History of the Case of Academics for Peace: January 11, 2016 - January 11, 2019), TİHV Akademi, 2019.

123 Interview no. 9, 25.03.2021, written response.

124 Interview no. 1, 30.01.2021, online.

is the constant attack on the most basic achievements of women and LGBTI+ activist work. Movements that could place issues such as honorable peace and democratic autonomy on their agenda a few years ago now have to focus on issues such as sexual abuse, child support payment rights and the Istanbul Convention. As one LGBTI+ activist put it, the LGBTI+ movement is compelled to defend its very existence in an "undeclared war"[125] waged against LGBTI+ people by the government. And this causes LGBTI+ communities to focus on preserving their existing organizations instead of growing larger. In the face of gender-based violence, which has become more intense and diverse in recent years in Turkey,[126] the phrase "struggle for survival" is literal for many women and LGBTI+ individuals.

> *As a matter of fact, several participants described violence against women and those who identify as LGBTI+ as "war." As a result of the intersection of attacks against both the struggles for peace and gender rights, those individuals and institutions fighting in both areas feel as if they are in the middle of a kind of conflict procedure. For example, a feminist involved in peacebuilding politics stated that "the dose and forms of violence in daily femicides are highly similar to war tactics."*[127]

As previously mentioned in section IV, it is understood that many participants experienced the peace process as a period of heightened visibility for LGBTI+ identity. Conflict and authoritarianism, on the other hand, brought along a process in which LGBTI+ people were prevented from expressing their identities openly and freely. As a matter of fact, on the days we conducted the interviews, protests at Boğaziçi University continued and LGBTI+ students were heavily targeted, being detained on the grounds of carrying the rainbow flag.[128] These attacks and violations against LGBTI+ identity were also brought up in the interviews. According to a Kurdish LGBTI+ activist living in the diaspora, as a result of the violence and language of conflict, as well as the marginalization of LGBTI+ identifying individuals, many *lubunyas* became afraid of coming out. The same participant explained the glaring difference between the peace process, where visibility and organization increased, and the conflict period as follows:

> *We witnessed a change and transformation in those spaces which opened up during peacetime: LGBTI+ organizing spaces, those in the sphere of a free existence, and even those who aren't LGBTI+. But now*

125 Interview no. 3, 08.02.2021, online.

126 Alev Özkazanç, *Deniz Kandiyoti ile Söyleşi 1: Eril restorasyon ve toplumsal cinsiyet krizinin keskinleşmesi* (Interview with Deniz Kandiyoti 1: Restoration of masculinity and the sharpening gender crisis), *Kısa Dalga*, February 26, 2020.

127 Interview no. 2, 03-06.02.2021, online.

128 *Boğaziçi: Gökkuşağı bayrağı taşıyan öğrencilere gözaltı* (Boğaziçi: Students detained for carrying rainbow flags), *DW Türkçe,* March 25, 2021.

non-LGBTI+ people who harbor a positive attitude can change their minds when they see fit; it can turn into a language of violence, a language of conflict, a language of hatred.[129]

C. Introversion of Movements

The fact that the movements have turned inwards is perhaps one of the most important problems caused by conflict and authoritarianism. It is understood that it has become difficult for both LGBTI+ organizations and women's organizations to develop policies in unison and that common areas are restricted. In our interviews, it was frequently mentioned that organization and contact areas decreased, gatherings disappeared, that everyone had withdrawn into their own worlds or had physically moved to other parts of the world.

One important reason for the decrease in alliances was the isolation policies directed towards the Kurdish movement in general and the KWM in particular. It was stated that politically active Kurdish women were specifically targeted by the state, and that in the west of the country, institutions where Kurdish women collaborated with the feminist, socialist, ecology, democracy and freedom movements, as well as the Turkish women's movements in general were de facto disbanded.[130] This is also reflected in the relationship established vis a vis the KWM, feminist, and women's movements. With the rise of oppression and fear, those movements that were able to collaborate on policy-making during the ceasefire diverged. One participant, a women's rights activist, stated that this is understandable and is part of the state's policy to isolate women and youth.[131] It is understood that in order to isolate the Kurdish movement, punishing those who stand in solidarity with them as well as those who voice their demand for peace, even with a signature, is the adopted state policy and, as a result, has become a type of sequestering not only of Kurds but of different social movements as well. According to the same participant;

> *"In other words, it was brought to that stage... In fact, if you were on the side of the Kurds you were committing a crime. That's why you stay away, keep your distance, don't talk, don't show your support for this struggle... In other words, a process, a period that segregates peoples has started. In that sense, it was a little isolating. For example, trustees were first appointed to the municipalities in the region, right? But now it has actually expanded. There are trustees everywhere, not just at Boğaziçi University.*[132]

129 Interview no. 8, 10.03.2021, online.
130 Interview no. 9, 25.03.2021, online.
131 Interview no. 1, 30.01.2021, online.
132 Interview no. 1, 30.01.2021, online.

According to some participants, the onset of the conflict had the effect of deepening divisions within the civil sphere. After the conflict began again, tensions that could be resolved without escalating during the peace process were now experienced more intensely. They stated that the democratic relations established by NGOs and opposition movements both among themselves and with one another have been damaged. Segments which were not afraid to act together before started to shy away from each other with the escalation of authoritarianism, according to a participant who is a rights defender:

> *Because that's how war is. The conditions of fascism, the war... it spreads unnoticed to every segment of society ... Here's why people rat out on each other. There is a rise of informants, even among lubunyas. What's more, the party that I espouse and vote for said "stand aside, we've got more pressing issues" [than LGBTI+ issues]. After that, in the previous election, bigger names and more popular candidates were put forward with a lot of fanfare, now that's all on the back burner. That's why it wasn't even mentioned at all in the municipal elections.*[133]

With the increase in authoritarianism, the overlaps between the feminist and LGBTI+ movements, which had established various ties and fed off of each other over the years, appear to have decreased in comparison to the period of non-conflict. It seems that there is not as much room left for coalition-building as there was in the de-escalation period. A feminist involved inpeacebuilding politics states that the natural areas of contact between groups have been decreasing for some time and that this has sharpened dramatically with the pandemic:

> *The mobilization of the past, namely the 2000s, is completely absent. Therefore, there are no contact areas. In the past, there were more overlaps because these organizations existed and they were all neighbourly. That's why there were so many areas of contact. Women and LGBTI+ organizations, feminist and LGBTI+ organizations shared a common space.*[134]

However, the LGBTI+ movement voices their demands for solidarity with other social movements and organizations, including the feminist movement, more loudly.[135] The movement expresses that LGBTI+ people are being abandoned at times amidst targeting that declares them the reason for withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention.[136]

It appears as if the social distancing

133 Interview no. 4, 14.02.2021, online.
134 Interview no. 2, 03.06.02.2021, online.
135 Sibel Yükler, *Şimdi Tam da Sırası* (Now is the Right Time), *Kaos GL Association*, 2020.
136 Ali Erol, *İstanbul Sözleşmesi'nin feshi kamu temsilcilerini ferahlatmıyor (!)* (The termination of the Istanbul Convention does not relieve the public representatives), *Kaos GL*, April 29, 2021.

due to the pandemic has made the issue of alliances even more difficult. Trans-exclusionary feminism and LGBTI+ inclusiveness in the pro-Istanbul Convention campaigns, a couple of the more important issues of the last period, were carried out via social media to a large extent. Although it is possible to get the impression that the bond between the movements has weakened by looking at discussions on social media, the participants stated that the discussions on inclusivity and intersectionality opened up a learning space especially for cis feminist women, and the ties between them grew stronger.

Although it seems quite difficult to establish a strong peace struggle under existing conditions, and the areas of contact between the movements are scarce, there is a belief that even stronger coalitions will be forged when conditions become more amenable. Reasons cited by the participants for this optimism include the opportunity offered by this intersectional organizational learning area, the LGBTI+ visibility seen in the March 8th marches, and the organization of many young *lubunyas*/ women within the framework of feminist politics.[137] Many young LGBTI+ people and women fighting for their rights and freedoms organized around feminist and queer politics after the peace process ended and even after the state of emergency. The robust struggle in defense of the gains won by women and LGBTI+ organizing as well as the increase in mobilization lead us to believe there is space for organizing together in the demand for peace. The reasons that united people for peace in the past are still valid today, perhaps even more bitterly so. For these reasons, it should be emphasized that the potential exists for common social opposition to be strengthened rapidly at even the slightest hint of political viability.

137 Interview no. 5, 17.02.2021, online.

VII. Conclusion and Recommendations

This report provided us with the opportunity to look in detail at the work of the women's and LGBTI+ organizations that played an important role in mobilizing a grassroots demand for peace. We believe that this study is a step towards filling an existing research gap in the field despite the availability of such rich accounts and experiences. Especially in this current challenging climate, when the demand for peace has become inaudible and the voice of peace efforts has been silenced, investigating the conditions of those times when the call was strong can provide an important guide for the future.

The interviews held within the study reveal a dominant approach to peace with a feminist perspective on the continuum of violence at the fore. In this view, violence against women and LGBTI+ people is not limited to periods of conflict, and the demand for peace includes not only silencing the guns, but also a struggle for equality, freedom and democracy. It is the struggle for democracy and the struggle against patriarchy that enable alliances to be built around the demand for peace. Participants' adoption of an intersectional approach reinforces the demand for peace in coalitions based on the fact that systems such as militarism, sexism, racism and cisheterosexism all reinforce one another. Nevertheless, careful attention is paid to ensure that the unification of different organizations around the demand for peace does not obscure the experiences of Kurdish women and LGBTI+ individuals directly affected by the conflict. Another prominent point in the understanding of peace for LGBTI+ organizations is that LGBTI+ activists see making peace with themselves as part of the struggle for societal peace. This also plays a role in them seeing themselves as actors in this struggle.

One of our motivations in conducting this study was to see the struggle waged in the peace process through the eyes of the women and LGBTI+ actors involved. In doing so, we saw that the boundaries of the peace process, which were official and according to many publications between 2013 and 2015, were not so clear for the actors. This suggests that the peace struggle was not only limited to the start and end dates of the peace process as officially announced. For example, even though the peace process was over, the hope of reviving the peace process was preserved until the state of emergency. The peace struggle was shaped around this hope. In addition, the ceasefire during the peace process offered LGBTI+ and women's organizations an opportunity to grow closer. When the space created by the peace process was combined with the Gezi resistance that took place in the same period, a very vibrant space opened up for social movements, greatly increasing opportunities for contact and alliances. LGBTI+ and women's organizations were able to express their demands for peace more potently. This period, in which women's organizations came together under the urgent demand of peace, played an energizing role in improving autonomous organization and visibility for the LGBTI+ movement. During the peace process, women and LGBTI+ organizations carried out peace efforts using many different methods and tools, achieving various gains.

Meaningful participation in the official negotiation process was at the forefront of the objectives of this period. The inclusion of a woman on the negotiation delegation and the establishment of the KÖM were two very important victories towards this goal.

The organizations we interviewed within the scope of the research had points of both agreement and divergence about the demand for peace. The main components of their common ground are those platforms in which women and LGBTI+ people from different political backgrounds and identities coalesce. BIKG and the LGBTI Peace Initiative emerged as two important organizations that ensured the establishment of bonds around the demand for peace. Although common grounds were established in these organizations through a political framework based on being an actor for peace, we understood that there were discussions about the methods used in raising the demand for peace on occasion. However, organizations sometimes chose not to bring up the differences in gender policies in order to more easily cooperate in the demand for peace. For example, sexuality is rarely discussed outside of the context of violence, which can serve as erasure for certain LGBTI+ identities. But debates about it have the potential to play a transformative role.

The resumption of the conflict in the summer of 2015 and the rapidly

deepening authoritarianism seen within a short time span significantly affected the gains achieved in the peace process. LGBTI+ and women's organizations involved in the peace struggle focused on putting pressure on the state for the resumption of negotiations and organized campaigns for this purpose for a time. During the period of blockades in Kurdish cities, women focused on both making the destruction there visible and on building solidarity with those affected by the conflict. The attempted coup in July 2016 and the state of emergency that followed made it very difficult to maintain the demand for peace. As a result of the criminalization of peace, vital issues such as security and survival have become urgent agendas for many LGBTI+ and women's organizations active in the peace struggle. Parallel to this, intense attacks on civic space forced LGBTI+ and women's organizations to struggle for their existence and survival. The peace agenda is forcibly left behind. One of the most important problems caused by that period and continuing still is the introversion of both LGBTI+ and women's organizations, leading to challenges in producing joint politics and a decrease in their areas of contact. As of March 2020, the mandatory physical distance that emerged due to the pandemic made it even more difficult to connect socially and to cooperate. However, this has not deterred women and lubunyas from getting together. Many people, especially from the younger generation, are coming together and organizing in the face of attacks on the gains of women and LGBTI+ activism. Considering that the reasons for mobilizing alliances around the demand for peace are still hot, it is clear that these groups will recoup and reorganize the peace struggle the moment the political environment allows.

This research and our previous studies[138] show that it is essential for women and lubunyas to act jointly to see that their needs are heard as part of the demands in the struggle, and to ensure their participation as actors in peace processes. Although the political conditions make it very difficult to focus on the peace struggle at the moment, it is also very important to increase the contact areas between these movements for any potential future peace process. The period we are currently in presents a unique opportunity for LGBTI+ and women's organizations, who often come from different ideologies, understandings of gender, and styles of politics and who keep their faith in the importance of the peace struggle to think together on ways to unify with rapid and concrete demands around peace.

138 Güneş Daşlı, Nisan Alıcı & Julia Poch Figueras, *Barış ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet: Kolombiya Barış Süreci* (Peace and Gender: Colombian Peace Process), *DEMOS Research Association*, 2018.

One fundamental way of increasing this contact is to bring organized people in these movements together physically, in safety, and free from concern about shortage of resources. Many participants we interviewed stated that the areas for coming together that formed spontaneously and easily a few years ago are now very difficult to achieve. For this reason, a good method could be to organize trips, retreats and facilitating organizations that focus on creating these spaces. Many human rights defenders face oppression and risks on a daily basis, and women and LGBTI+ activists are no exception. Support centered on the well-being of activists should be a key consideration while creating these spaces. A major area for support that might prove useful in this period could be to look at what activists who previously organized for peace currently need in their struggle for fundamental rights and freedoms.[139]

Many young LGBTI+ activists and women fighting for their rights and freedoms mobilized after the peace process had ended and even after the state of emergency. This indicates that they experienced processes such as the criminalization of peace, preserving their existence, and introversion without the benefits of the ceasefire period. Despite this (or maybe exactly because of this), the struggle for equality and democracy among young women and LGBTI+ youth is strong. Young people may not remember the days when the word "peace" could be uttered without instant legal investigation, not surprising considering that even the participants who built the peace discourse had difficulty remembering those days. Therefore, remembering, sharing and reflecting on the experiences of women and LGBTI+ organizations in the peace process could pave the way for reuniting around the demand for peace under these new and different conditions. It can serve as a road map, especially for young women and LGBTI+ youth, to take part in the struggle.

This report, which observes the peace efforts of LGBTI+ and women's organizations by focusing on the peace process, is first and foremost an attempt to revive the memory. We believe that remembering, reflecting on and recognizing such complex experience and knowledge had an empowering effect both for those of us who conducted the research and for the participants. In addition, one of the prominent needs of this period is to strengthen the actors in the peace struggle through tools such as reflection, research and experience sharing on the ways and methods of doing peace work as the conflict continues and while living under an authoritarian regime. We hope that this

139 For a comprehensive assessment on the challenges faced by the civil society and human rights defenders in Turkey, and what can be done about them, see The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders & Human Rights Association, *Turkey's Civil Society on the Line: A Shrinking Space for Freedom of Association*, 2021.

study will be one such tool for those who participated in the research and for those who read the report, helping them to find the strength to think and act together towards this shared goal.