IMAGINING PEACE AND CONFLICT:

THE KURDISH CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN DIYARBAKIR

by

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ABSTRACT

IMAGINING PEACE AND CONFLICT:

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This study is an attempt to give voice to the Kurdish children and young people in Diyarbakır, and to explore their peace images and conflict perceptions. Motivated by the assumption that peace in Southeastern Turkey would have to involve not only willingness of the youth in the region, but also their ability to imagine peace and to act as peace-builders at grassroots, it seeks to understand their perceptions and interpretations of the current conflict based on their every day experiences and observations, and accordingly to highlight their expectations from a future peace process through the use of focus group methodology. In this respect it also aims to highlight and guide further research and initiatives that needs to be undertaken about and with youth.

The research reveals that the peace definitions of young Kurds basically evolve around not only having both having equal citizenship rights (socially, politically, economically and in their relations with the state) in Turkey, but also having constructive relations with the Turks at a societal level. It also reveals that, in addition to being victims of the conflict environment in multiple ways in their everyday life, they are also social and political actors that play a multiplicity of roles. Finally the research suggests that the children and youth of Diyarbakır, for the time being, are willing to take on constructive responsibilities to contribute to a peace process at the grassroots level, drawing attention to the need for research and initiatives that promote their involvement and empowerment.

Keywords: Kurdish question, children, youth, peace, conflict, empowerment, focus group method

ÖZET

BARIŞI VE ÇATIŞMAYI İMGELEMEK

DİYARBAKIR'DAKİ KÜRT ÇOCUKLAR VE GENÇLER

Zeynep Başer

Uyuşmazlık Analizi ve Çözümü Programı, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2011

Danışman: Doç. Dr. Ayşe Betül Çelik

Bu çalışma Diyarbakır'da yaşayan Kürt çocukların seslerini duyulur kılmayı, ve barışa ilişkin hayalleriyle çatışmaya ilişkin algılarını araştırma amacı taşıyor. Çalışma, Güneydoğu'da barışın sağlanabilmesinin gençlerin bu yöndeki gönüllü isteklerinin yanı sıra aynı zamanda barışı hayal edebilme ve barış inşasında rol alabilme yetileriyle mümkün olabileceği varsayımından hareket ediyor. Bu doğrultuda, odak grup yöntemini kullanarak çocuk ve gençlerin günlük hayata ilişkin tecrübeleri ve gözlemleri çerçevesinde şu an içinde bulunulan çatışmaya ilişkin algılarıyla yorumlarını anlamayı, ve gelecekte oluşacak bir barış sürecine ilişkin beklentilerini aydınlatmayı amaçlıyor. Bu açıdan çalışma aynı zamanda bölgede gençlere yönelik gerçekleştirilmesi gerekli diğer araştırma alanlarını aydınlatmayı ve gençlerle birlikte gerçekleştirilmesi gerekli barış müdahalelerine rehberlik etme amacı da taşımakta.

Çalışma, genç Kürtlerin barış tanımlarının temel olarak Türkiye'de (sosyal, siyasi, ekonomik ve devletle ilişkileri açısından) eşit vatandaşlık sahibi olmanın yanı sıra, Türklerle toplumsal düzeyde yapıcı ilişkiler kurmayı da içerdiğini gösteriyor. Bunun yanısıra, bir yandan çatışma ortamından kaynaklanan ve günlük hayatta çeşitli şekillerde ortaya çıkan mağduriyetlerini ortaya koyarken, aynı zamanda birer sosyal ve siyasal aktör olarak oynadıkları rollere işaret ediyor. Son olarak, çalışma Diyarbakırlı çocuk ve gençlerin, yapıcı sorumluluklar alarak halk düzeyinde barış sürecine katkı sağlama yönündeki isteklerini ortaya koyuyor, ve bu doğrultuda katılılımlarını ve güçlendirilmelerini sağlama yönünde gerçekleştirilmesi gerekli araştırma ve girişimlerin gerekliliğine dikkat çekiyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kürt Sorunu, çocuklar, gençlik, barış, çatışma, güçlendirme, odak grup yöntemi

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

This study is an attempt to explore the peace imaginations of the Kurdish children and youth in Diyarbakır. It seeks to understand their perceptions and interpretations of the conflict currently taking place in the context of Turkey's Kurdish Question, based on their every day experiences and observations, and accordingly to highlight their expectations from a future peace process.

Kurdish children and youth have become increasingly more visible in the Turkish media and public discourse in the recent years particularly due to their increasing presence at the forefront of mass demonstrations celebrating the PKK and its leader Öcalan. The representations of the Kurdish children in the context of Turkey's Kurdish Question have been either as one of perpetrators (as "stone throwing children" that support a terrorist organization and continuation of violence), or as one of victims (of police violence, state terror, structural problems, families and finally of justice mechanisms). What has been missing from these debates and discussions are the voices and perspectives of the children and young people themselves. Furthermore, those children who participate in the demonstrations are only the visible part of the problem; the perspectives, experiences of victimhood and agency of many others who also have to live with the present everyday realities and hardships of the conflict, and of especially young women, are completely invisible from the present representations.

This research is an attempt to give voice to the Kurdish children and young people holistically. It adopts the theoretical conceptualization of children and young people as both 'being' and 'becoming' individuals in belief that such a conceptualization also proves useful for the study of youth in the context of conflicts; children constitute the most vulnerable category in the face of conflicts and conflict related phenomena and hence need special protective measures, and simultaneously, whether recognized by adults or not, they are also active social and political actors in their own right, playing a multiplicity of direct and indirect roles in a

conflict environment. Finally, as 'future adults' they are also important potential actors for the establishment of any sustainable peacebuilding process.

In this respect, the research is motivated by the assumption that peace in Southeastern Turkey would have to involve not only willingness of the youth in the region, but also their ability to imagine peace and the development of their skills and their empowerment as social actors to act as peace-builders. To that end, it also aims to highlight further areas of research regarding youth that needs to be undertaken in the region, and help guide those forms of peace interventions that need to be undertaken with youth. Accordingly, it will explore how children and young Kurds in Diyarbakır experience and interpret the current conflict in the light of their everyday realities, how they imagine peace, what they think about the attainability of and the means to achieve peace in the near future, and how they perceive their own present and future roles as agents in any attempts of peacebuilding and reconstruction in the region.

The study employs the use of consultative, less structured focus group methodology. The choice for this particular method has been made based on its exploratory potential for capturing the perspectives of young people in the context of their own experiences and worldviews. Taking into consideration the understudied nature of the subject in question, this loosely structured focus group format proves invaluable for exploring and identifying problems related to and perceived by Kurdish youth and conflict, and for generating hypotheses about new areas that need further investigation. Furthermore the choice for this method has also been based on its potential for empowering the youth by providing them with a voice on how they think and feel, and on its potential of production of knowledge for action which might help inform future normative practices and interventions.

The study is composed of four chapters. It starts with a review of the literature that, first, highlights the problems and debates associated with defining children and youth, and second, sets out to anchor the subject of and the rationale for the study in the literature on youth, conflict and peacebuilding, as well as on the present realities of Turkey's Kurdish Question. Finally, the scope of the current study is underlined based on insights from the literature in the final section. The second chapter aims to explain the focus group methodology used in research and aims to highlight both the rationale for the choice of this method by explaining its benefits and limitations, and the particular process through which this method has been applied in Diyarbakır. The third chapter presents first, an analysis of each of the focus groups conducted in Diyarbakır. Here each group is analyzed separately in order to be able to provide the views of the participants holistically and in the context of the interactions (agreements,

disagreements, comparisons) that were unique to each of the groups. Second, an analysis of the written feedback from the participants about the focus group discussions is provided, in belief that these both provide further insights about into their perceptions, thoughts, feelings and needs, and allows for an assessment of the impact of the discussion method and content on the participants. In the final fourth chapter a discussion of the findings is provided, while also outlining the possibilities for further research and interventions that need to be realized on and with children and youth in the future.

CHAPTER I | LITERATURE REVIEW

The present chapter provides a review of literature with two major aims. First, it seeks to anchor the subject of and the rationale for the study in the literature on youth, conflict and peacebuilding. To that end, it provides an overview of the literature (a) on the significance of focusing on children and youth in conflict settings, and (b) on the ways and means through which the perceptions of children and youth regarding peace and conflict are shaped. Second, the chapter also aims to anchor the research on the realities of Turkey's Kurdish Question. Accordingly, first an overview of the recent history of the conflict, as well as of the recent related political and social developments, is provided. Then, the situation of the Kurdish children in the context of the conflict as both victims and actors is reviewed.

Both these aims, however, cannot be realized without defining the subject under study, or in other words, what is meant by children and young people. In this respect the chapter starts with an overview of the problems of and debates in defining these contested and overlapping categories in the literature, while also explaining the definitions it succumbs to in undertaking the research. Finally, in the last section the scope of the current study is underlined in the light of insights from the literature.

1.1 Definitional Problems: The Categories of Childhood and Youth

As a universal age group, a child is defined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) as "every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier" (1989, Article 1). Similarly, youth is defined by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly as those individuals aged between 15 and 24.[1] Thus, according to international treaties, young people between the ages of 15 and 18 also fall under the legal category of children. These age-based, universal categorizations by international legal norms mainly stem from the recognition by the international community that children due to their physical and psychological immaturity, universally constitute a

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[1] See UN General Assembly, World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, A/50/81 (1999). This definition by UN however is not legally binding.

vulnerable category across different cultures and geographies and thus the necessity to devise special measures for protection (UNDP 2006).[2]

At the same time, however, there has been an increasing awareness that age-based, static conceptualizations that assume universal childhood and youth periods are biased towards modern Western experiences and Western ideologies of childhood. In this sense, these conceptualizations of 'modern child' - which also inform much of aid initiatives and social policy formulations - are inadequate in reflecting the experiences, conceptualizations and categorizations across different cultures and societies (UNDP 2006, Dawes and Cairns 1998). For example, historical and social processes of modernization, industrialization, urbanization, and schooling, which take place at different paces in different geographical settings, have necessitated an extension in the period of childhood and youth in many cultures.

Consequently, it has been increasingly acknowledged that both childhood and youth are *social constructs,* and that they take on different meanings across time and space. In this regard, a more universal, comparative categorization of youth has emerged, which defines it as a period of transition between the more established categories of childhood and adulthood; a transition that varies across cultures as well as across personal, institutional and macroeconomic contexts of particular societies (Neyzi 2001, UNDP 2006). This conceptualization of youth also echoes the prevailing 'becoming' child discourse, where children, notwithstanding the variances in socio-cultural contexts, are perceived to universally lack the skills and characteristics required to become adults, and hence are considered to be 'adults in the making' (Uprichard 2008, 304).

Nevertheless, critiques have suggested that this universal categorization of youth is not without its problems either. One issue is that these categorizations, despite their acknowledgement of the different socio-cultural contexts, nevertheless, promote definitions of childhood and youth as coherent social categories. In reality, this is rarely the case. Differences related to gender, class and ethnicity, even within same communities, might imply different processes of transition and hence different meanings, and experiences self perceptions for children and young people (UNDP 2006, UNDP 2008). However promotion of particular discourses and definitions of youth and childhood, often results at prioritizing the ideal definitions of these categories and thus renders invisible many of the mostly less advantaged groups in the public discourse. For example, a UNDP report (UNDP 2008, 13)

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[2] This is spelt out in the preamble of the CRC "Bearing in mind that … the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguard and care, including appropriate legal protection."

draws attention to how in the Turkish context government policy and media representations promote particular images of the young people as students, and therefore how other categories of young people such as the handicapped, street children, victims of drug trafficking, juvenile delinquents, young women who are neither working nor in education and so on, become invisible in the youth discourse.

The gender dimension proves especially important in this regard. The transition from childhood to adulthood for girls, in comparison to boys, is experienced in a different way in most societies, particularly in non-Western ones, due to the differences in cultural norms, societal expectations and personal aspirations based on gender roles. For most girls, unlike boys, youth is a time when they begin to experience new restrictions, and "the attitudes, behavior, conduct and, in particular, the sexuality of young women begin to be more closely watched, even 'policed'" (UNDP 2006, 17). Due to these restrictions, young women as they grow older, tend to be much less visible in the public spaces and become even invisible as social agents. As a result, the term 'young' in the public discourse of many different cultural contexts has come to be associated mostly with boys. For example, in literature on violence and conflict, studies regarding women and girls focus more on the direct and indirect violence perpetrated *against* them (such as rape, discrimination, etc) while in terms of agency and perpetration "many studies on youth and violence still implicitly or explicitly refer to young males" and omit girls (UNDP 2006, 17).

The second issue about the universal definitions of childhood and youth is about the categorization of youth as a transition phase, or of children as 'becoming' individuals. Much of the criticism in this regard, particularly in the context of the emerging paradigm for the sociology and anthropology of childhood, problematizes the discursive practices formed around childhood and youth, and the inherent power relations within societies between children/young people and adults based on age that help reproduce these discourses. In other words, critiques point out that the prevailing discourses around children and youth are constructed from the perspectives and aims of the power-holding adults rather than that of children and youth themselves.[3]

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[3] According to Jennifer Milliken (1999) there are three major ways of discourse productivity:

> "[First] discourses define *subjects authorized to speak and act*. … [Second] discourses also define *knowledgeable practices* by these subjects towards the objects which the discourse defines, rendering logical and proper interventions of different kinds, disciplining techniques and practices, and other modes of implementing a discursively constructed analysis. … Finally, of significance for the legitimacy of … practices is that discourses produce as subjects *publics*

First of all, these discourses around childhood - and youth - are explicitly future oriented, as a result of which "the onus of importance [is placed] on that which the child *will* be, rather that which the child *is*" (Uprichard 2008, 304, emphasis in original). That the children and young people, here and now, are individuals in their own right is ignored by such discursive formulations which conceptualize them as 'future adults', and as such the present everyday realities of childhood and youth are either ignored or downplayed or distorted since seen from futuristic lenses (Uprichard 2008).

Second, the futuristic orientation of these dominant discourses of transition and 'becoming' is based on constructions of children and young people as incomplete, dependent and incompetent subjects, vis-à-vis competent adults. Children and young people are assumed to lack the psychological development, knowledge, rationality, skills and experience that adults are assumed to possess, which implies that adults must decide for them and educate them until they become competent and socially acceptable individuals within their communities (Uprichard 2008, Kurtaran et al. 2006, Lloyd-Smith and Tarr 2000). Furthermore, in these prevailing discourses, children especially, are also equated with innocence and vulnerability, and hence portrayed as in need of protection by adults who in return are responsible for developing the necessary policies and practices to mold them (De Boeck and Honwana 2005, 3, Lloyd-Smith and Tarr 2000, Aries 1962 cited in Gürbilek 2001, 47).

These categorizations and understandings of youth and childhood prove important, for they also inform (and are informed by) much of the social policy, practices and norms concerning children and young people - including the international norms mentioned above, but also national and local policies and practices (McDonald 2009). They affect how youth are viewed and treated within the societies and by the institutions in accordance with their respective norms - either as creative or destructive forces - while also shaping the ways in which young people feel about themselves and their value in society (Smith, et al. 2005). [4]

The difficult and often problematic distinction made between categories of children and youth in public discourses is an important example for understanding the influence of normative 'adult' perspectives on constructing categories and developing related practices.

(audiences) for authorized actors and their *common sense* of the existence … and of how public officials should act for them and in their name (eg. to secure the state, to aid others)" (Milliken 1999, 229, my emphasis).

[4] For example, especially in the context of nationalist or developmentalist discourses childhood and youth as social categories are romanticized and instrumentalized vis-à-vis visions of utopia, (Neyzi 2001; Kurtaran 2006); they are defined to be potential safeguards of the future that need to be molded into virtuous citizens, and/or as sources for productive workforce and economic development.

Taking into consideration the difficulty of making clear-cut age distinctions between these two phases, particularly in terms of everyday experiences and self-representations as revealed by recent anthropological studies, the ways in which the terms "child" and "youth" are conventionally used as distinct, general categories is generally a complicating and a problematic factor (Comaroff and Comaroff 2005, McEvoy-Levy 2006). Regarding the use of the terms in the media, criminal justice, and advocacy discourse in the context of conflicts, McEvoy-Levy (2006, 4) observes that, while children are equated with victimization (for example, internally displaced children), youth are equated with perpetration (for example, a youth rioter). In other words, while children are idealized as innocent and good victims to be protected, the tendency is to castigate youth as problematic, dangerous troublemakers that need to be contained (also see Lüküslü 2005). However, ironically enough, both the 'victims' and the 'perpetrators' may belong to same age groups and sometimes even to same individuals, since a young person can both be a victim and a perpetrator. In this regards, these distinctions as put by McEvoy-Levy "reveal *not* empirical categories but *assumptions* about what is acceptable or unacceptable about 'our' children and 'their' children, assumptions that may be tied to foreign policy interests or gender stereotypes" (McEvoy-Levy 2006a, 4, my emphasis). [5]

Seen in these lights, there are several problems associated with the discourses around childhood and youth. On one hand, the futuristic orientation of childhood and youth categories, as well as the discourses around incompetency, imply that children and young people have to wait to become adults in order to contribute to the social life and gain equal rights and citizenship status within their societies (Kurtaran et al. 2006, Smith et al. 2005). Decisions regarding processes of exclusion and inclusion within societal systems are preserved for adults due to functions of power. In this regard, the social institutions of the system (such as state, economy, civil society, etc.) are defined as spaces for adult participation, and both children and young people are mostly excluded and marginalized from structures and institutions of political power sharing and agency (Comaroff and Comaroff 2005, Neyzi 2001). They are seen and treated, not as full citizens, but, in the words of T. H. Marshall, as "citizens in the making" (1950, 25, cited in Smith et al. 2005, 426). In this sense, not only adulthood but

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[5] Throughout this study, the words "children" and "young people" while referring to the subjects under study have been used interchangably, taking into consideration the difficulty of making clear cut distinction between these overlapping categories, and the meanings attributed to them. However it was observed that while the younger participants mostly refer to themselves as "children" (çocuklar) the older particpants have preferred mostly the use of the term "young people" (gençler). In this sense, I also tried to reflect their own perspectives of themselves and used the terms accordingly, especially in the analysis and discussion sections.

also citizenship becomes something that children and youth have to prepare for and 'become' in the future (Smith et al. 2005, Lister et al. 2003).[6]

On the other hand, the notion of children as 'incompetent' vis-à-vis adults also ignores that the notion of competency is context-dependent; a phenomenon that has received increasing attention recently in childhood and youth studies. In other words, whether children or adults are competent or incompetent is relative and depends on the situations that they face (Uprichard 2008, 305; also see Christensen and James 2000). In this respect, viewing children solely as passive, incompetent individuals undermines the multiple roles and agencies that they assume within wider social, political and economic contexts, and in the reconstruction of the everyday life. Such a conceptualization also ignores the views of children and young people themselves in understanding their own 'competency' vis-à-vis adults as well as their peers (Uprichard 2008, 305).[7]

In the recent decades in particular, the processes of globalization, technological development, neo-liberal economic policies, transnationalism, migration and the rise of identity politics have resulted in the reinvention of children and young people as active agents and actors within their societies. Despite their economic marginalization, young people have increasingly assumed economic responsibilities for maintaining families and communities (McEvoy-Levy 2006a, De Boeck and Honwana 2005). Furthermore, the rise of identity politics, as well as internal conflicts across the globe has resulted in mobilization and resistance of youth along political lines, and in this context, young people have assumed roles such as child soldiers, gang members, political activists, and so on. However, both their exclusion and marginalization from established institutional spaces, and the new advances in communication technologies brought about by the process of globalization (such as internet and satellite television) have also meant that this mobilization takes place in alternative spaces and forms of resistance invented by the youth (Neyzi 2001).

In the light of these observations, in the recent years the related studies in the fields of sociology, anthropology and psychology have increasingly focused on children and young

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[6] Osler and Starkey (2003), in the context of the United Kingdom, argue that the position of children in the official discourse and practice is one of "deficit model" of citizenship, which is based on the assumption that "young people are politically apathetic and ignorant of their rights and responsibilities" (cited in Smith et al. 2005: 426). I believe that the deficit model also applies to the Turkish case.

[7] Uprichard (2008) mentions how children view their "competence" vis-à-vis both adults and other children in relational terms. In one example she quotes a 10-year old: "I still need my parents, but they also kind of need me too – I mean, my mum doesn't know anything about computers or DVDs, so I have to tell her everything" (cited in 2008, 305)

people as social actors and as active agents who constantly engage in constructing their own social identities and social worlds (James and Prout 1997). These perspectives are critical of the temporality associated with the 'becoming' child/youth understandings, and instead argue that children and young people need to be seen and treated as 'beings', as individuals here and now. Accordingly, more and more emphasis has been placed on the need to listen to children's and young people's own perspectives, feelings, and thoughts of their experiences in order to develop policies that concern them, and the need for their empowerment and involvement in these processes.

A more recent development in this context has been the recognition of children and young people as *both* 'social actors' *and* 'adults in the making'. These perspectives attempt to bridge the 'children as beings' and "children as becoming" perspectives by drawing attention to how the biological, cognitive and social processes of development that the children and young people experience (i.e. the processes of 'becoming') constitutes an important part of their experience of 'being' children and young (Uprichard 2008, Qvortrup 2004). In the words of Uprichard, "'[L]ooking forward' to what a child 'becomes' is arguably an important part of 'being' a child" (2008, 306). Furthermore, it might as well be argued that because of the way the system is set around prevailing discourses, being and being treated as an 'adult in the making' also constitute an inevitable part of the everyday experience of children and young people, also shaping their identities and forms of agencies, as well as how they view themselves. It is in this light that James et al. (1998), argue that viewing children as social actors and beings does not need to leave out their experiences as 'becoming' individuals at the same time: "The 'being' child is not … static, for it too is in time. Thus there is no necessity to abandon ideas of past and future just because we have shifted from a conceptual framework that is predicated on becoming" (James et al. 1998, 207). Similarly, Uprichard (2008) further argues that theorizing children and young people solely as 'social actors' though promising in itself, is still problematic and incomplete. She argues that they should be seen both as "social actors" and also as "adults in the making" at the same time - as both 'being and 'becoming' individuals - for the two notions complete each other in providing a more holistic picture of what it means to be a child or a young person, which in return might also have important significance for designing more efficient and empowering policy formulations.

This study adopts the theoretical conceptualization of children and young people as both 'being' and 'becoming' individuals in the belief that such a conceptualization also proves useful for the study of youth in the context of conflicts. As will be explained below, children

and youth constitute the most vulnerable category in the face of conflicts and conflict related phenomena (such as poverty, hunger, etc.) and hence need special protective measures. At the same, whether recognized by adults or not, they are active political actors in their own right, and play a multiplicity of direct and indirect roles in a conflict environment. Finally, as 'future adults' they are also important potential actors for the establishment of any sustainable peacebuilding process. Seen in this light, such a conceptual framework ensures the recognition of both the vulnerability and the (existing and potential) agency of children in the context of conflicts. It might help guide research designs and policy making directed at both the protection and rehabilitation of children and young people affected by conflict, and their empowerment.

1.2 Conflict, Peacebuilding and Youth

1.2.1 The Importance of Studying Youth in Conflict Situations

Children and young people - together with women - constitute the most vulnerable category in conflict settings, as victims of direct (personal), structural (indirect) and cultural forms of violence in their everyday lives.[8] Since contemporary conflicts take place mostly in and around communities involved, rather than on precise battlefields as in the past, they disrupt the traditional livelihoods of children, separating them from their families, and jeopardizing their futures in various ways. Some of the primary structural insecurities of a conflict environment such as poverty, unemployment, and displacement affect young people the most in comparison to other age groups (McEvoy-Levy 2001, 18, Del Felice and Wisler 2007). Other challenges involve lack of education, malnutrition and lack of access to basic needs such as clean food and water. Furthermore, youth are also often victims of direct violence in both conflict and post-conflict settings, the most visible of which is the violence from the state. As illustrated in the cases of Israel/Palestine and Northern Ireland, even after the signing of the peace agreements, police harassment and use of violence against children

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[8] The concepts of structural and cultural violence have been introduced by Johan Galtung. According to Galtung (1969) peace does not only mean the absence of armed conflict, it is also directly linked to creation and maintenance of the conditions for social justice. In this respect, he distinguishes between 'personal' ('direct') and 'structural' ('indirect') violence, the latter of which refers to those institutions and relations that produce social, political and economic injustice in a society. Consequently, he turns his attention to all those means through which both personal and structural violence are legitimated and rendered socially acceptable in a society, a phenomenon which he names as 'cultural violence' (Galtung 1990). In making these differentiations, Galtung identifies between negative and positive forms of peace. 'Negative peace' is defined basically as the absence of military conflict. 'Positive peace', on the other hand, is more comprehensive and means the absence of all forms of –personal, structural and cultural– violence. Galtung asserts that attaining positive peace is a gradual process for which one must not only seek to eliminate violence against individuals and social groups, but also for the enhancement of dialogue, cooperation and solidarity among peoples.

continue; children who participate in public demonstrations are arrested, detained and beaten by government forces (McEvoy Levy 2001, 18). On the other hand, spreading of the culture of violence brought about by conflict also reproduces, legitimizes and sustains other forms of direct violence throughout the society which are experienced and witnessed by children, such as domestic violence, sexual and economic exploitation, suicides, vigilante justice, and willing or unwilling recruitment by guerillas and criminal gangs, as well as various forms of oppression and humiliation existing in their state, communities, tribes and families (Wessels 2000, Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998, De Boeck and Honwana 2005). As a result, despair, hopelessness, and apathy among young people who grow up in conflict settings are very common. Finally, they might also be considered victims since they are disempowered and marginalized from decision making practices, even when the decision making concerns them and their present and future lives.

While being victims, children and young people are also simultaneously social actors that play major roles in conflict reproduction through political socialization. First, children and young people respond to conflict through participating in forms of violence. They constitute a potential recruitment pool for guerilla activities and engage in armed conflict, participate in interface fighting and demonstrations, feature as rejectionists during peace processes, and engage in criminal activity and vigilantism as members of gangs (McEvoy Levy 2001, Wessells 2000).

Second, youth also reproduce conflict through interpretation and discursive practices. They play major roles in the transmission of knowledge, societal beliefs and meaning making regarding the conflict as a result of their everyday interactions in multiple localities - such as home, street, school, etc. (Punamaki 1996, Straker et al. 1996). As put by McEvoy Levy (2006c, 284-85),

> … conflict is reproduced through layers and memories of trauma, through stories and texts that transmit images of the other, perceptions of grievance and evaluation of peace processes, and through experiences and retellings of oppression, violence and lack of economic opportunity. Youth participate at the hearts of these processes of meaning making…. Out of this they create a variety of narratives that are transmitted to peers, to younger siblings and also to adults.

In short, children and young people are simultaneously both victims in conflicts and agents that help reproduce conflict. At the same time, however, it proves important to establish the

relationship between their victimization and agency: between the experiences of children as victims, the ways in which they interpret these experiences, and how this affects their political socialization. Political socialization of youth and engagement in political violence does not occur in a vacuum; it is most often a part of their survival strategy in the face of the challenges that they face, and of their attempts to overcome their social exclusion and marginalization. Violence in this regard, might be seen and used by youth either as a means to make their voices heard and to collectively redress their social, economic and political grievances, such as poverty, inequality, social exclusion, or an unjust peace (Sambanis 2002; also see McEvoy 2000), or as a means to escape the miserable life conditions and gain protection and self-esteem through membership in paramilitary organizations or gangs (Collier 2000; also see O'Higgins and Martin 2003), and yet often times as both (Urdal 2006, Muldoon et al. 2008).

Similarly beliefs, perceptions, and discursive practices of youth produced and circulated vis-à-vis the conflict might also constitute a part of their survival strategy. Bar-Tal (1998) argues that in case of intractable conflicts, formation of particular societal beliefs about the conflict, the self, and the enemy 'other' enables the society members to cope with the conflict in their individual and social lives by strengthening their sense of society. Since children are in constant interaction with and within the society, these beliefs and interpretations of conflict, formed in the light of ideology, memory, stories and actual experiences of violence also form a part of their coping mechanisms and play a significant role on the choices they make of their agency (McEvoy Levy 2006b). Similarly, Punamaki (1996) has suggested that, as a coping mechanism, children habituate to and incorporate into their daily lives the reality of political violence. Indeed, in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, she has reported that among the children who experience political violence, those who have strong ideological commitments experience less suffering. In this context, it has also been suggested that active participation in politics and political violence also provides youth with resilience and coping ability in the reality of war and political conflict (Cairns 1996, Punamaki 1996). The dilemma here is that, such beliefs and interpretations of the conflict (and also of the enemy 'other'), in the absence of alternative conceptualizations, simultaneously help reproduce and normalize conflict and thus perpetuate its continuation (Bar-Tal 1998).

Nevertheless, while youth have become more visible through their physical participation in violence in the recent years, they still widely remain to be treated as insignificant actors and the sophisticated processes of meaning making and participation through which they create politics in the context of conflict mostly are unnoticed or ignored. A case in point, which is also

relevant for the purposes of this research, relates to the concept of 'recreational rioting' which has increasingly been introduced to identify these activities where the main participants are children and young people. The concept is important for it seeks to highlight the subsequent motives for participation on the part of youth. Writing in the context of the interface riots taking place in Northern Ireland, several researchers have defined 'recreational rioting' as a social activity, undertaken out of boredom, and for fun and excitement by young people (Carter 2003, Jarman and O'Halloran 2001, and Henry et al. 2002, cited in Leonard 2010). As such, the term implies that such riots are devoid of any political motivation or aspiration; as put by Henry et al. "it designates a form of violence with no political basis" (2002, 23, cited in Leonard 2010, 39). Critiquing these perspectives, Leonard (2010) argues that, such description is reflective of the power relation between conceptualizations of 'children' and 'adults' and of the discourses around childhood by which "powerful adults marginal the myriad of ways in which children's accounts of their own activities may call into question adult imposed judgments of their actions [sic]" (2010, 39). In other words, where riots by adults are placed in the context of social and political significance, the labeling of children's rioting as 'recreational' both disregards and -thus -renders invisible the multiple perspectives and aspirations of children and young people regarding their social and political environments. In this sense, their actual and potential roles as political and social agents are undermined, and the image is reproduced of them as non-political beings.

Leonard's own research of 'recreational riots' in Belfast shows that these riots are important spaces of self expression and experience of their sectarian identity for many children and thus are important activities for political socialization. She observes that rioting produced a dominant shared identity based on sectarianism, helped reproduce ongoing stereotypes, and helped unite children and youth around a common identity through suppressing other identities and age hierarchies that were inherent. In her words, "[r]ioting served as a construction site providing a temporal and spatial location for the ongoing interplay between self-description and ascription by others to be maintained" (Leonard 2010).

As also shown by Leonard's research, children do create politics and their own political spaces for self expression. Seen in this light, understanding the needs, perspectives, and roles of children and young people in conflict settings and how they will construct their own meaning out of their own experiences becomes a major issue for building a sustainable and positive peace and designing relevant interventions. Peacebuilding is a long-term process, and aims to reduce direct, structural and cultural forms of violence in people's lives, while

providing them with a greater sense of justice, respect and equality (Schirch 2004, Tschirgi 2005). It involves, addressing the root causes of the conflict and transforming those structures that promote social, economic and political inequality as well as developing those processes and mechanisms that will promote empowerment, self-expression and justice so as to achieve a durable, positive peace sustained by the legitimacy and support of the overall society in the long-term (Lederach 1997).[9] An important aspect of peacebuilding in this sense is that it needs to be participatory and empower people from all levels of society to "shape their environment, so they can meet their own needs" (Schirch 2004, cited in Kantowitz and Riat 2008, 6). Thus, grassroots initiatives are an important dimension of any peacebuilding process for it is at the grassroots that the fundamental conditions that generate conflict, such poverty, social and political inequality, and violence, are experienced (Lederach 1997, 43).

Then, in the context of youth, the task is twofold. On one hand, there is a need to address the victimization of children and deal with those direct, structural and cultural forms of violence that they experience in their daily lives. Indeed, this has been a more visible side of the problem. Recent policy initiatives have recognized the victimization of children and young people in conflicts and have called on states and other institutions for proper policy recommendations to prevent all forms of violence against them.[10]

On the other hand, there is a need to recognize and understand children's forms of agency holistically, give voice to their concerns, and empower them at the grassroots to act as agents of positive social change in their own lives. Unfortunately, despite their roles as political actors in conflict, the perspectives of children and young people are rarely, if ever, considered in prospects for conflict resolution and peacebuilding. As Smyth (2000b, cited in McEvoy-Levy, 23) has argued "children are both visible and invisible. At the level of street activity they are visible and have their own strategies. But they are also invisible in public life and their voices are not heard". Most often both the concerns of youth and youth themselves are marginalized and disenfranchised from political processes and there is lack of recognition both at the discursive and policy levels of children and young people as actors deserving rights of consultation on issues concerning them. Furthermore, while the agency of children in perpetrating violence is recognized, the constructive roles that they do and might potentially play as agents of positive social change in conflict environments, or in other words as actors of

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[9] Also at the relational level, it involves repairing and transforming damaged long-term relationships towards constructive ones among the society, through processes of reconciliation, forgiveness and trust building (Lederach 1997).

[10] See for example: UN Secretary General Study of Violence against Children 2006 http://www.unicef.org/violencestudy/reports/SG_violencestudy_en.pdf (accessed August 10, 2010).

peacebuilding processes, are most often ignored. It is only recent that research on how young people, acting at the grassroots levels and participating in community projects in different cultural contexts has taken on the roles of peacebuilding.

In this sense, this task of recognizing children and young people as actors and empowering them proves important from a practical stand point, as it does from a normative one. As put by McEvoy Levy (2001, 5) "[i]n the longer-term, a peace agreement's endurance depends on whether the next generations accept or reject it, how they are socialized during the peace process, and their perceptions of what that peace process has achieved".[11]

Yet, empowering children and young people as peacebuilders, especially in areas where conflict is severely experienced, is not an easy task. Boulding (2000) underlines that building peace first requires imagination; the imagination of peace as a commonly shared future. In other words, peace cannot be achieved unless it is imagined. In this sense, first, it is important to help children and young people develop the cognitive abilities to imagine what peace might mean. Second, empowering children and young people as constructive social and political actors requires providing them with the necessary set of skills. Both these tasks of intervention - which might also be referred to as 'peace education' - also necessitate an understanding of their conceptualizations of peace and conflict, and how these are molded through their own present everyday experiences of conflict and violence, as well as the past experiences and memories of the communities they live in.

1.2.2 Children and Young People's Perceptions of Peace and Conflict

Children's and young people's understandings and beliefs about peace, conflict and war are shaped by developmental, socio-cultural and situational factors. Developmental factors refer to these mental processes that children experience with age. Indeed, psychological studies have shown that as children get older their conceptualizations of both peace and war become more complicated. More important for the subject of this research, however, are the roles played by structural and socio-cultural factors. According to Raviv et al. (1999, 161-162),

> Individuals acquire conceptions and beliefs related to the domains of social knowledge, such as concepts of war, conflict and peace as members of a particular society who live under particular conditions and form a particular culture. Also as members of a particular society they experience particular

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[11] Indeed, research has shown that knowledge and understandings shaped by experiences in childhood serves as the basis for adult understanding and action (Oppenheimer et al. 1993, 3)

situations which have both short- and long-term effects on their view of the social world.

The socio-cultural factors include those forms of social knowledge and cultural beliefs produced (and negotiated) within particular communities, in the light of their unique history and powerful experiences, and expressed through collective memories, myths and traditions. Being directly related to the well being of communities and their members, these also involve conceptualizations of, and shape attitudes towards peace, conflict and war. These forms of social knowledge are mostly resistant to change and are transmitted from generation to generation through processes of socialization within communities (Raviv et al. 1999; Covell 1999, 122; Oppenheimer et al. 1999). In this sense, they provide "meaning to the past experiences of the society and provide a framework for understanding the present" (Raviv et al. 1999, 184).

The political socialization of children, in this regard, takes place within these particular social and cultural contexts. As put by Covell (1999, 111),

> Political socialization blends with cultural background; it describes the process by which children acquire their basic political knowledge, values, and attitudes, and learn to be effective members of their (political) society.

In other words, these forms of social knowledge also shape the socio-cultural context in which the children and young people grow up, and hence they play an important role in shaping their perceptions and interpretations of the war, conflict and peace, the meanings they attest to their own related everyday experiences, and the way they determine their subsequent responses.

The nature of social institutions and social activities at community and societal level, which provide the sites for children's socialization, are also shaped by the social knowledge (regarding conflict) inherent within culture, and hence informs the way in which children learn about conflict/war and its corollary peace (Covell 1999, 122). Seen in this light, the processes, institutions and sites through which the children become politically socialized - such as families, clans, schools, media and peer groups - become important for research; both to

understand young people's conceptualizations, and to understand the potentialities and necessities for designing effective interventions such as programs of peace education.[12]

Finally, situational factors, or in other words more recent events, are also important in shaping the ideas and attitudes of children and youth with regards to war, peace and conflict. These might include both direct experiences of continuous political violence, and experiences of indirect, structural and cultural forms of violence, such as poverty, marginalization and political exclusion (McEvoy-Levy 2006b, Raviv et al. 1999, McLernon and Cairns 1999). They might also include those situations which inspire hopes for peace, such as the signing of a peace agreement.[13] Depending on the intensity of their exposure to such events within their society, and their impact for their lives, these situations can be very influential in shaping perceptions and attitudes of young people, sometimes even to the extent that they prevail over the previously attained knowledge and "serve as the sole basis for the formation of new beliefs" (McLernon and Cairns 1999; also Raviv et al. 1999). Furthermore the situational factors, in combination with socio-cultural ones, also have a strong impact on the cognitive factors that children experience in the context of the conflict, such as the (in)ability to imagine peace and show tolerance for other's perspectives (McEvoy-Levy 2006b).[14]

1.3 The Kurdish Question and Youth

As addressed in previous sections, the (historical) socio-cultural and the (more immediate) situational contexts of the conflict play major roles in shaping children's and young people's perceptions and understandings of peace, war and conflict. In this regards, the perception and

[12] Peace education takes different meanings depending on the goals and social context within given societies. On one hand, peace education is about changing the mindsets of individuals, and about promoting empathy, respect and tolerance for the perspectives of the 'other'. For others, it is mainly a matter of cultivating a set of skills; the general purpose here is to acquire a non-violent disposition and conflict resolution skills. Prime examples for such would be school based, violence-prevention programs peer mediation and conflict resolution programs. Oppenheimer et al. (1999) have argued that most often peace education are shaped in the light of adults' concerns and peceptions;"as a result peace education programs rarely make use of children's own experiences of conflict and violence" (1999, 13).

[13] The research of McLernon and Cains (1999) has shown that, at the time children and young people's ideas about war and peace in Northern Ireland were also influenced by the then current cease-fire, and the subsequent peace process that was taking place.

[14] This link between cultural and structural factors is well illustrated in research undertaken by Punamaki (1999). Looking into how conceptualizations of war and peace develop among children, when children themselves are victims of political violence, Punamaki (1999, 128) observes that,

> Children incorporate a violent environment into the way they think, remember and make sense of causal rules, through their natural activity such as playing and learning … Myths and legends are people's construction of their accumulated experience; they provide children with explanations and conceptualizations of issues of war and peace. Fairy tales, fantasies and play themes further mediate the related collective reasoning of right and wrong and good or bad, and the struggle between light and darkness. (Punamaki 1999: 132)

understandings of the Kurdish youth in Turkey has evolved in the context of Turkey's Kurdish Question. In other words, while the historical experiences and collective memories of the overall Kurdish community regarding their conflicting relations with the state forms the socio-cultural context within which the Kurdish youth's perceptions of peace and conflict are shaped, their own experiences of the conflict in its present form constitute the situational context. In the next sections first the socio-cultural and situational context of the Kurdish Question is briefly discussed; second the unique situation of the Kurdish youth in this context is provided.

1.3.1   The Context: Kurdish Question in Turkey

Turkey's current Kurdish Question, as an intractable, violent, intra-state conflict crystallized during the 1980s.[15] Following the 1980 coup-d'état, a set of draconian measures were taken by the military government to stem the growing expression of Kurdish ethnicity, which also included the ban on the use of Kurdish language and a change of the Kurdish town and village names. The already inherent tension between the state and the Kurdish minority took on a new violent form when PKK started an armed insurrection campaign against the Turkish state in 1984 with separatist ideals shaped around an ethno-political consciousness. The conflict entered an escalation stage when the state responded with a massive military campaign, and in 1987 declared emergency rule within Kurdish provinces in Southeastern Turkey (Kirişçi and Winrow 1997, Çelik 2010). Meanwhile, starting from 1989 onwards the dissatisfaction of the Kurdish population with the state policies also became increasingly more visible, shaped around demands for human rights and democracy and manifesting itself in votes and the street demonstrations, as well as acts of civil disobediance (Yeğen 2006, 33-34).

The armed conflict between the Turkish armed forces and the PKK lasted for fifteen years and took upon its most violent form between 1987 and 1999. Although the conflict affected the whole country as it spread to Western urban centers with PKK bombings, the most affected part of the population remained those residing in the mostly Kurdish populated

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[15] Historically, the roots of Turkey's Kurdish Question goes back to the early days of the Republic, when violent nationalist riots broke out in Kurdish populated areas throughout the late 1920s and 1930s and were suppressed forcefully by the armed forces of the infant state. In the following twenty years there were no major riots, yet the experience and trauma of armed conflict, displacement, loss of loved ones, and economic grievances, as well as the subsequent socio-cultural policies of the state that aimed to suppress Kurdish ethnic consciousness and to consolidate the republic in the context of "Turkishness", left their mark in the collective memories of the Kurdish population. From the 1960s onwards, the Kurdish ethnic consciousness once again started to be expressed, particularly in the context of rising left wing political activism within the country and in relation to the issues of poverty and backwardness that characterized the Kurdish populated areas in the Southeast. By the 1980s, the discourse of Kurdish political activism had already "shifted away from focusing on the problem of the southeast's underdevelopment, towards more explicit demands for the state to recognize the Kurdish language and grant cultural rights to the Kurds" (Peleg and Waxman 2007, 446).

provinces of the Southeast where the conflict took on its most violent form. Indeed, the balance sheet of the conflict in this period in the Southeast Turkey includes homicides, human rights abuses, internal displacement and forced migration, extreme poverty, chronic unemployment, damaged infrastructure, criminal activities by the village guards, loss of relatives, trauma, and mistrust between the local Kurdish population and the state (Çelik and Kantowitz 2006, 6, Düzel 2005). The approximate number of casualties in this period is estimated to be around 30,000-40,000.[16] Furthermore, the armed conflict also resulted in a crystallization of ethnic consciousness among both the Kurdish and the non-Kurdish population in Turkey alike (Kirişçi and Winrow 1997, 154).

From 1999 onwards the conflict went into a de-escalation period as a result of two major events. First, PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan was caught in 1999 by the Turkish forces, following which the organization declared a period of 'inaction'. With the end of overt violence a *negative peace* was established.[17] Second, through the end of 2000 Turkey started negotiations with the EU, in the context of which she had to undertake certain reforms and ensure the rights of the Kurdish minority with regards to language and culture. Subsequently government passed a number of reform laws, yet in the end these fell short of bringing in the desired changes for the Kurdish population. Furthermore, the reforms and policies in this period were inadequate in addressing the major structural (post-armed-conflict) problems brought about by years of intractable violent conflict and affected the lives of a significant portion of the Kurdish society - such as extreme poverty, unemployment, internal displacement, and lack of trust between the Kurdish locals and the state authorities.[18]

Since 2004 onwards the conflict has once again entered an escalation stage. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's 2005 speech in Diyarbakır, which for the first time

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[16] According to the official state statistics reported by Yetkin (2005) the total number of dead between 1984 and 2001 due to vielent clashes between PKK and the state forces amounts to 33,530. Regarding the internal displacement, the official statistics state that 355,000 people have left their houses and villages due to the conflict. However, according to Yükseker, this number is much understated since it only involves those villages which were evacuated by the state itself, and the actual estimated number of people that were affected by this phenomenon is around 1 million (Düzel 2005).

[17] 'Negative peace' is defined basically as the absence of military conflict. 'Positive peace', on the other hand, is more comprehensive and means the absence of all forms of –personal, structural and cultural– violence. Galtung (1969, 1990) asserts that attaining positive peace is a gradual process for which one must not only seek to eliminate violence against individuals and social groups, but also for the enhancement of dialogue, cooperation and solidarity among peoples.

[18] Indeed, writing in 2002 in the light of these observations of physical and moral destruction of the Kurdish population, Yeğen (2006, 44) had predicted that the political program of the Kurdish opposition would go through a change in the 2000s, and that in addition to the demands for human rights and democracy the theme of poverty shaped around the severe social problems of the post-war era would also play a significant role in determining the direction of the Kurdish opposition.

acknowledged the past mistakes and recognized the issue as a "Kurdish Question", raised hopes but were not followed by concrete steps and remained mere rhetoric. Indeed, the renewed tension has been manifest in PKK's ending its unilateral ceasefire in 2004, increased clashes between PKK and the Turkish armed forces, and in cross-border operations by the Turkish Army into Northern Iraq, as well as the spreading street violence and demonstrations in South Eastern provinces (Çelik and Blum 2007, 65, Çelik 2008).

In the recent years some important political developments have taken place that determine the current whereabouts of the conflict. In 2007 general elections, for the first time in the history of the Republic, the members of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi*; DTP) were able to win enough seats as independent MPs to form a political group in the Turkish Parliament. The Party also raised their votes in the 2009 municipal elections in the region vis-à-vis the governing AKP, and won most of the municipalities in the Southeast. The results of the 2009 election were interpreted as reflecting the dissatisfaction of the Kurdish constituency with the policies of the government regarding the Kurdish Question. The 2009 speech of President Abdullah Gül, in the period following the elections, and the subsequent policy initiative of the government - called by the government as the "Democracy Initiative", yet widely known in public as the "Kurdish Initiative" - also signaled a similar understanding on the part of the government. The initiative was initially considered a major step to start the process of resolving the Kurdish Question, but later has stalked in the light of several developments.

First, there have been severe disagreements between the parties in the parliament as to the content of the initiative, and the government has failed to come to an agreement with none of the nationalist, social democrat or pro-Kurdish representatives in determining a reform package. This disagreement is mainly rooted in the earlier disagreements over the definition of the Kurdish issue between leading AKP, the Kurdish actors, and the state institutions (Çelik 2010: 7; also Yavuz and Özcan 2006) and about the legitimate parties for the resolution of the conflict. The initiative has also received mixed reactions among the public, and the government has also failed to rally a significant constituency for the initiative. Meanwhile, throughout 2009 and 2010 hundreds of local executives of the pro-Kurdish DTP (later BDP) have been - and continue to be - arrested (Bianet April 14, 2010). The party itself was closed down by the Constitutional Court in December 2009 for "becoming focused on terroristic activities", while 37 of its members were imposed a political ban (Bianet December 14, 2009). The party was reformed by its members as Peace and Democracy Party (*Barış ve*

Demokrasi Partisi, BDP). Nevertheless, the closure was received with disappointment and anger among the Kurdish constituency.

Throughout the period, the social tension has remained high in the Southeast as well as in the rest of Turkey. The street violence and demonstrations in the region have become usual, often times suppressed with the violent interventions of the security forces.[19] At the same time the conflict has also gained another, social dimension. The armed conflict in the pre-1999 period had already started a limited process of alienation and social polarization between the Kurds and the rest of the population in Turkey. Writing in 1994, Gençkaya noted that as a result of this social polarization the Turkish and Kurdish public opinion were having problems in understanding each other's perspectives (1994, 211, cited in Kirişçi and Winrow 1997, 155). Nevertheless, in this early period the conflict did not transform into one between Kurds and Turks at a societal level (Kirişçi and Winrow 1997, 155). Since the end of overt violence, however, this situation seems to be changing. There have been increasing reports of discrimination directed at Kurds who live in non-Kurdish parts of Turkey by their neighbors, employees, etc. (for example see Toprak, et al. 2008). Moreover, especially with the rise of ultra-nationalism among some circles of the Turkish population since 2005 (Çelik and Blum 2007), there have been frequent attacks on the Kurds residing in the Western cities (Bianet May 23, 2006, Bianet December 13, 2007, Bianet February 29, 2008, Toprak, et al. 2008: 30-34). In November 2009 the convoy meeting Ahmet Türk was attacked in İzmir (Bianet November 23, 2009).

In short, in its current form, the Kurdish Question in Turkey presents a complex, multi-layered picture, played out at different levels throughout its lifecycle. Çelik and Blum (2007) identify three levels at which the conflict can be analyzed. According to them at one level, the conflict is an armed one between the Turkish state and the PKK. This is probably the most visible level of the conflict, and without doubt the one that the official state discourse adheres to by defining the conflict as one of 'terrorism'. At a second level the conflict is between the Turkish state and the country's ethnic Kurdish minority. At this level the conflict is mainly related to the structural and cultural forms of violence that the latter has experienced since the beginning of the conflict - such as forced displacement, poverty, economic underdevelopment of the region, ban of social, political and cultural rights - as well as to the ongoing lack of trust between the state and the Kurdish population. Finally, in the recent years,

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[19] The apparent reasons for demonstrations have included protests of the government , the closure of DTP by court, the jail conditions of Abdullah Öcalan etc.

the conflict is also being played out at a third level as a form of social tension - or polarization - between Turks and Kurds throughout Turkey. This social tension is most evident in the big cities in the Western, Southern and South Western Turkey, which has received a significant amount of immigration from the Southeast from the 1990s onwards.[20]

1.3.2 Kurdish Youth in Turkey

While the recent history of the conflict starting from the late 1980s constitute the socio-cultural context of the conflict for shaping the understandings of peace and conflict by the Kurdish children and young people living in the region, the latest developments that has been taking place in the recent years constitute the situational context. Most of those youth between the ages of 11-20 were born at a time when the conflict was at its most destructive and they grew up in a period where the scars of the conflict were recent and well remembered. In other words, while some witnessed the violent conflict as young children in the pre-1999 period, following the cessation of violent conflict, many more also grew up hearing stories of evacuated villages, forced migration, and murdered relatives. At the same time, these young people also personally experienced (and continue to experience) much of the difficulties brought about by the conflict, particularly in the form of poverty, unemployment, internal displacement, as well as police violence and social discrimination, and witnessed (and continue to witness) the recent - positive and negative - aforementioned political and social developments that have been taking place in the context of Turkey's Kurdish Question. It is to this youth that now we turn.

1.3.2.1 Kurdish Youth as Victims

Not all young people living in or having migrated from the Southeast have the same experiences of the conflict - the dimensions and severity of their experiences, as well as the roles they take in the context of the conflict and the reflections of the conflict on their everyday life vary in accordance with where they live and their socio-economic status. Nevertheless, while the high intensity of the military dimensions of the conflict of the 1980s and 1990s have largely ceded since 1999, direct and structural, as well as cultural, forms of violence are still widely experienced by most children and young people in the region.

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[20] The Mediterranean cities in the South (such as Mersin, Adana, Antalya) as well as Istanbul and İzmir received the bulk of immigration from the Southeast. But not all of the immigrants went out of the region and some immigrates to the city centers in the Southeast, such as Diyarbakır, Batman and Van (Yükseker, in Düzel 2005)

In this respect, the most affected segments of youth are constituted by those children of internally displaced families living in the impoverished urban neighborhoods. These children have been victims of the social, economic and political realities created by conflict and displacement, and subsequently have also become prominent, yet invisible actors within the current Kurdish movement.

At the structural level, urban poverty and unemployment - particularly due to displacement - constitute one of the most severe issues that confront the children and their families in their daily lives. As a result, exploitation of child labor and the issue of children working in the streets have emerged as significant phenomena in the cities where large migrant populations live. In this respect, small children working in the streets, also known as "street children" have been the more visible aspect of the problem.[21] These children are subject to all kinds of exploitation; indeed in the recent years there has been a significant increase among children and youth, of substance abuse (such as taking drugs and sniffing glue), crime involvement (such as mugging), begging and forced prostitution (Çelik, 2007, Yükseker, 2007b, KHRP 2008). A relatively less visible phenomenon, however, is the situation of children working in garment sweatshops for long hours and under difficult conditions.

The issue of child labor needs to be viewed as a symptom of a much larger social-structural problem that confronts the internally displaced population. As explained by Yükseker,

> In an environment where parents are unemployed and are unable to find work, the only option for many families is for children to bring home an income. Children working on the streets or in workshops are a manifestation of urban poverty, therefore this is a *problem of the exploitation of child labor at a societal level*, rather than being a problem of abuse by their families. (2007b, 273; my emphasis)

A related major consequence of urban poverty that confronts children and young people of displaced families has been the inability to benefit from the right to basic education. Not only the quality of schools in the region are poor, but also many children do not continue schooling, especially after primary school, either because their families cannot financially afford education related expenses or because they have to work in order to make a contribution to the family income (Çelik 2007, 211, Yükseker 2007b, 273, KHRP 2008, Üstündağ

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[21] According to Çelik (2007: 210), with regards to her field study in Batman, 79-80% of the 1600 children working in the streets are IDPs.

and Keyder 2006). Furthermore, like the elders, problems of housing, lack of proper health care and malnutrition also affect the children of displaced families, in their everyday lives.

In addition to these structural problems, children and young people are also often victims of everyday violence within their own communities and families. Indeed, recent research points out to an increase in levels of domestic violence (Çelik 2007). The girls are especially vulnerable in this regard; number of forced marriage of girls, honor killings and suicide among women and girls has been observed to have risen significantly in recent years (KHRP 2008). Furthermore most children who use drugs and sniff glue are the children of the IDP families. These are criminalized by the media under the label '*tinerci çocuklar*' [children who sniff glue], without looking at and reflecting on the root causes of this phenomena. In addition, with the rising tension in Turkey in the recent years, those who are residing outside the region have also been victims - together with their families - of violence from ultra-nationalistic groups.[22]

Apart from these structural forms of violence, with the recent increase in "confrontational violence" between state and Kurdish residents, particularly in the form of mass demonstrations celebrating the PKK and its leader Abdullah Öcalan, in the Southeastern cities since 2006, many children have also been subjected to direct violence from the armed forces and the police. The presence of children and young people at the forefronts of these mass demonstrations has brought about a new problem: children who participate in the demonstrations experience indiscriminate punishment beatings by police, are arrested, put in the same prison with the adults, suffer from lawless inhumane treatment in jail, and are tried for supporting terrorist movement under the clauses of Counter Terror Law (*Terörle Mücadele Kanunu*); some are even killed. This issue has also brought to the forefront the issue of Juvenile Justice (KHRP 2008). As will be explored in more detail, what is most significant about this aspect of the issue is that, children in this context are not only victims of the current system but also are active participants, agents, and political actors within it. Furthermore, direct or

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[22] For example in 2006, 55 people of Kurdish had to leave a district of İzmir (Kemalpaşa/Bağyurdu) and settle in Aydın after fights broke out between them and the nationalist groups. Human Right Association (İnsan Hakları Derneği, IHD) Aydın Branch vice-president Sait Aras has said regarding the matter: "According to what the families have told me, since 2002, due to the pressures and threats from nationalist groups the children had been having difficulty in going to school and the women to work. But in the last periods the attacks had become more intense. … and the Gendarme said it could not protect them from the attacks." (Bianet May 23, 2006).

indirect violence from the state also takes on different forms. For example, children living in rural areas are victims of remnant explosives in the fields.[23]

Finally, on the psychological level, an important point that needs attention - yet so far has been mostly neglected - is the experience of societal, individual and transgenerational trauma. The initial trauma for the families of the IDP children has been their eviction from their villages. Yükseker (2007, 189) reports on people that spoke of "their houses and their animals had been burnt and how they had been forced to leave their homes by the armed forces or by the PKK". Although, having been born in the later years most of the children in these families did not personally experience these direct forms of violence, nevertheless they grew up hearing stories of state violence in their villages, which constitutes an important dimension of their collective memory and societal identity (Darıcı 2009), and hence makes them subjected to 'transgenerational trauma' (Volkan 1997, 48).[24] Furthermore, their daily experience of poverty, unemployment and related forms of structural violence creates (and recreates) an environment of hopelessness (Çelik and Blum 2007, Yükseker 2007a, 189), giving a new, personal dimension to their trauma. Finally, as will be dealt with shortly, the direct violence they experience from the state bodies (such as arrests by the police following demonstrations, beatings, maltreatment under custody, and so on), as a result of their participation in mass demonstrations also serve as further sources of trauma for the children.

It is not only the IDP children and youth who are victimized by the conflict however. With the rising social tension throughout Turkey, it has been increasingly reported that Kurdish youth residing and/or studying in universities outside the region have become targets of attacks by ultra-nationalists. According to reports, students studying in cities such as Giresun (Northern Turkey), Muğla (Southern Turkey), or Nevşehir (Central Turkey) have been threatened, harassed, attacked, and some beaten by ultra-nationalist (*Ülkücü*) students because of their Kurdish origins (Bianet February 29, 2008). Furthermore, the preventive measures against these attacks, as well as punishments given to perpetrators by the state organs and school administrations, have remained at best limited:

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[23] According to Bianet, in 2008 and 2009 a total of eleven children have been killed and 20 children were injured by explosives. Among these children Ceylan Önkol (age 14), who died in 28 September 2009 in an explosion in a field while herding animals, has become a symbol of the victimization of these children.

[24] Volkan observes that "When a whole society has undergone massive trauma, victimized adults may endure guilt and shame for not having protected their children" (1997, 42), and argues that these collective traumas and memories of victimization are transmitted from generation to generation, and thus influence the new generations with the same sense helplessness and humiliation experienced by the older generations.

At school, we are harassed because we are Kurdish and plus, because we are women. The university administration remains silent. [25] (Young woman, studying in Giresun; Bianet February 29, 2008)

Three months ago I was detained in a house by force, our home was raided. Outside they attack us saying "filthy Kurds, filthy PKK members". They swear at our mothers, our identity, and our homeland. Shootings take place outside our home, our homes are being stoned. The Gendarme says there are no clues. But it's known who these people are. We cannot go to school. Because of this, while I had top scores during the first semester, I failed from 8 classes the second semester due to my absence from classes. The school administration says "do we tie your hands and feet up that you cannot come to school?" We extend school, the families are anxious. And now we have to leave the district for a few days. [26] (Young man, studying in Giresun; Bianet February 29, 2008)

A recent research by Toprak, et al. (2008) shows that the discriminatory behavior towards Kurdish youth living in predominantly non-Kurdish cities is not limited to physical attacks by ultra-nationalists. Based on the testimonies of Kurdish university youth studying in non-Kurdish cities, Toprak, et al. (2008, 30-34) report on the experiences of Kurdish university students of being out casted in dormitories and in classes, their inability to find housing due to their ethnic origins, and their inability to speak Kurdish or listen to music in Kurdish in fear of being protested at best by the locals, and at worst being beaten.

In the light of these observations, there is a need to recognize and explore further these various forms of victimization experienced by Kurdish children and youth, for unless understood and addressed through proper means of intervention they risk perpetuation and escalation of conflict in the near future.[27] In this sense, it is also important to understand the various ways in which these young people also are actors within their communities.

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[25] "Kürt olduğumuz için üzerine bir de kadın olduğumuz için okulda taciz ediliyoruz. Okul yönetimi sessiz kalıyor"

[26] "Üç ay önce zorla bir evde alıkonuldum, daha evimiz basıldı. Dışarıda bize 'Pis Kürtler, Pis PKK'liler' diyerek saldırıyorlar. Annemize, kimliğimize, memleketimize küfür ediyorlar. Kapımızın önünde silahlar sıkılıyor, evimiz taşlanıyor. Jandarma 'delil yok' diyor. Halbuki bu kişilerin kim olduğu belli. Okula gidemiyoruz. İlk dönem başarı ortalamasında derece yapmışken ikinci dönem bu sebeple 8 dersten devamsızlıktan kaldım. Okul yönetimi 'sizin elinizi, ayağınızı mı bağlıyorlar ki derslere girmiyorsunuz?' diyor. Okulumuzu uzatıyoruz, Aileler tedirgin. Şimdi de ilçeyi birkaç günlüğüne terk ediyoruz."

[27] Indeed, writing in 1997, Kirişçi and Winrow have argued that the social-economic imbalances and the subsequent challenges observed and experienced by Kurdish youth, particularly as a result of forced migration, have made them more conscious of their ethno-political identity and more open to violent means to achieve their demands

1.3.2.2. Kurdish Youth as Actors

Besides, and also as a consequence of being victims within the conditions created by the current conflict that informs their livelihood, some Kurdish children and young people have also been active actors within the context of the conflict. They are social and economic actors when they work for income, lead households, take responsibilities at home. They are also political actors when they participate in mass demonstrations, engage in political activities, are involved in criminal gangs, and participate in Islamic organizations. Moreover, some are said to join the ranks of the PKK as child soldiers.[28]

In the context of the current conflict, children are most visible in the Turkish media and public discourse by their increasing presence at the violent mass demonstrations taking place in the Southeastern cities. This phenomenon of 'stone throwing children' as publicly named, attracted the attention of the national media for the first time during 2006 at the mass demonstrations during the funeral of the PKK members which took place in Diyarbakır and lasted for several days. As a result of the intervention of the security forces five children were killed, 213 were taken into custody and 94 were arrested (Yükseker 2007a, 188). Since then children have been increasingly in the forefront of the demonstrations that are taking place in the southeastern cities, as well as those southwestern cities that host large numbers of Kurdish immigrants such as Adana, engaging in confrontational violence with the police by throwing stones and Molotov cocktails and shouting slogans.[29] As a result of these demonstrations, hundreds of children under-18 have been beaten by the police, imprisoned, charged under counter terrorism legislation, and many were tried and given extended jail terms.[30] While most of these children are boys, there are also girls among those who are jailed.

The response of the government and legal institutions to this new phenomenon has been contradictory; one of treating children as victims at the discourse level, yet severely punishing them as perpetrators at the actual legal level. At the discourse level, one response of the

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[28] The arguments about the PKK's use of child soldiers have been controversial. While some has argued that "in 1998, it was reported that the PKK had 3,000 children within its ranks, the youngest being seven years old" (Singer 2001, cited in Çelik 2010), others have argued that "there were no reports of child recruitment to the PKK" in 2004 (Child Soldiers Global Report 2004, cited in Çelik 2010).

[29] The biggest of these demonstations were made to protest Abdullah Öcalan's health conditions (in 2008), his circumstances of imprisonment (in early 2009), and the closure of the DTP and the arrests of its members (in 2009).

[30] According to the statistics of the Diyarbakır Human Rights Association, since the introduction of the new the Counter Terrorism Legislation (Terörle Mücadele Kanunu, TMK) in 2006 , 2622 minors have been imprisoned, 737 have been charged under the counter terrorism legislation. Of these 267 were tried in Diyarbakır in 2009, and 78 were given extended jail terms (Guardian January 31, 2010).

government officials has been to underscore the children as victims of deception by the PKK, arguing that children are being used by adults who organize the demonstrations for the sake of terrorism in return for monetary gain. In response to the 2006 events, the Minister of Agriculture, Mehdi Eker, said that children had been given "5 liras and a Molotov cocktail each" by the demonstration organizers in Diyarbakır (Radikal April 2, 2006). Similarly, in response to the 2009 demonstrations in Adana, the Adana Governor İlhan Atış said, "according to us children are the tools. We have to find the ones who are holding the tools" (Radikal December 10, 2009). At the same time, another response has been to label children's participation in the events as "recreational violence", arguing that the children are not aware of the political dimension of the conflict but merely think of their participation as a game;

> First he stones you, then you catch him, give him chocolate and pencils, and he hugs you as "Ağabeyiğim, Müdürüm" ["my brother", "my manager"]. He is not aware [of what he is doing], thinks he is playing on the street with his friends. (Salih Kesmez, Chief of Security in Adana, Radikal August 19, 2009)

> I am sure that the children throw stones not because the other ones are the policemen. They think that it is a game (Adana Governor İlhan Atış, Radikal August 19, 2009)

In this respect the state officials' discourse echoes Henry et al.'s (2002) previously mentioned conceptualization of 'recreational riots' as "a form of violence with no political basis" that denies the existence of any political motivation or aspiration on the part of the child participants (2002, 23, cited in, Leonard 2010, 39). Furthermore, the officials have also blamed the families for being unable to look after their children. Adana Governor Atış, has even expressed that they were considering canceling the green [poverty] cards of the families, cutting off the government aids they are receiving, and placing their children in children's asylums.[31]

On the other hand, the treatment of children merely as consciously motivated perpetrators at the legal level, significantly contradicts these discourses that recognize children as victims or tools. Children have not only been beaten up harshly by the police at the

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[31] "We can take those children who are constantly engaged in the atrocities from their parents by a court decision and give them to those orphanages" (Radikal December 10, 2009). "That the children in these demonstrations are used shows that the families do not protect the children that they are responsible to look after. We are investigating, except for the children we are considering to cancel the green cards of the families. We are also considering leaving them devoid of the government subsidies." (Radikal October 30, 2008)

demonstrations, but also it has been reported that their rights were violated during the detentions and that they had been subjected to maltreatment in custody (Mazlumder et al. 2006). Indeed the 2006 statement by Prime Minister Erdoğan is also reflective of this understanding: "No matter whether [the perpetrators] are women and children, as long as they are in service of terrorism, the security forces will intervene in whichever way is appropriate" (Radikal April 1, 2006). Moreover the children are tried as *adults* under the Counter Terrorism Legislation (*Terörle Mücadele Kanunu*, TMK) that was passed in 2006, which allows courts to jail them for up to 50 years for 'crimes on behalf of an illegal organization'. In short, while at the discursive level the children are represented as 'becomings' that are not fully responsible for their acts, at the legal and actual levels they are treated as 'beings' -as even adults- who are fully responsible for and aware of their actions.

What is most striking of the state's policy vis-a-vis these children is that so far there have been virtually no attempts to understand the root causes of and the reasons for children's participation in the demonstrations. Furthermore neither the social and political meaning they attribute to their participation has been questioned. Instead the problem has been basically defined as the absence of recreational activities for the youth and of provocation in the absence of these activities, and has been treated as such.[32] In the mass media too, root causes for children's participation in the demonstrations have largely gone unrecognized; it has only been recently acknowledged that most of these children who participate in the demonstrations are children of the internally displaced families, as a partial recognition of their wider victimization. Nevertheless, children's own voices are still absent from the public discourse. This absence is also true of those civil initiatives that criticize and lobby against the detention conditions of the children and their conviction as adults, which make emphasis on the victimization of children under the current laws.

Without doubt, the political agency of the Kurdish children remain very much understudied and there is a need for further ethnographic and sociologic research in order to understand the causes, dynamics, forms and motivations of their participation, as well as the implications of this participation on their respective communities and on the Kurdish Question

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[32] The most publicly known of the state initiatives for recreational activities has been the "Don't throw stones, score goals" project that has targeted children and young people between the ages of 10-18. The project was described as an attempt to 'save' those who throw stones at the policemen, and those who use drugs, and involved the training of children and youth in the sports fields of badminton, football, basketball, wrestling, tennis, volleyball and grass hockey, as well as encouragement of them to go to cinemas and theatres. The project was initially started in late 2008 in the 9 cities of the region (Adıyaman, Batman, Diyarbakır, Gaziantep, Kilis, Mardin, Siirt, Şanlıurfa, Şırnak) and was later extended to also include 16 other cities (including Hakkari, Van, Tunceli, Bingöl, Bitlis, Muş ve Ağrı).

in general. Darıcı's (2009) ethnographic research in a Kurdish migrant neighborhood in Adana - a city by the Mediterranean that has been receiving Kurdish migrants from the Southeast since the 1990s - provides some insights into these unexplored areas. For example, Darıcı observes that the children in the Gündoğan neighborhood are more radical in comparison to the previous generation. Hence, he explains, they are very effective in the decision mechanisms in the neighborhood association, and at the same time they both have a significant influence on the way the grown-ups think and act, and also that they sometimes confront the grown-ups whose policies they do not like. An important observation he makes is that violence for this neighborhood constitutes the most effective means through which the children can express themselves.

Of course these findings are not generalizable, and need to be supported with further research that will take place in multiple localities that host different conditions of livelihood, for the social and political perceptions as well as the responses of youth will vary in accordance with the everyday realities that surround and confront them. Nevertheless, an important question that emerges in this context is what motivates these children and young poeple to participate in the mass demonstrations, and to what ends their participation serves. Another important question which informs this study relates to that what their aims are, what they want to accomplish, and how they see their own agency in the context of a probable future peace. How do they perceive their own agency vis-à-vis the adults? And do they feel that they have enough space - and whether they feel they are empowered to - express their concerns?

Also important is to examine the ways through which attempts have been made to address the issues of youth. Much has been written in the post-1999 period, on the problems of and means through which to politically, socially, economically and psychologically reconstruct Southeastern Turkey.[33] However, it appears that children and youth have only been marginally involved as the focus of these studies. Rather they are mentioned as a part of the educational, social, economic, and health agendas, and policy recommendations are made to better their lives (for example Keyder and Üstündağ 2006; TESEV 2008). Furthermore, although the importance of ensuring participation of the local populations as agents in certain matters, for the reconstruction process is emphasized (Keyder and Üstündağ 2006), still children/youth agency in peace building and social and political reconstruction is left out of the

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[33] Yükseker (2007, 189) has noted that, the recent incidents involving children "made it possible for local NGOs and business peoples' associations to call on the authorities and the society at large to invest in the region's cities, for the creation of new job opportunities, for an increase in the number of classrooms in schools, etc" (Yükseker 2007: 189)

equation. In other words, children and youth are portrayed more as "silent victims" and are placed on the receiving end, than as prospective agents that need to be empowered in a process directed at normalization.

Without doubt, recognizing that the peacebuilding process in Southeastern Turkey cannot be realized without an improvement of the structural and cultural conditions that face the youth is an important step. However, an equally important step to that end should be to explore those conditions which might empower the Kurdish youth in participating in these steps as active agents and peacebuilders. Taking into consideration that youth both shapes and is shaped by their respective societies/communities in the long run, involving them in the process of imagining and building peace has invaluable significance. This necessitates an understanding of how they perceive the present and future communities that they live in and belong to, and how they imagine peace and their own roles in this context; an issue understudied so far. This research aims to contribute to this gap.

1.4 The Current Study

Inspired by Boulding's (1990) insight that for peace to be created it has to be first imagined, the current study aims to address some of the gaps mentioned in the above sections. The main motivation of the study, in this regards, is to explore the ways in which Kurdish children and young people perceive the current conflict, imagine a future peace, and feel about their own potential agency in the establishment of the peace as they imagine.

The study was conducted in Diyarbakır, which is the second largest city in the Southeast (after Gaziantep) - "the informal capital of Turkey's southeastern region" (Gambetti 2009, 98) - and which has a historic and symbolic value for the Kurdish population. The city also hosts a large share of the internally displaced population, is politically the most mobilized of all predominantly Kurdish cities, and is a center for many of the political institutions and NGOs in the region.

The nature of the conflict in Diyarbakır, according to Çelik and Blum (2007, 69) - like the other cities in the Southeast - is predominantly one between the state (and its related institutions) and the Kurdish residents. This analysis proves particularly important, since the nature, root causes and dynamics of the conflict are significant for designing appropriate forms of intervention. In their analysis where they discuss possible forms of Track Two interventions in different contexts and geographies where the Kurdish question is experienced, Çelik and

Blum (2007) emphasize that this particular nature of the conflict in the Southeast needs to be taken into consideration, and argue that in the Southeast, development of individual conflict management skills gains utmost importance; especially because they can help create "a critical mass of individuals that could manage the multiplicity of small conflicts created by mistrust - conflicts that overtime lead to new outbreaks of violence" (2007, 70). They argue that such activities might "create a sense of empowerment as well as more optimism about the future through skills building, individual reconciliation, and helping individuals cope with the past trauma" (2007, 70).

At the same time design of programs directed at development of individual conflict management skills also require some fundamental preparatory work that will explore into what people need and how they think and feel. Writing in the context of peace education programs directed at youth in particular, Vriens (1999, 29) states that such interventions need to take into consideration "both the ideal of peace in the future and the child's present everyday life into account". In this respect, the recent writings on the proper means of action regarding youth and conflict emphasize the agency and responsibility of youth in the achievement of peace. One aim of these interventions then, according to Vriens, "is to make young people *conscious of their own responsibility* for peace" (Vriens 1999, 29; my emphasis):

> [U]ltimately the youngsters have to arrive at their own point of view about their situation, and their influence on and their contribution to the peace process at both the personal and structural levels. (Vriens 1999, 29)

The importance of this approach is that while it takes into consideration the perspectives of children and youth, at the same time makes an emphasis on their empowerment and creativity by making them accept their responsibility and encourage them for non-violent forms of action.

In its exploration of youth perspectives of conflict and peace, the current study follows the framework suggested by Çelik and Blum (2007), as well as the above perspectives on youth empowerment. Accordingly, first and foremost, the study aims to give voice to those young people who have been living with the realities of the conflict and whose concerns and perspectives about the conflict have so far been mostly neglected. Second, it aims to contribute to the literature by understanding Kurdish children and young people's perceptions of peace, conflict and agency, with the intention of informing further future attempts for designing appropriate forms of interventions that will empower young people as individuals

towards non-violent ways to achieve their aims for peace and justice. In this context, the exploratory nature of the study also makes it possible to highlight other youth and conflict related issues that might require further academic research and inquiry on the ground. In accordance with these aims, and due to both time constraints and other tangible challenges faced in the field, the study focuses particularly on the perspectives of those young people who are from lower income categories, most of whom are children of displaced families.[34]

The study also has its limitations. First of all, it is important to clarify that the study does not claim to represent the views of the Kurdish young people from Diyarbakır as a whole. Rather it seeks to give voice to a particular group of youth who has been the most affected by the conflict both socially and economically. This is a limitation in the sense that the perspectives of those youth from middle and high social and economical status go unrepresented in this research, and the need to explore their perceptions of peace and conflict remains. Nevertheless, and also taking into consideration the restraints of time and finances, the focus of the research on the perspectives and experiences of these young people is still justified since they constitute a more marginal, vulnerable category of the population with more immediate needs.

Second, because the study is limited with the city of Diyarbakir, for further research, the need to extend the research to other cities in the Southeast where the conditions will be different, also remains. Finally, especially because of the rising tensions in the West between Turks and Kurds, there is also a need to extend the research to those Western cities where Kurds and Turks live together, and also to those Turkish children and youth, in order to understand *their* conceptualizations of peace and conflict. Such a research might also prove useful to understand how the two communities perceive each other and highlight those opportunities for future interventions that will be directed towards dialogue and relationship building in the context of the current conflict. Furthermore, it should also be remembered that the disempowerment of youth is not limited with the Kurds; the Turkish youth in the rest of Turkey also remain much disempowered and marginalized in the political scene, and thus there is also the need to integrate their perspectives to a possible genuine and sustainable peacebuilding process. If peace is to be build by first imagining, this imagination needs to be undertaken by not only Kurdish but also Turkish children and young people.

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[34] Please refer to the Methodology chapter for a detailed explanation.

CHAPTER II | METHODOLOGY

This study employs the use of consultative, less structured focus group methodology in exploring children and young people's perceptions of conflict and their imaginings of peace, and their own agency in peacebuilding.

The choice for consultative focus groups as methodology for current research has been made based on its exploratory potential for capturing the perspectives of young people in the context of their own experiences and worldviews. Taking into consideration the understudied nature of the subject in question, this loosely structured focus group format proves invaluable for exploring and identifying problems related to and perceived by Kurdish youth and conflict, and for generating hypotheses about new areas that need further investigation. Furthermore the choice for this method has also been based on its potential for empowering the youth by providing them with a voice on how they think and feel, and on its potential of production of knowledge for action which might help inform future normative practices and interventions.

In what follows, first, the focus group methodology is introduced and the rationale for use of consultative less structured focus groups in the context of current research is explained. Then, the information gathering process involving sites, recruitment, participants and procedures, as well as the limitations involved are explained.

2.1 Focus Group Research Design

Focus group interviewing is a qualitative research technique "that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher" (Morgan 1996, 130), who might also assume the role of the moderator in discussion. This definition, as suggested by Morgan (1996, 130-131), has three implications. First, focus group is a methodology for data collection, and thus should not be confused with other group discussions that have purposes other than research. Second, the source of the data in the focus groups is the interaction and discussions between participants. In this sense the unit of analysis for research is not the individual participants, but the group as a whole. Third, the researcher (as the moderator) plays an active role in generating the focus group discussions.

The two key strengths and weaknesses of focus groups, particularly in comparison to other primary qualitative data gathering techniques of participant observation and individual interviews, also flow from these characteristics. First, focus groups are focused in the sense that they rely on the issue areas that are of interest to the researcher. Since the researcher defines the topics of discussion for the focus groups, as well as who will attend, groups enable the researcher to gather data on a wide range topics that are targeted specifically to the researcher's interests within a short time span. This feature of focus groups becomes an advantage in comparison to participant observation, when the types of discussions intended are not observable in natural settings outside the group. The trade-off here, however, is that the focus groups constitute an unnatural setting for the participants, and the richness and the complexities of the actual life that could be provided by participant observation are lost. Furthermore, the moderator, through her/his attempts to maintain the focus of the group, might also influence the groups' interaction. These limitations however, are not unique to focus groups, as most qualitative interview techniques suffer from same limitations to different degrees (Morgan 1997, 21, 1998, 31-32).

A second strength of focus groups is related to its reliance on group interaction to gather data. According to Morgan and Krueger (1993, 16-18), the extent and nature of interaction between participants (such as discussions, agreements or disagreements between participants, and comparisons of each other's experiences and opinions) offer "insights into complex behaviors and motivations", which cannot be captured by individual interviews. Focus groups not only provide the researcher with access to the opinions and attitudes of the participants; more importantly, they also "reveal aspects of *experiences* and *perspectives* that would not be accessible without group interaction" (Morgan 1997, 21, emphasis added; also see Kitzinger 1994, Hollander 2004). As put by Morgan (1988, 55),

> Without the interaction around a researcher-supplied topic, individuals are often safely unaware of their own perspective, and even when they do contemplate their world view, there is not the same effort needed to explain or defend it to someone who sees the world differently. Using focus groups to create such interactions gives 'the research a set of observations that is difficult to obtain through other methods.

In this sense focus groups also produce collectively generated tacit and experiential knowledge that reflects the greater experiences and world views of their participants.

Moreover, since the discussion in the group involves participation of more than one individual, the participants may feel more relaxed and less pressured in sharing their views and experiences since the others also respond. Hence, according to Morgan and Krueger (1993, 16-18) focus groups are also useful for researching sensitive and emotionally charged topics due to their provision of a respectful and "humane" environment for discussions (also Zeller 1993).

Furthermore, the interaction between the participants also presents "direct evidence on how the participants themselves understand their similarities and differences."(Morgan 1997, 21; also Stewart and Shamdasani 1990). This is a unique aspect of focus groups which gives the researcher access about how the participants give meaning to and contextualize their own and each other's experiences. In the words of Stewart and Shamdasani (1990, 141):

> The spontaneous interaction of focus group members often produces insights that are not obtained readily, if ever, in individual surveys or experiments. Surveys and experiments tend to provide feedback about the world or specific phenomena as conceptualised by the researcher. This etic approach is quite useful but it must be recognised that such conceptualizations may be a variance with the way individual respondents conceptualise the world. Focus groups are designed to help understand how individuals contextualise and categorise phenomena. As such, the data generated by focus groups are more emic than etic.

One weakness of the reliance of focus groups on interaction, however, is that the nature of the data produced by the group can also be influenced by this interaction. The presence of the group and the way in which the discussion evolves might affect both the content of participants' opinions, and/or the way in which these opinions are expressed. For example, while some participants might withhold things they may say in private (a tendency toward conformity), others might sharpen their attitudes in defense and express more extreme views than they would in private (a tendency towards polarization) (Morgan 1996, 15). Also, in comparison to individual interviews which generates more in-depth data about a person, focus groups produce less data about each of the participants. The decision to use which method then, needs to be made by the researcher in accordance with her research question and goals.

In this study I used a form of consultative, less structured focus group method with low moderator involvement in an attempt to explore the imaginings by children and young people in Diyarbakır of peace and of their own roles in its establishment.

Less structured focus groups favor low moderator involvement and use of few open-ended questions that encourage the participants to explore the topic (Morgan 1998b, 49).[35] They are mostly used when the goal in groups is to discover new insights and learn from the experiences and perspectives of the participants. In less structured groups, the moderator encourages the group to pursue its own interests and emphasize those particular aspects of the broader topic that matter to the participants the most. Small number of questions asked, as well as the moderator's minimized involvement in the discussion enables participants to reflect on these questions freely and allows room for a more lively discussion among the participants (Morgan 1997, 40). In this sense, Morgan emphasizes that less structured groups in social scientific research are especially useful for purposes of *exploration* and *discovery* (1997, 40). Accordingly they are frequently utilized to understand people or those basic issues that are not well understood, and can be used for "generat[ing] hypotheses about new areas of investigation", and "in problem identification stage" (Morgan 1998a, 12). While the minimized involvement of the moderator, in contrast to more structured groups, reduces the consistency across groups in terms of the topics discussed, when the goals of research are purely exploratory this lack of consistency does not pose a problem. To the contrary, according to Morgan (1988), it allows for an evolving set of research topics and a revision in "the direction of the research as data gathering and analysis proceeds, … in line with the general approach of grounded theory" (Morgan 1988, 54).[36] Nevertheless, one challenge posed by less structured focus groups for the researcher, is that they make it difficult to compare across groups because of the unstandardized format of the discussions (Morgan 1997, 40). Furthermore, it should also be noted that, as in all qualitative studies, the findings in focus groups are not generalizable.

It has also been suggested that, in addition to exploring the perceptions and experiences, focus groups can also be used to empower participants and for raising critical awareness by giving voice to those groups that are socially marginalized (Chui 2003, Madriz 2003, Johnson 1996, Padilla 1993).[37] Focus groups in this sense, provide the participants from similar social

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[35] In contrast, more structured focus groups, which are mostly utilized in marketing and communications research, emphasize the researcher's focus, and thus use a large number of narrowly focused questions with moderator's tight control over the group dynamics.

[36] Morgan (1988:54) explains that the revisions that can be made in the direction of research as follows: "In the most common case, material that has been well covered in earlier sessions will be given only limited attention in later groups (to assure their similarity with previous groups on these issues), whereas other topics will be pursued in greater detail. For example, a single question from the earlier discussion guide may expand to become the topic for an entire set of new discussions".

[37] Indeed, Morgan (1988; 1997) and Wilkinson (1998) note that in comparison to individual interviews the participants mostly have expressed views of focus groups as more gratifying and stimulating.

and economic backgrounds with space to discuss, share, and reflect on those issues that are most relevant to their lives; in other words it allows for a production of 'collective testimonies' (Madriz 2003), which according to Benmayor has the potential for "impacting directly on individual and collective empowerment" (1991, 159, cited in Madriz 2003). In a similar spirit, Johnson argues that focus can also be used by critical social scientists for the purposes of empowerment as well as fostering social change; for "raising consciousness and empowering participants, rupturing rather than reproducing underlying relations of exploitation and domination" (1996, 519). Johnson (1996) argues that by treating the participants as experts of their own social worlds and challenges of the everyday, focus group discussions enables them to articulate on their experiences and create 'new politics of knowledge', empowers them vis-à-vis their alienation from sources and means of power, and fosters the collective creation of 'sociological imagination' directed towards alternative, local, and democratic forms of action that could bring about emancipatory change (also see Chui 2003 and Madriz 2003).

Seen in this light, focus groups are capable of producing not only scientific 'knowledge for understanding', but also 'knowledge for action' (Bagnoli and Clark 2010, 102). One of the key strengths of focus groups in the sense is that the data produced in the groups are anchored in the everyday experiences and life-worlds of the participants, and thus the knowledge, language, concepts, and categorizations that are generated by them are also grounded in the voices of participants, serving as a bridge between what is scientific language and what is language common sense (Stewart and Shamdasani 1990, Johnson 1996, Goss 1996). This form of data production also ensures that the formulation of solutions to identified problems will be tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of the participants. Furthermore, it has also been suggested that, if applied in the spirit of Participatory Action Research (PAR), focus groups can empower the participants not only by making their voices heard, but also by including them in the formulation and application of solutions (Chui 2003) and even by involving them in the planning phases of research (Bagnoli and Clark 2010). In the light of these features, in the recent years focus groups have been extensively used in sociological, psychological and public health research relating to children and young people.

In the context of the current research, the use of the less structured focus group format in working with children and young people in Diyarbakır proves invaluable from several aspects. First, the loose format of the groups fits the explorative nature of the research, and allows for a discovery of the perspectives of young people on issues of peace, conflict and peacebuilding. It also allows for exploring the perspectives of the participants on these issues in the context of

their own experiences, and in relation to their everyday lives. Second, by treating youth as experts of their own worlds and as "deserving of rights of consultation" (McEvoy Levy 2000), the focus group serves as a space for empowerment. It provides them with a forum where they can share their own and reflect on and learn from each other's opinions and experiences of peace, conflict or war as it relates to their everyday lives. This is especially important, when it is taken into consideration that children in Diyarbakır (as in elsewhere) are seldom, if ever, consulted on political issues, and lack those spaces to express their opinions and emotions, despite the fact that they are at least as affected by the politics in their everyday lives.[38] In this respect the focus group format can also stimulate their 'sociological imagination' by encouraging them to think about the kind of peace they want and the multiplicity of roles that they might play in peace building as children, or as adults in the future. Finally, the focus group format also fits into the main normative motivation that underlies this research: producing 'knowledge for action'. If appropriate policies and peace trainings are to be developed, it proves important to understand how children and young people understand peace, how they are affected by its 'absence', and how they can contribute to its establishment, at least in their own localities. The focus group format, in this sense, by giving voice to children, by making their perspectives and needs visible and thus by -even if figuratively- making them a part of a process, can help guide appropriate peacebuilding policies that target children, which are much needed in the region.

2.1 Sites, Participants and Procedures

In March 2010, I conducted a total of six focus groups in five educational and youth centers in Diyarbakır; two in Bağlar District (at Bağlar Center and 5 Nisan neighborhoods), three in Yenişehir District (at Yenişehir center and Ben u Sen neighborhoods), and one in Sur Distict (Suriçi neighborhood/center).[39] Bağlar and Sur Districts and Ben u Sen Neighborhood in

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[38] Indeed many participants expressed this perspective both in our talks in the aftermath of the groups and also in the questionnaires that they filled in.

[39] Focus groups were conducted in the following centers in these neighborhoods: the Sümer Park Community Center in Yenişehir Center, Children's Center of ÇAÇA (*Çocuklar Aynı Çatı Altında*, Children under the Same Roof) Foundation in Ben u Sen neighborhood of Yenişehir, Child Education Center (*Çocuk Eğitim Merkezi*) and 5 Nisan Youth Center (*5 Nisan Gençlik Merkezi*) in Bağlar, and Education Support Home (*Eğitim Destek Evi*) in Suriçi.

While ÇAÇA is an independently run NGO that provides educational and social support for the children in the Ben u Sen neighborhood, the former four centers are associated with the municipalities; Sümer Park Community Center with Diyarbakır City Municipality, Child Education Center and 5 Nisan Youth Center with Bağlar District Municipality, and Education Support Home with Sur District Municipality. Sümer Park Community Center is a center that provides social activities and services for children (primarily under 15), and vocational training for young people. Child Education Center in Bağlar is a social center mainly directed to the needs of those children working on the streets, although a significant number of non-working children - particularly girls -

Yenişehir are home to a large population of internally displaced who were evicted from their villages during the armed clashes of the 1990s. These neighborhoods are characterized by high poverty and unemployment and lack of infrastructure. Bağlar and Sur have also been the primary sites of recent contestations between the police and the local population. Yenişehir is a more heterogeneous neighborhood in terms of the socio-economic profile of its residents. While it also hosts a large number of internally displaced in its surrounding neighborhoods, some of the relatively well-off families live in this district as well. Nevertheless the children and youth that attend these community and youth centers constitute majorly a low-income population, and not only come from the impoverished neighborhoods of Yenişehir, but also from other neighboring districts and neighborhoods, and particularly from Bağlar.[40]

A total of 55 individuals participated in six groups[41] - 32 female and 23 male - and were divided by age into groups of 11-15 year olds and 16-20 year olds. Each group contained between 7 and 11 participants and was of mixed gender.[42] All the participants were self-identified as Kurdish and were of the groups were comprised of members of similar social economic status. It was felt that, given the political, yet non-gender-sensitive nature of the subject under study, mixed-gender groups could reveal additional insights and interactions among participants and allow for a comparison between male and female perceptions of

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from around the neighborhood also attend the center. ÇAÇA Foundation's center is a social and educational center that works solely and closely with the children in Ben u Sen neighborhood, which is one of the poorest neighborhoods in Diyarbakır. These three centers converge in their provision of social and recreational activities to children and young people during the weekdays after school, or work. Education Support Home in Suriçi and 5 Nisan Youth Center in Bağlar, on the other hand, provide support mainly for education. While the former provides support for the children attending 5th to 8th grades in their school work during the weekends, the latter provides support to those young people who are preparing for the nation-wide university entrance exam.

    The choice for the recruitment of the children from these centers has been made due to the fact that recruitment from schools, as had been planned in the initial phases of the research, has proved challenging. Holding any activities with the children in school settings requires the official permission from the Ministry of National Education (*Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı*), and constitutes a demanding and time consuming bureaucratic process. Furthermore, the semi-political nature of the study and its relation to the current Kurdish Question have also made it uncertain whether, even when applied for, such permissions could ever be achieved. Finally, it has also been considered that holding the focus groups in schools governed by state could have a restraining factor on the participants in terms of speaking up and elaborating on their genuine perspectives freely. These challenges associated with recruitment from schools have made it necessary to find alternative sites for recruitment.

[40] Bağlar and Yenişerhir also host the most number of households that do not have any income in Diyarbakır. (http://www.Diyarbakıryenisehir.bel.tr/pages.asp?ID=21)

[41] It has been suggested that, as a rule of thumb, four to six focus groups would suffice for most research projects, since data becomes "saturated" after a few groups and little more new information emerges from the groups (Zeller 1993); that is, unless there is diversity in either the participants, or the number of issues to be covered which would require an increase in the number of groups to achieve saturation (Morgan 1992, cited in Morgan 1996).

[42] 11 people participated in the group in Sümer Park Community Center child branch, 8 in Sümerpark Communty Center vocational branch, 9 in Bağlar Child Education Center, 8 in Bağlar 5 Nisan Youth Center, 9 in Suriçi Education Support Home, and 10 in ÇAÇA. Please see the Table below for detailed information of the composition of the groups.

peace, and reactions to and experiences of conflict.[43] In all groups the students were selected for participation by the administrators in the community centers. The focus groups were conducted in the recreational rooms and classrooms of the centers; places that are familiar to the participants. The medium of language was Turkish.[44]

Table: Data on Focus Groups Conducted in Diyarbakır

Institutions where the focus groups were conducted	Date of the focus groups	number of participants			Age
		Male	Female	Total	
Sümerpark Children's Branch	08.03.2010	3	8	11	(11-13)
ÇAÇA Center at Ben u Sen	13.03.2010	5	5	10	(12-15)
Bağlar Child Education Center	09.03.2010	3	6	9	(13-15)
Suriçi Educational Support Center	14.03.2010	3	6	9	(12-14)
Sümerpark Vocational Training Center	08.03.2010	6	2	8	(16-19)
Bağlar 5 Nisan Youth Center	10.03.2010	3	5	8	(17-20)
Total		**23**	**32**	**55**	

One limitation of the research in terms of sites - and thus recruitment - is related to the social and economic status of the participants. Initially it was planned that the research would involve children and young people from different social and economic strata in order to reflect the perspectives of a larger segment of children in Diyarbakır, and not only those of the socially and economically marginalized. However, during the planning phase of the field work, reaching those children who are from middle and high economic and social classes has proved challenging; these children and young people spend most of their time at private and public spaces such as schools, private institutions, private classes and home, all of which have been

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[43] According to Stewart, Shamdasani & Rook (2007) similarity in socio economic status within groups eases group interaction: "Similarity of abilities, intelligence and knowledge tend to facilitate communication. Similarly, in culturally and racially homogenous group situations, it may be easier to encourage member participation" (Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook 2007, 22). On the other hand, the composition of the group in terms of gender also influences the nature of interaction and data, and all-men, all-women, and mixed gender groups produce different results.

[44] All the participants without any exceptions were fluent in Turkish, although some stated in the survey questions that their mother tongue was Kurdish. Some of the participants during the discussions also stated that their Kurdish was not as good as their Turkish. Thus, the choice of Turkish as the language of medium did not pose any visible, overt challanges during the focus groups. Nevertheless, in Sümerpark Vocational Training Center a participant in a private conversation drew attention to the symbolic political importance of the language, stating his personal opinion that the young people would be more open to discussion if they had known that I - as the moderator and the researcher - could speak some Kurdish.

beyond my outreach as the researcher.[45] One implication of this limitation is that the perspectives of those youth from higher social and economical status go unrepresented in this research, and the need to explore their perceptions of peace and conflict remains. Nevertheless, it might also be argued that the youth from lower income categories in Diyarbakır - and particularly the children of the displaced families - are the segment of the population that has been - and still is - the most affected segment by the conflict, socially and economically. As such these constitute a more marginal, vulnerable category with more immediate needs. In this respect this research focuses on their perspectives and experiences.

Another limitation of the research relates to the particular characteristics of focus groups, where it is difficult to attain in depth individual information about the participants. Thus while the perspectives of the participants regarding the discussion topics have been attained, the circumstances and characteristics that are specific to each individual, and thus the broader factors and processes that lie at the roots of their perspectives have been hard, and sometimes not possible, to observe.

At the beginning of the focus groups I explained the research project to the participants while making it clear to them that their presence was not obligatory and that they had the option of not participating if they did not want to.[46] Moreover, all the participants were assured that their identities would be kept strictly confidential and that they would not be identified by name.[47] Finally, I also informed the participants of my own background as a non-Kurdish student coming originally from Ankara and living and studying in Istanbul. Before starting the main discussions, as a warm up, I asked the participants to introduce themselves and talk about their hobbies.

Prior to the main groups a pilot focus group was conducted in Istanbul in February 2010, both to evaluate the questions and probes, and to assess the capability of the moderator in eliciting in-depth information from the participants. The pilot was conducted in the neighborhood of Tarlabaşı where a large community of Kurdish migrants from the Southeast lives. Six participants participated in the pilot between the ages of 12 and 16, two girls, and

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[45] Personal interviews at Diyarbakır Syndicate of Education (Eğitim-Sen) and Çaça (Azize Laygara); also Temelkuran ('Öteki' çocuklar kurstan kursa 2006).

[46] Except for three children in Suriçi Education Center, who said they that had to go home, no one in the other groups took the opportunity.

[47] In the group in Suriçi two students specifically asked about this issue following the end of the discussions, and were given a chance to pick up their own pseudonyms.

four boys.[48] Primarily three questions were asked - (1) "In your opinion what is 'peace'? How would you describe 'peace'", (2) "What do you think about your own identity?", and (3) "What do you think you as children can do in order to bring peace?" - and the answers were probed where necessary. The questions and probes were then modified for the main focus groups. First, the abstract use of terms in questions and probes was avoided for the primary sessions. A humorous example of an overly abstract question indeed was one of the primary questions: When asked about what they think about identity, and how they define their identity, the children interpreted this literally and some took out their identity cards (the word identity in Turkish - *kimlik* - is also used identically to refer to identity cards), commenting on those sections in the identity cards that they wanted changes about. While their answers did reveal important insights into how they feel about their 'Kurdish identity' thus answering the question, nevertheless, their responses also was a warning for the moderator against the use of abstract and academic terms. Second, the question about identity was removed from the main set of questions, to be included in the probes where necessary. This decision has been justified on the ground that the responses and the discussion of the children regarding their perspectives of peace already evolved into a discussion of how they viewed their (in pilot, ethnic) identity[49] and thus the question on identity as a main question became idle. Instead, another question was added in order to provide ground for the participants to relate their perspectives of peace on their more concrete perceptions of the country and their everyday personal experiences: "Do you think there is peace in Turkey/in Diyarbakır?"[50]

Accordingly, in the primary focus groups in Diyarbakır three main questions were asked: What is peace in your opinion? Do you think there is peace in Turkey/in Diyarbakır? If it were up to you, what would you do to bring peace?[51] During the groups, I followed a consultative approach to research design in a loosely structured format that drew on the perspectives of the children and young people in the hope of recording their experiences of in meaningful ways. The same questions were asked in each group evolving from more general to more

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[48] The participants of the pilot group were recruited through the agency of a Kurdish cultural center - Mezopotamya Kültür Merkezi (Mesopotamian Cultural Center; MKM) in Beyoğlu.

[49] The question was intended in a way as to highlight the multiplicity of their identities, such as being girls/boys, daughters/sons, children, muslims, citizens etc. as well as their ethnic identities, yet due to the discusion the group mainly emphasized their ethnic identity as Kurdish.

[50] In the main groups it was observed that this question also became idle in some groups, for the participants without being asked already gave their opinions on what they thought about the existence of peace in Diyarbakır and Turkey.

[51] Please see the appendix for a list of questions and probes in Turkish. / Focus Group Draft Protocol

specific, with minimum intervention.[52] The answers were probed for clarification and for expression of feelings and concrete experiences where necessary, without disrupting the momentum of the discussions. In all the groups I assumed the role of the moderator.

Although not initially planned, I also had the chance to have informal individual interviews/chats with a male participant from Sümerpark MEB group, and two female participants from the Suriçi group following the focus group interviews.

Except for the first group in Sümerpark, audio tapes, which are a common instrument to record data in focus groups, were not used, since I observed that the children did not feel comfortable or safe in the presence of tapes.[53] All the data collection thereafter was made by taking detailed notes. This had the advantage of allowing for a free and open discussion where children felt more secure to express their 'true' opinions, while the trade off was the loss of some of the exact expressions by the participants for analysis. The discussions lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

Before and after each group the participants were asked to complete two brief surveys.[54] The first included demographic information, which was designed to obtain general information on the participants' social, economic and educational background, as well as questions on their recreational activities to obtain a feeling of their daily lives. The second survey inquired into how the participants felt about the overall discussion and their participation, and asked whether they had anything they wanted to add or change. It aimed to measure the immediate impact of the discussion on the participants as individuals, while also providing them with a space to voice those issues and concerns they were not able to express during the discussion, due to time or conformity restraints.

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[52] In all the groups conducted, the latest events in Diyarabakır were brought up by the participants in the context of discussing peace and conflict, yet the issue was discussed in detail only in some of the groups. Following Morgan's (1988: 54) insight that revisions can be made as the research progresses in the Suriçi group - the last group I conducted – I revised the order, and started off the discussion by asking the participants "What do you think about the latest developments in Diyarbakır?", and continued with the three primary questions.

[53] Only in ÇAÇA the administrators expressed strong rejection to the use of audiotapes on the grounds that it would have unhealthy psychological impacts on the children. In other centers, the administrators showed consent for the use of audio tapes, yet suggested that children not be informed and the recording be made secretly on the grounds that children would be scared or reluctant to speak openly if they knew they were being recorded. Since this contradicted the research ethics, and upon observation that despite their initial consent the first group of children did feel 'different' in the presence of the audio tape, all the data recording afterwards has been done by taking notes by the researcher.

[54] Please see the appendices for the survey questionnaires used.

CHAPTER III | ANALYSIS

This chapter has two major aims. First, it aims to summarize the discussions in the focus groups with excerpts from the dialogues, and analyze young Kurds' reflections on peace and conflict. Each group is analyzed separately in order to be able to provide the views of the participants holistically and in the context of the interactions (agreements, disagreements, comparisons) that were unique to each group. Second, it aims to reflect on the thoughts and feelings of the participants about the discussions in the light of the mainly written but also verbal feedback that I have received from them in the aftermath of the discussions. It is my belief that their feedback on the discussions compliments their views on peace and conflict; not only those feedback enable me as the researcher to assess the appropriateness of using focus group research method and its impact on the participants, but also provide further insights about into their perceptions, thoughts, feelings and needs.

A comparative analysis and discussion based on the themes derived from the group discussions will follow in the next section.

3.1 Discussing Peace and Conflict: Perceptions and Imaginations

3.1.1. Sümerpark Children's Branch

The focus group at Sümerpark Children's Branch (Sümerpark CB) located in Yenişehir District was conducted among a group of young people aged between eleven and thirteen; three boys and eight girls. The participants were residents of Bağlar District and the Şehitlik and Kooperatif neighborhoods of Yenişehir which are the two most populated and poorest neighborhoods in the district, and house a high number of immigrants/internally displaced families from low-income strata.[55] Bağlar District in general and the Şehitlik neighborhood were also the sites of recent confrontations between locals and the police forces.

In this group, the overt peace definitions of the participants were shaped more around the ideal life that they imagined in the context of their current socio-economic conditions, life

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[55] http://www.Diyarbakıryenisehir.bel.tr/pages.asp?ID=21

experiences, observations and relationships at a micro, community level. When asked, the Sümerpark CB participants defined peace in abstract terms as *"not fighting with anyone"*, *"sharing with friends", "showing understanding and caring for others", "helping each other", "collaboration",* and *"not to outcast any friends"*. Indeed, when asked about whether the absence of armed conflict in a country would mean that there is peace in that country they collectively replied as "no"; most restated those aspects of peace they used in their initial definitions of peace that referred to harmonious and idealized relations within a community, while also emphasizing the need for social solidarity among people: *"People can also fight among themselves", "They would need to collaborate", "I think that everybody needs to be good to each other", "They need to share and help".*

In this sense, the participants defined peace in the context of the personal conflicts they experienced and observed, as well as the relations they desired, within their communities and in their everyday lives. Peace was seen as the existence of a harmonious community in which all members socially and psychologically support each other - and particularly those that are disadvantaged - in coping with difficulties of the everyday.

Their repeated emphasis on solidarity and communal support was stimulated by a sense of vulnerability due to economic marginalization based both on their own personal observations in their own localities and the images that they observed in the media. Although they did not identify with such vulnerability openly in their narratives, they clearly empathized with the conditions; when asked about what they would like to do or change in Diyarbakır and in Turkey to achieve peace, they were united in their concerns regarding poverty, hunger, and unemployment which they felt were widespread in the city.

— *Ahmet: some people have to sit at home, they are not given jobs. If I were in power, I would provide more job opportunities.*

— *Berivan: There are some who have to sleep outside (others agree). Then there are those who sleep in construction sites. And some are kicked out of their homes.*

— *Eda: Some tenants, they cannot pay their rents and are kicked out of their homes*

— *Gül: We can help them for example. I would help them.*

— *Ahmet: And there is unemployment. It's a bad thing. He cannot work, cannot support his family.*

— *Ayşe: I would give bread to the hungry*

Q. Do you see many hungry people around?

— *(together in exclamation) Yes! Yes!*

Q. Where?

— *Ayşe: In the streets.*[56]

In this sense peace was also conceptualized as the absence of those structural insecurities, and particularly economic ones, that threatened the livelihood of the people within their community. It should be mentioned that none of the participants in this group had present or past experiences of working, and all had one (and sometimes two) members in the family who were employed.[57] Nevertheless, in their narratives there is still a sense of shared responsibility for the wider vulnerable population, rooted in feelings of empathy and social justice.

Added to this was a conceptualization of peace as the absence of those direct insecurities that particularly threatened children - such as forced collaboration in crime and violence. When asked about the meaning of peace one female participant replied: "*For instance a person steals and forces the other to do the same. I wish they wouldn't. Like, threaten [children]…*" She later elaborated on this point: "*Our neighbor had a son. They were trying to force him to steal. One day he came home, his nose, his eye was purple. He had told [them] 'I would never steal'.*"[58] A similar threat was voiced by another female participant: "*They abduct children and force them to beg. When one doesn't they break his arm or his leg.*" [59]

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[56] - Hocam bir de bazıları var dışarıda yatıyorlar (diğerleri onaylıyor). Ondan sonra inşaatlarda yatıyorlar, bazılarını evlerinden kovuyorlar.

- Kiracılar para veremiyorlar evden kovuluyorlar.

- Yardım edebiliriz mesela. Ben onlara yardım ederdim.

- Bir de işsizlik… kötü bir şey. Çalışamıyor, ailesine yardım edemiyor.

- Aç olanlara ekmek dağıtırdım.

Soru: Aç olanları görüyor musunuz çevrenizde?

- (Aynı anda) Evet, hocam evet!!!

Soru: Nerede?

- Hocam sokaklarda…

[57] According to survey questionaires.

[58] "Hocam mesela bir kişi hırsızlık yapıyor, onu da katıyorlar araya. Yapmasalar. Yani işte tehdit falan"; "Komşumuzun oğlu vardı. Onu zorla hırsızlık yaptırmaya çalışıyorlardı. Hatta bir gün eve geldi, burnu falan yani gözü morarmıştı. Demiş ben hırsızlık yapmam."

[59] "Kaçırıp zorla dilendiriyorlar, sonra bir şey yapmadığında kolunu ya da bacağını kırıyorlar."

An important observation in this regard was the relationship some established between structural problems in the city, especially poverty, and those children involved in crime. One female participant (Kadriye, 12) expressed this view as follows:

> *"…there is too much theft in Diyarbakır, and this is the fault of the governor and the others [in power]. Once, my mother's mobile phone was stolen. The police were looking for it. Then we went to their [the thief's] home. The father of the child was crippled; he had one leg missing. That's why he [the child] was stealing. The governor ['vali'] could consider that."* [60]

An important point in this testimony is the tripartite causal link this young female establishes between the structural problems in the city, particularly poverty and the absence of social security, crime, and the responsibility (inability) of the city governor to address these issues.[61] In her narrative the child's criminal action is interpreted as a result of his and his family's economic marginalization, and thus as an act of (collective) survival in a challenging environment where other mechanisms of socio-economic protection or more legitimate means are gone missing. The child is viewed as a victim of his circumstances, and of the failure of the governor and hence the state to prevent and/or address those circumstances. In this sense, while her statement reflects a sense of helplessness and yet a desire to address these structural problems, her testimony also takes the form of a sophisticated social and political critique directed at the governor of Diyarbakır as well as at the state he represents. It draws attention to the inability of the state to provide its citizens with social and economic well being and protection and to the perpetuating impact of this inability on the increase in crime in the city.

The emphasis on the responsibility of the city governor (can be read as state representatives) for providing protection for people and particularly children was also voiced by another participant (Dicle, 12) during the discussion on what they would like to change in Diyarbakır in order to achieve peace:

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[60] "Bir de bazı çocuklar var, çalışmak zorunda. Ben Diyarbakır'ın valisi olsaydım öncelikle daha duyarlı olurdum. Bence 18 yaşından küçük çocukları çalıştırmamak gerekir ve o yüzden gidip bir valiye bunları anlatsalar belki 18 yaşından küçükleri çalıştırmaz diye düşünüyorum."

[61] In Turkey the cities are governed by both mayors and governors. The mayors ('belediye başkanı') run the city municipality, are elected by the people, and are responsible for the provision of local services to the people in the city (for instance transportation, environmental issues, etc.). The governors ('vali') on the other hand, are appointed by the state: they represent the state, report to the Ministry of Domestic Affairs and are responsible for the provision of those services that are directly in the domain of the state such as security (the police forces for example are responsible both to the city governor and the Ministry of Domestic Affairs).

"And there are some children, they have to work. If I were the governor of Diyarbakır, I'd be more sensitive. I believe children under 18 shouldn't be made to work (others agree). If [people] went and told these things to the governor, maybe he won't make [will prevent] children under 18 [to] work [sic].[62]

These two statements not only share a concern for the 'victimization' of children through economic marginalization and a view that the state representatives are responsible. They also converge in their belief that the failure of the state representatives to tackle these issues is due to their unawareness or indifference. In this sense, arguably, their criticism also reflects a desire to communicate their observations and analyses to those in power, in the belief that they might have an impact on policy making.

Then how can we make sense of the conceptualizations of the Sümerpark CB participants of peace as social harmony and communal solidarity, and their views of the state representatives regarding prevailing structural insecurities? Arguably, while the state and its representatives are seen to be the ones who should address these structural forms of insecurities - be it economic marginalization or crime - in the absence of their effective intervention, revoking the discourse and action of social solidarity and support (sometimes in the form of charity) are seen to be the only available means to address these problems, to overcome the vulnerability of those marginalized people and to bring social harmony - and thus peace - to society.

Such meaning making also affects their views on politics and politicians. For instance, while discussing about the current politicians, some participants stated that they liked Osman Baydemir (mayor of Diyarbakır from BDP) the most, because, *"people who need help, they need food (erzak) and stuff, and he gives it to them."* In the same discussion, a young woman (Berivan, 12) criticized the prime minister and the politicians in parliament:

— *If I were the prime minister of Turkey, first I would fix myself. Because they [people] will take me as an example, I would do innovations in myself.*

Q. Do you think the current politicians need innovation?

[62] "Bir de bazı çocuklar var, çalışmak zorunda. Ben Diyarbakır'ın valisi olsaydim öncelikle daha duyarlı olurdum. Bence 18 yaşından küçük çocukları calistirmamak gerekir ve o yuzden gidip bir valiye bunlari anlatsalar belki 18 yasindan küçükleri calistirmaz diye dusunuyorum."

⸺ Of course, because some presidents of the parties politicians, they sometimes go on television and talk loudly and fight. And they are supposed to lead us.[63]

While Baydemir's acts are seen as an act of communal collaboration, and thus received approval from the participants, the parliamentarians' behavior is criticized for representing a bad example for the whole society. It is interpreted as invoking a culture of confrontation in circumstances where constructive action and dialogue - or at least examples of it - are much needed.

Overall, the discussions of the Sümerpark CB participants reveal that these young people do not perceive peace to be simply the absence of war. This is also evident when compared to their conceptualizations of war. While their descriptions of peace focused mostly on the social relationships at the more micro level, interestingly, their conceptualizations of war revealed a macro understanding, as a phenomenon happening between countries and soldiers. They described war as "*not to be in peace*", "*to fight with a country by guns and bombs*", and "*clashes between soldiers*". One female participant gave the following definition: "*two countries compete with each other, and one wins over the other. This is how it is mostly. [They say] if we win this and this will happen, if you lose [we'll make] an agreement. Like that…*" Seen in this light, while they do perceive war as the absence of peace, they do not see peace as the absence of war. The conditions for peace are perceived to be based on good and collaborative relations throughout society and on the elimination of direct and structural threats to all members of the society including children. This proves interesting for the current situation they perceive themselves to be in appears to be neither peace nor war, but a liminal place in between - arguably a form of negative peace.

To my surprise, the discussions on peace (or war) in Sümerpark CB group included neither direct or open references to the current Kurdish Question at a more macro level, nor to other relevant issues such as discrimination and identity/Kurdishness at a local level. Indeed, not even the word 'Kurd' (nor the word 'Turk') was uttered by this group. Furthermore, although they discussed - upon my questioning of their feelings about the recent developments in

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[63] - Ben Türkiye'nin başbakanı olsaydım, öncelikle kendimi düzeltirdim. Hani onlar da beni örnek alacağı için öncelikle kendimde yenilikler yapardım.

Soru: Peki var mı sence yeniliğe ihtiyaci şu anki siyasetçilerin?

- Elbette, çünkü öğretmenim bazı parti başkanları, politikacılar, bazen tv karşısına çıkıyorlar, yüksek sesle konuşuyorlar, kavga ediyorlar, ama göya onlar bizi yönetiyor.

Diyarbakır - the recent confrontations with the police on the streets and children's participation in these events, as well as the fights that broke out following the Diyarbakırspor-Bursaspor football game, in the end these issues were not discussed in direct relation to peace or its absence, and were also detached from the broader political debates that surrounded both issues.

Regarding both issues, most participants took a critical stance towards violence, whether that be of the police or of the demonstrators. Regarding the football match, most were critical of the behavior of the Diyarbakırspor fans and felt that there should not have been fights, but some could understand the underlying reasons: "*But those from Bursa insulted Diyarbakırlıs a lot in the previous game*". Thus, the manifestations of violence were described by some as a collective response to an insult, with which they empathized as Diyarbakırlıs themselves.

More importantly, many of these children had also witnessed some form of violence on the street level; two young males (Ahmet 12, Ferat 13) said they had once participated in the events and had thrown stones at the police, one female reported on watching his father and uncle fight with the police (Kadriye, 12), and some females reported on their experiences of watching children being beaten by the police (Gül 12, Hasret 12, Berivan 12). They voiced sentiments of fear vis-à-vis these phenomena, empathizing with the children being beaten and feeling themselves at risk, and although most stated that they did approve of children throwing stones, they also thought that the police violence against children was unjust: "*They go and beat some people up with no apparent reason. For example in my grandfather's neighborhood, police came for no reason, took a child and they beat him up, broke his arm. He was as old as my younger brother*" (Berivan, 12).[64]

Regarding the motives of those children for throwing stones the participants voiced different and sometimes conflicting opinions. On one hand, those who had personally witnessed police violence, held the view that the behavior of the children was a result of the negative sentiments they held against the police and the current government: "*They don't like the police, they don't like Erdoğan*"; "*People see the police as the enemy*". Reasons for these sentiments unfortunately were not elaborated further. One participant (Ferat, 13) who had thrown stones at the police said, smiling impishly, that he had done so, because the police had hit him and chased after him without any reasons**;** "*everybody has it [this feeling] inside; all people would want to throw stones at them*". He was supported by a female participant

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[64] "Yani durduk yere gidip bazı kişileri dövüyorlar. Mesela bizim dedemin mahallesinde durduk yere polis geldi. Çocuğu aldılar, dövdüler kolunu kırdılar. Kardeşim yaşındaydı."

(Kadriye, 12) who calmly explained the logic as follows: *"Maybe not everybody, but for example, let's say a friend did me evil, then probably I would also throw stones to break her windows. Or wouldn't. Why would I throw stones without any apparent reason?"* Noticeable here are the two intermingled images about the police in their discourses. On one hand, while it is not elaborated, a discursive link is established regarding the sentiments towards the police and the current (Erdoğan) government, where reacting to the police is equated with reacting to the government /state and its policies. On the other hand, the police is also seen as an independent actor engaging in indiscriminate and irrational violence. The act of throwing stones at the police, like of violence at the football game, thus, is conceptualized more as a reactionary, rational, and arguably, a political response where the police - as well as the government - is seen as the hostile and irrationally harmful 'enemy other'. It is also perceived - by some - as a manifestation of and a means to express feelings of anger born out of mistreatment. The analyses of these participants - as will also be seen in some of the other groups - draw attention to how the indiscriminate acts of violence by the police have an escalatory impact in the conflict, provoking feelings of resentment among young people, and perpetuating continued violence at the street level.

Not all children in the group succumbed to this view however. At the end of the discussion, when the issue of stone throwing children was brought up again, some others expressed views that the liability for children's actions lay with the adults, who encouraged them to throw stones by giving them money:

> ⸺ *Ayşe: You asked what we think. I find it bad, but I think it's not the fault of the children. In some news they showed, they force the children to throw stones. And one child even said, "a man gave me 5 million [5 TL] to throw a stone, and forced me to do so".*
> Q. He said that on the news?
> ⸺ *Ayşe: Yes.*

The description above reflects a conceptualization of children as pure and innocent beings who would not resort to violence unless forced, encouraged, or bribed to do so by adults. In this sense, the actions of those children who participate in the riots are presented as apolitical, and without references to the role of police in the violence. Indeed, many in the group also shared this view:

> ⸺ *Eda: Sometimes they give 10 million [10 TL].*

Q. Do you agree with your friends?

— *(3-4 children at the same time) Yes!*

— *Esra: I agree because they give money. That's why they go and throw stones.*

— *Dicle: Yes, they bribe them.*

— *Esra: And for example the kids love the money.*

— *Ferat: Also because they don't like the police.*

Q. Why do they not like the police?

— *Demir: It is as if they brainwash these children. You know, these supporters of terror, they say [to the children] 'throw stones to the police'. As if washing their brains.*

— *(Ferat choked and remained silent)*

There is a striking contrast between the views of those children who thought the act of stone throwing was reactionary and those who thought it was basically motivated by adult manipulation and rewards. Then how can these differences in opinion be explained? Noticeable in the statements of the latter view is a resonance with the state officials' discourse which emphasize that the children are being used by purposeful adults for their political purposes. The comments of one of the male participants - "*these supporters of terror*" - deserves particular attention as it is the exact statement that is so often used by government and state representatives in reference to those who support the PKK as well as those who participate in the demonstrations. One source for this image, as noted by one participant, is the television news; this might help explain the resonance, especially considering that the mainstream media gives priority to the perspectives of state authorities and regularly cultivates an image of these children as political tools. On the other hand, those who held the former view that the act of stone throwing was a reaction to police violence were also the ones who had earlier reported having witnessed or experienced some form of police violence during the confrontations. Seen in this light, the contrast between the two images and ideas might be attributable to the existence (or not) of direct experiences and observations of violence by the participants. At the same time, the discussions in the focus group itself are insufficient to draw strong conclusions on this issue, since children have multiple sites of socialization (such as families, schools, peer groups, etc.) where they construct and reconstruct their views on social and political matters. The differences of opinion, thus, reveal the need for further research that inquires into how children and young people obtain their political

impressions and opinions, as well as the various processes through which they engage in the act of interpretation and meaning making.

Furthermore, while interpreting the statements of the participants, the interaction within the group must also be considered, which signaled tendency to conform on the part of some participants at certain moments. For example Ferat, who once again brought up the issue of police violence as a reason for children's participation in the riots chose to remain silent following Demir's assertion that the children were brainwashed by "those supporters of terror". A few minutes after this conversation, Demir exclaimed to me, pointing to Ferat who was sitting next to him, "*Teacher, he says 'Erdoğan Kerdoğan, Kurban Öcalan'*"[65], and Ferat immediately reacted, "*I did not say such a thing.*" The expression that was (supposedly) uttered by Ferat is a chant in Kurdish language that is used at the Kurdish nationalist demonstrations. It translates nearly as "Erdoğan, Donkey-doğan, I will sacrifice myself for you Öcalan"; thus it is a chant that denigrates the current Prime Minister, while glorifying the PKK leader. This instance was interesting for it was the only time during the discussion that the participants introduced a terminology that clearly related to the Kurdish Question and gave signs as to their probable political tendencies. Both Demir's and Ferat's reactions - of *voicing a complaint* in offense and of immediate denial in defense - show that these children are not only politically opinionated regarding the Kurdish Question, but also are aware of vulnerable nature of the topic as well as the broader implications of their views for those who hold the opposite view. This broader awareness, and feelings of having to conform with the group - as well as the existence of a tape recorder - might also provide some clues as to the silence of the participants regarding the Kurdish Question in discussing peace and war, despite the direct experiences of some of violence. While it is difficult to interpret the reasons behind their silence, the silence itself (at least for some) thus should be considered as a choice, and not an inability.

Sümerpark is not the only group where the participants chose not to make direct connections between peace and the Kurdish Question; the Ben u Sen group is the other one, and is dealt with in the next section.

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[65] This is a chant in Kurdish that is used at the demonstrations and translates nearly as "Erdoğan, Donkey-doğan, I will sacrifice myself for you Öcalan.

3.1.2. ÇAÇA Foundation at Ben u Sen

Ben u Sen neighborhood, in Yenişehir District, is one of the poorest neighborhoods in Diyarbakır. Most of the neighborhood is made up of those families who had to immigrate to Diyarbakır due to internal displacement, as well as subsequent economic reasons. The neighborhood is mostly a 'shanty town', composed of "gecekondus" and is characterized by lack of infrastructure and high rates of unemployment and extreme poverty. Although it is close to the central and lively Suriçi neighborhood, Ben u Sen is also an internally marginalized site in Diyarbakır; according to one informant working at ÇAÇA, there are no public transportation facilities to and from the neighborhood, and except for family/relative visits, it is rare that the residents go out of, or outsiders come to the neighborhood. The focus group in Ben u Sen included a group of young people aged between twelve and fifteen; five boys and five girls, all of them residents of Ben u Sen.

Similar to the participants in Sümerpark CB group, the participants in the ÇAÇA Foundation Group (Ben u Sen) group also discussed peace both in ideal abstract terms and in relation to their everyday life conditions, observations and experiences in the neighborhood, and *not* in the context of the current conflict. Abstractly, they defined peace as, "*a beautiful place where people can live happily", "freedom", "love and brotherhood"*, and living "*without guns*" and "*without enemies*". Throughout the discussion however, these themes were neither discussed in depth, nor were linked with the current Kurdish Question. At the same time, these abstractions were followed by more concrete references reflecting first, their concerns about structural forms of violence in general- *"[if there was peace] bad people would not harm people and go to jail"* - and second, their concerns about the inharmonious and disruptive relations they observe and experience in their everyday lives with their families and friends in their neighborhood as exemplified in this dialogue:

- ⎯ *Sinem: Some people treat their friends badly; they call them bad names and swear.*

   Q. Do you think there is a difference between the peace perceptions of adults and children?
- ⎯ *Lale: Yes, the children want peace, the adults don't*
- ⎯ *Kısmet: If two families are not talking, they want the children not to talk [to each other] as well, this is absurd*
- ⎯ *Suat: Blood feud (kan davası), custom, (töre), these are not peace.*

A male participant later gave the following written reply as an addition to his comments, *"When adults face an event relating to peace they think of their own interests. But the children think in pure sentiments for [the interests of] all children"* (Ömer, 15).[66] In the discussion, the Ben u Sen participants also expressed concern over the fights and disputes taking place between neighbors, and among adults including their parents: *"And if there were peace there would not be this: the neighbor speaks badly, then the police comes home and slanders him because he/she doesn't like the neighbor"* (Pelin, 12).[67]

Seen in this light, these young people's definitions of peace - or its absence - are shaped around the burdens they have to witness and experience in their everyday lives and their relationships, and the idealized 'good life' that they imagine. Similar to the Sümerpark CB participants, their descriptions of peace also involve harmonious relations within a community, yet their emphasis is more on the nature of relationships between individuals and on moral behavior, rather than collaboration as emphasized by the former group.

The concerns and statements of these children regarding peace also reflect their feelings of entrapment in the everyday politics, behaviors, and rules of the adult life, as well as in the tribal traditions - blood feud, custom - of violence that are perpetuated by those rules. They question and silently challenge these rules and behaviors in the context of their own values and their own relationships, desire to change them, but as a result of their marginalization as children, they are helpless to initiate that change. What is striking here is the distinction they make between the 'actual' world created by adults and the 'desired' world imagined by children. In this conceptualization, the adults are seen as the obstacles to the attainment of peace, for they not only act in the name of self interest but also engage in various forms of violence. Their perception of children generally, and also of themselves, on the contrary, is one of innocence, vulnerability, opposition to all forms of violence, desire for genuine peace. In this sense children's participation in violent acts is perceived by some as an apolitical victimhood of deception, whose origins also lie with adults, or in exceptional cases, as 'spoiled' behavior, as exemplified in the following dialogue:

— *Sinem: Some children of Diyarbakır are spoiled, they should fear the police.[68]*

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[66] "Büyüklerle küçüklerin barışı aynı mı diye bir soru soruldu. Ben buna şöyle cevap vermek isterim. Büyükler barışla ilgili bir olayla karşılaştıklarında menfaatlerini düşünüyorlar. Oysa çocuklar saf bir duyguyla bütün çocuklar için düşünüyor." In response to the survey question "Is there anything you … would like to add?"

[67] "Barış olsa şu olmaz: komşu kötü anlaması için konuşuyor, polis eve gelince iftira atıyor. Komşusunu sevmediği için…"

[68] "Diyarbakır'ın bazı çocukları şımarmış. Polisten korksunlar"

⸺ *Kısmet: Why do they participate [in the events], what if they go to jail?* [69]

⸺ *Hasret: The adults tell them "throw stones"; the children do not have guilt.* [70]

On the survey, one participant (Lale, 13) also agreed with this perspective. She wrote that she wanted "peace, friendship, and brotherhood," and continued, "*Some kids throw stones at the police. [Some people] threaten the kids in exchange for money. They say 'throw stones at the police and we will give you money'*".[71]

The perceptions of the Ben u Sen participants regarding the victimization of children in the riots were not limited to the reasons for their involvement. Direct and structural/systemic forms of violence that threatened these children were also a source of concern for some. Indeed when asked what they would do to achieve peace in Diyarbakır, two participants stated with a sense of worry and injustice: "*When our friends who throw stones get injured, we become sad. It is necessary to get them to the hospital immediately*" (Hasret, 13); "*One child throws stones and (s)he's sentenced to 28 years. That is very bad*" (Kısmet, 12).[72]

Unfortunately, however, the children's motives for their involvement in the demonstrations were not well developed beyond the adult influence and financial motivation argument, and were not in any way related to the current conflict. Moreover, the act of stone throwing was conceptualized as an act of disrupting peace that did not receive approval from the participants. Noticeably, it was the female participants who took the opportunity to voice their opinions on this matter; the male participants chose to stay relatively silent. Taking into consideration that it is mostly the boys who participate in the demonstrations, their silence makes it difficult to draw any inferences on their experiences and opinions. At the same time, presumably due to its marginalized location, Ben u Sen has not been a site of confrontations between the local population and the police, and during the discussion none of the participants reported on any personal experiences, or testimonies of these events. This might suggest that the impressions of the participants regarding the events - and children's participation in violence in general - are attained from sites other than the immediate surroundings, such as the media, school or the perspectives of families. Indeed the children

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[69] "Niye karışıyorlar [olaylara], ya hapse girseler?"

[70] "Büyükleri diyor taş atın, çocukların suçu yok ki."

[71] "Barış dostluk ve kardeşlik. Bazı çocuklar polislere taş atıyorlar. Çocukları tehdit ediyorlar para karşılığında. Diyorlar ki, polislere taş atın size para vereceğiz.". In response to the suvey question, "What do you think about your participation and the overall discussions? How do you feel?"

[72] "Taş atan arkadaşlarımız yaralanınca üzülürüz. Onları hemen hastaneye kaldırmak gerek"; "Bir çocuk taş atıyor, 28 yıl yiyor. Bu çok kötü".

did reflect on the family perspectives regarding the demonstrations on several occasions: *"Mothers, fathers they don't want [us] to be involved in the events, or curse. I did not even once." (Ahmet, 13); "Children want to get out [of their homes] but the parents don't allow them to. When there is no peace they don't (Nedim, 13)".* [73] These narratives reveal an attempt on the part of their parents to keep the children off the streets and away from the demonstrations. It is also clear that the participants show empathy and consent with these attempts, and abide by them - in Nedim's case, despite sentiments of frustration due to lack of freedom.

The other dominant theme that shaped the participants' views on peace (or its absence) were these structural, and particularly economic, forms of insecurities that affected them at a broader level, and an accompanying sense of collective victimhood:

> *In the neighborhood, when money [poverty/food aid] is being distributed, women run immediately. My father doesn't work, and the rich don't help (Sinem, 11).*[74]

> *Let factories be built in Diyarbakır, we want peace, brotherhood. Our elders [adults] do not have jobs, they look for jobs (Lale, 13).* [75]

In addition, when asked about what they would like to do/change in Diyarbakır in order to bring peace, some stated that they would "*build factories", "provide job opportunities*", and "*dress up the poor on religious holidays".* Some others mentioned the recent earthquake and said they would demolish the houses in the neighborhood and build instead *"concrete, very safe*" houses, and would amend the houses in Ben u Sen. [76] Absence of peace in this sense was associated with the existence of widespread poverty and unemployment around them, as well as the underdevelopment of and lack of infrastructure in their neighborhood, drawing attention to both their own economic marginalization and desire for a 'good life'.

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[73] "Eylemlere katılmayı, küfretmeyi anne baba istemiyor. Ben bir kere bile etmedim"; "Çocuklar dışarı çıkmak istiyorlar ama anne babaları izin vermiyor. Barış olmayınca vermiyorlar."

[74] "Mahallede kadınlar para çıktı mı (yardımlardan bahsediyor) hemen koşuyor. Benim babam çalışmıyor, ve zenginler yardım etmiyor."

[75] "Diyarbakır'da fabrikalar kurulsun. Barış kardeşlik istiyoruz. Büyüklerimizin işleri yok, iş arıyorlar." This was a written statement in response to the Survey 2 question "Is there anything you would like to add?

[76] Many of the participants stated that had they had the power they would "build concrete, safe houses" and mend them. Just a few days before the focus groups, there had been an earthquake in a neighboring city which was also powerfully felt in Diyarbakır, and the children expressed fears and concerns regarding the earthquake. As they themselves expressed, the repeated emphases they made on the infrastructure and of safe house was to a significant degree related with this event.

Visible in some of these discourses - *"we want brotherhood"; "the rich don't help"* - was a subtle call for communal solidarity and collaboration to overcome their economic difficulties. However, in contrast to Sümerpark CB group participants who identified victimhood outside of their own personal spaces and highlighted collaboration as a means of helping the disadvantaged 'other', in Ben u Sen Group this collaboration was meant to deliver help and support for themselves and was sought from the outside; in the form of charity or investments from the rich and the more powerful. The difference, arguably, can be attributed to the differences in the socio-economic conditions of the participants' families, and the consequent realities of the everyday life. The participants in Sümerpark CB, according to survey information, had smaller families with fewer siblings in comparison to the Ben u Sen group, and had at least one person in the family employed – unlike Ben u Sen where three of the participants stated that no one in their family was working.

The theme of economic marginality also underscored their concerns as children. On the one hand, based on their own observation   s, some voiced concern for those children that have to work and are not able to attend school:

⎯ *Suat: The adults are at home, the children are working. Their fathers make children work.*

 Q. Why?

⎯ *Suat: To bring home more money. And they do not send them to school either*

⎯ *Yakup: They don't have money to buy alcohol. [77]*

On the other hand, in response to the survey question, "… what would you like to do in your free time? What kind of opportunities would you like to have?" four of the participants in the group, including also Yakup (Pelin 12, İbrahim 14, and Hasret 13, Yakup, 15) expressed their desire to work.[78] Hasret wrote, *"I'd like to work. I lost my father eight years ago, and our [economic] condition is low. I'd like to work to help my family."[79]*

Discourses of victimhood and (desire for) agency are mixed in the statements of these children, sometimes overlapping and sometimes contradicting one another. In line with the

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[77] "Büyükler evde, çocuklar çalışıyor. Babaları çalıştırıyor çocukları. ["Neden" diye soruyorum] Eve fazla para getirmek için. Okula da göndermiyorlar", "İçki alacak paraları yok."

[78] Three of the boys in the group had prior experiences of working, and Leyla said that she went to the cemetery nearby to sell water on Thursdays. My informant at ÇAÇA said that selling water on Thursdays was a common thing for many of the children in the neighborhood. It should also be noted that the participants who said they wanted to work each had one member in the family who was working as unskilled workers.

[79] "Çalışmak isterdim. Babamı 8 yıl önce kaybettim durumumuz düşük. Aileme yardımcı olmak için çalışmak isterdim."

mainstream conceptualizations of childhood and adulthood, these young people make a distinction between the typical roles and responsibilities of adults and children, where the latter has to work and the former has to be looked after and go to school. Yet the economical realities of the everyday, characterized by high levels of poverty and widespread unemployment in the neighborhood reverse these roles, and make such ideal role sharing a luxury for them. Where parents cannot find jobs, or cannot support their families adequately it is the children who have to - willingly or unwillingly - take economic responsibilities, sometimes at the cost of going to school. In this sense, I would argue that their perceptions of child labor in the case of Ben u Sen is context dependent; where adults are perceived to be irresponsible despite their poor circumstances - like spending money on alcohol - and children have to take upon their roles for supporting households, the act of working is seen as a form of victimhood that is not appreciated or supported. However, where the adults in the family are also working (or desire to work yet are unable to do so), the act of working becomes a means for the children to share the responsibility for supporting and upholding their family vis-à-vis challenges of the everyday. Indeed each of the participants, who expressed their desire to work, had a single member in the family who was employed (as unskilled workers). This is an interesting point that requires further research to design effective interventions, since it suggests that the agency of children regarding work takes place in two interrelated levels; at the 'actual' level which is the more visible one that is addressed by most studies, and at the level of meaning making, that reflects their desires for sharing economic responsibility.

To sum up what has been said so far, the participants in Ben u Sen group reflected on the meaning of peace at two distinct ways - as one of social harmony, and as one of the absence of direct and structural, particularly economic, forms of insecurities - and they used the word 'peace' interchangeably while referring to both these definitions. As such, these two dimensions were often intermingled in the discussion yet at the same time appeared as two separate conceptualizations, as two levels seen as independent of one another. One example is this dialogue:

— *Once some people came to our home. They wanted money, and they were going to break the door. We were afraid. Why is it like this?*
— *Also when a small kid and a big kid fight the families get involved*
— *Mothers and fathers fight and say dirty words to each other*
    Q. And would these things happen if there were peace?
— *Yes* (3-4 participants at the same time)

⸺ *Children want to get out [of their home] but the parents don't allow them to. When there is no peace they don't.*

⸺ *We don't want children to throw stones, but they tell the children "come on".*

⸺ *Bursa [the football team] comes, our people throw stones. Then they know [us] bad. Let those who know [us] bad come and see [for themselves].*

Arguably, the dialogue above reveals the distinction these children make between an ideal, almost utopian definition of peace of harmonious relationships at all levels, and a more 'feasible' peace shaped more around their observations of violence in the context of the current conflict, one form of which are the violent demonstrations in which children and young people participate. When one participant says "*When there is no peace [parents] don't [allow kids to go out]*", he is referring to the insecurities that threaten them such as the risk of being hurt or taken under custody in the demonstrations, as well as the related fears of the parents. These violent events and consequent physical insecurities, in return, are seen to both restrict their freedom of movement as children, and spread an unfair bad reputation for Diyarbakır and its people which they personally identify with, with a sense of frustration: "*Why did Bursa call us terrorists? We aren't terrorists.*"

For the purposes of understanding their perceptions of peace, the dialogue hints that, although they desire both, these young people perceive an end to this overt violence in the context of the current conflict to be more possible, since the fights within members of their community and family -which they also conceptualize as the absence of peace - will continue even after these violent events cease.

Without doubt, the observations noted here regarding the existence of two (or more) different levels of peace, as well as the relationship between these conceptualizations need to be researched further. Still though, I believe this is an important dimension which needs to be considered in the design of further research about the peace conceptualizations of young people, as it also determines the limits of their imagination, not only of the type of peace they desire, but also of the multiple roles that they might be willing to play. Thus it might also prove significant for designing different types of interventions that aim to empower and address the needs of children in conflict environments.

Finally, it should also be noted that although the participants in the Ben u Sen group did not openly talk about peace or its absence with reference to the politics of the Kurdish Question - but rather with reference to its more visible daily symptoms in their lives and still

without establishing a discursive connection between the two - this should not be taken to imply a lack of awareness of or concern regarding the macro political dynamics in which the conflict is played out. One suggestion of this is the below dialogue:

> ⸺ *Ahmet: Why did Bursa call us terrorists? We aren't terrorists.*
>
> ⸺ *Kerim: It's better if you say guerilla…*
>
> ⸺ *Ahmet: Ok. I mean we aren't guerillas. [80]*

This dialogue suggests that not only these young people are informed about the Kurdish Question - although they chose not to talk about it, - but also that they are far from being immune to the political language that surrounds the conflict and related issues of identity. Both 'terrorist' and 'guerilla' are words used in reference to the PKK members in Turkey; the former by those (state and predominantly the Turks) who see the organization as an illegitimate, terrorist one, and the latter by those (predominantly Kurds) who think its causes and (sometimes) means are legitimate. For those who hold the latter view the word 'terrorist' is seen as a delegitimizing label. What makes this dialogue interesting is the fact that it involves an impulsive defensive correction of the term 'terrorist' irrespective of the context in which it is voiced. The Bursa fans in the Diyarbakırspor game had called the Diyarbakırlıs 'terrorists' - not 'guerillas' - as an insult. So this was not a debate on PKK or it's actions, and Ahmet was basically voicing his frustration, as a Diyarbakırlı, with the label 'terrorist'. His comment was a statement of disillusionment with a degrading term that stigmatized all Diyarbakırlıs. Yet Kerim nevertheless felt the need to correct him, irrespective of the context in which the word was used, and Ahmet did rephrase his sentence without questioning - and the sentence lost its initial meaning. This instance shows how certain words and expressions have become excessively politicized and that this politicization also diffuses into the discourses of the children. The interaction between the two participants also suggests the existence of pressures towards ethno-political conformism within Kurdish society, and that children are also affected by this.

The debates and discussions in Sümerpark CB and Ben u Sen groups converge in their focus of a description of peace as detached from the wider politics of the Kurdish Question and of issues of identity. A related interesting point in that regards was that neither in Ben u Sen

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[80] - Bursa bize neden terörist dedi? Biz terörist değiliz.

- Gerilla desen daha iyi…

- Tamam. İşte, gerilla değiliz.

nor in Sümerpark CB groups did the participants show any interest in my ethnic identity as a non-Kurdish researcher. In the next four groups however, the Kurdish Question was the major theme, and the participants' descriptions of peace as well as their various grievances and concerns were voiced more in the context of the identity debates that evolved around the conflict. In these groups I observed that, though subtly, that there was a greater awareness of my ethnic identity that interested the participants in varying ways.

3.1.3. Bağlar Child Education Center

Bağlar District is the largest and most populated district in Diyarbakır, and houses a large number of immigrants who were displaced during the 1990s because of the armed conflict. Poverty and unemployment are important economic problems, and the district is also one of the primary sites of recent demonstrations and clashes with the police. A total of nine children between the ages of thirteen and fifteen (one sixteen) participated in the group; three boys and six girls. All the participants were residents in Bağlar District.[81]

The participants in the Bağlar Child Education Center (Bağlar) group provided some of the most elaborate and in depth arguments and views on how they regard peace particularly in the context of the current conflict, and with emphases on how it affects their everyday lives. In fact the discussion in this group was very lively, with participants sometimes speaking in collaborative sentences and sometimes interrupting each other in disagreement.

It should be noted that the Bağlar Child Education Center, from where the participants for this group were recruited, is a unique place among all the other centers, for the children attending this center, with the help of their advisors, publish and distribute in their neighborhood a Turkish/Kurdish bilingual monthly newspaper called *Denge Zarokan/Çocuğun Sesi* (*Children's Voice*). All the content of the newspaper is prepared by the children themselves and the newspaper provides the children with a platform to reflect on their concerns, interests and hopes in the form of interviews, stories, pictures and articles. At the time of the focus groups the children had just published and distributed the third issue of the paper.

The focus group in Bağlar involved some of those children who were actively involved in preparing the paper, and during the discussions some of the information they provided was from the interviews they had held with other children of various experiences from their neighborhoods. Although rigorous research would be needed to verify this, I believe that

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[81] They were from the neighborhoods of Mevlana Halit, Kaynartepe, Yunus Emre, Şeyh Şamil, and 5 Nisan.

having a legitimate space to express themselves with an audience, and having the practice of self expression, as well as being empowered to do so throughout this whole process, have played an important role in providing these children with a sense of self confidence and skills for explaining themselves and listening to others, as well as with the ability to imagine alternative futures.

In contrast to the Sümerpark and Ben u Sen participants, from the beginning Bağlar participants provided very concrete - in addition to abstract - definitions of peace, and they primarily discussed its absence in the region, in the context of the Kurdish Question and the related social and political developments. Their definitions of peace mostly entailed descriptions of equality and brotherhood, mutual love and respect, coexistence, and tolerance.

— *Büşra: Peace is a magic wand. When that wand touches a place, a new life takes root in that place. New dreams take root. Peace is that everybody lives in love and tolerance, with people who do not demean them. Peace is the biggest need for the human kind.*

— *Kerime: I believe people should live and let live.*

— *Ece: I think the people in our country don't know what peace is. Some of them don't.*

Q. Who don't know?

— *Ahmet. The ones who do not live [experience peace] don't know.*

— *Sena: Now we are talking about peace. In peace there is no discrimination. Turk, Kurd, Zaza, Jew; in peace there is no differentiation of any of these [others agree]. These should not be discriminated.* [82]

Freedom from both those direct and structural forms of violence was the other major theme. The participants stated that peace meant *"not to be made to suffer"*, *"freedom of the others from living through the same suffering"*, having *"no fights on streets"*, and "*not to be arrested when not guilty*" [of children]. Indiscriminate police violence towards children at the recent demonstrations, arbitrary arrests of them by the police, and the imprisonment of

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[82] "Barış bir sihirli değnek. O sihirli değneğin ucu bir yere değerse orada yeni bir yaşam yeşerir. Yeni düşler yeşerir. Herkesin sevgi hoş görü içerisinde, kendilerini hiç hor görmeyen insanlarla beraber yaşamalarıdır barış. Barış insan oğlunun duyduğu en büyük ihtiyaçtır."

"Bence insan yaşamalı, yaşatmalı"

"Bence bizim ülkedekiler barışın ne olduğunu bilmiyorlar. Bazıları bilmiyor"

"Biz şimdi barıştan bahsediyoruz. Barışta ayrım da yoktur Türk Kürt iste Zazası Yahudisi, hepsinin ayrımı barışta olmaz. Birbirinden ayrılmaması gerekiyor bunların"

children was a major concern for all of those in the group, who also witnessed - and sometimes participated in, or were affected by - these events in their own neighborhoods and empathized with their fellow children. Indeed, many recounted on their own vivid observations and experiences of this phenomenon in the form of 'collective testimonies' stating that the events "*affect us children the most*". One described in detail how police "*had no mercy*" even for small children, and how they caught, beat and arrested (put in jail) even those who were out playing or had "*gone out to buy bread*". Another told of how she witnessed a classmate being shot in the foot by the police leaving him crippled, and of how she watched another boy killed by police gunfire - "*I saw him with bread in his hand, and they killed him right in front of me. He could have been my brother, or my best cousin*". Yet another told of talking to a friend of his who had been jailed without food for two days, and without the knowledge of his parents. Their own self images in the face of these experiences of violence was one of both victims - born out of empathy with those children affected and accompanied by sentiments of fear, anxiety and anger - and of righteous yet helpless defenders concerned for the safety of children in a parent-like manner. Furthermore, physical, as well as psychological (in)security was a major theme determining these young participants' imaginations for alternative realities and thus of a desired future peace. As put by one female participant:

> *We fear them [the police]. We hate them; because of what they do in these events. I mean if they hadn't done this, it wouldn't have been like this. Right now a child could go to him and speak to him very comfortably, with ease. They could have spoken with each other at different events in very different ways, they could have made jokes. But right now we are not in such a situation. (Sena, 14)*

However, physical insecurity was not the only theme that dominated the discussion on peace. The participants also voiced their concerns about those structural insecurities such as poverty, unemployment, underdevelopment in the region, crime, lack of proper education facilities for children, child street labor and coerced participation in crime.

Throughout the discussion, all these definitions of peace - be it of brotherhood, equality and coexistence, or of absence of physical and structural security - were shaped mostly around their perceptions and experiences of discrimination and marginalization (as both Kurds and *Diyarbakırlıs*) in the context of the current conflict. These young people were extremely wary about the stereotypes about them prevalent in the "West". On one hand, based on personal

experiences and the impressions they obtain from the media - such as some TV series[83] - they complained about how being Kurdish or from Diyarbakır came to be associated either with being a member of the PKK, a 'terrorist', or with being a criminal, such as a thief or a drug dealer; *"In any case you are sure to have done something".* When asked whether their opinions were based on impressions or on actual personal experiences, they replied in favor of the latter; two children recounted their experiences of having been in the West:

> *Hocam, once I went to Bursa to work. For those people [living in Bursa] even a dog is more precious than we are. I walk past their houses, they say 'Kurds walked by' and get mad. When a little [Kurdish] child enters a garden, the owner gets mad and beats him.[84]* (Ahmet, 14)

> *And once I went to Istanbul to my uncle's (enişte) house. Where they live, it's all Turkish; there are no Kurds. Once, friends of my uncle's nephew had come for a visit. We were sitting. He said, "among us people always wish that the Kurds had never been". They kept saying this over and over again. It was almost as if they saw them [the Kurds] as enemies, and yet they did not know I was Kurdish. After conversing for a while, I told them that there shouldn't be any discrimination. And they asked me "What is your race? Are you Turkish or Kurdish?", and I said "I am Kurdish". They were very surprised. They said "[until now] we had known the Kurds to be very ignorant, very aggressive, very greedy, etc. (Büşra, 14)[85]*

Both Ahmet's and Büşra's stories reflect on how being a Diyarbakırlı is also intermingled with being Kurdish, especially in the light of their own experiences of discrimination. Yet at the same time there is an important difference in both the ways they tell these stories and their approaches. As was evident by his tone of speech, Ahmet was angered by the treatment of the Kurds by the Turks in Bursa, yet at the same time because he had no genuine contact with these Turks, he could not do anything to counter it, which added to his anger and frustration. It was different for Büşra; she was actually talking with these people who were prejudiced

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[83] "Tek Türkiye" is a fictional TV series that takes place in Southeast. It depicts the clashes between Turkish state and the PKK (unnamed in the series, but obvious) from the perspective of the state. "Ölümsüz Kahramanlar" is a tv show where the personal stories of those Turkish Army soldiers who died in clashes with the PKK are told. Both shows are aired in Samanyolu TV known for its nationalist and conservative stance and closeness to the government.

[84] "Hocam ben bir kere gittim Bursa'ya, çalışmaya gittim. Oradakiler için bir köpeğin değeri bizlerden daha fazladır. Hocam ben geliyorum, ben geliyorum, benim evden Kürtler geçti, kızıyorlar. Küçük bir çocuk bahçelerine gitse kızıyor vuruyor."

[85] "Ben de yaz tatilinde İstanbul'a eniştemin yanına gitmiştim. Onların yakınında hep Türk var, hiç Kürt yok. Bir kere eniştemin yeğeninin arkadaşının yeğeni gelmişti, oturuyorduk. Dedi, bizde hep diyorlar Kürtler olmaz olsaydı. Çok diyorlardı hatta. Hani neredeyse onları bir düşman gibi görüyorlardı, ki onlar daha benim Kürt olduğumu bilmiyorlardı. Biraz sohbet ettikten sonra ben dedim ayrım olmaz falan. Onlar da bana dediler, senin ırkın nedir? Kürt müsün, Türk müsün? Ben dedim Kürdüm, çok şaşırdılar. Dediler Kürtleri daha çok cahil biliyorduk, daha çok saldırgan, daha çok açgözlü vs… "

against the Kurds and also because of her keen character and desire for dialogue, she was able to come up with counter arguments. Indeed after telling her story she continued:

We are able to answer such questions asked us by people in various ways. For instance we said, if one Kurd is bad, that does not mean that all Kurds are bad. Or if someone [not Kurdish] is bad, that does not mean that all are bad. And I think what we have said has worked well, and many of our friends have said it. And now they [the Turks they talked to] do not believe these people.

Q. How did you feel at the end of all this?

At the end, I am happy that I was able to familiarize them with Diyarbakır, with the Kurdish, even if only a little; to have changed the wrong ideas they had… [86]

Büşra's story suggests how engaging in constructive dialogue can have an empowering impact for the children, providing them with a voice and space for self-expression as well as with self esteem and hope in future improved relations - a point which has much significance while designing appropriate forms of intervention designed for promoting children/youth agency. This is also important, since most of the Bağlar participants, like Büşra, held the view that these false and negative impressions held against the Kurds and Diyarbakır were a result of misinterpretation and hearsay in the West - *"They [the Turks] believe in what they are told, and say what they have heard"* (Sena, 14) - as well as of lack of engagement between those in the East and the West. They pointed out that the Turks did not know about them, and expressed their belief that if they got to know them and the region better they would rid themselves of their negative stereotypes and discriminatory behavior.

On the other hand, the participants in the Bağlar group associated the wider structural problems in the city also with this discrimination between East and West and issues of identity. One participant complained that "Turks in İstanbul outcast all the Kurds as if all are members of the PKK. That is why they don't make investments here. That's why we are left the way we are" (Ece, 14).[87] Another pointed out that Kurds were discriminated against vis-à-vis Turks in terms of employment opportunities and thus were economically marginalized; she thought

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[86] "Bir kişinin bize sorduğu böyle sorulara falan çok farklı cevaplar verebiliyoruz. Mesela diyorduk herhangi bir Kürt'ün kötü olması demek bütün Kürtler'in kötü olması demek değil. Veya başka birinin kötü olması hepsinin öyle olduğu anlamına gelmez. Ve bence söylediklerimiz işe yaradı ve bir çok arkadaşımız da bunları söyledi. Artık o kişilere inanmamaya başladılar."

Soru: "Tüm bu olayların sonunda nasıl hissettin?"

"Sonuçta onlara az da olsa Diyarbakır'ı, Kürtler'i tanıttığım için mutluyum. Onların kafalarındaki yanlış fikirlerini değiştirmek..."

[87] "İstanbul'daki Türkler, bütün Kürtler'i sanki PKK'lı [pekakalı] diye onları dışlıyorlar. O yüzden buraya hiç bir yatırım yapmıyorlar. O yüzden biz de böyle kaldık."

this was one of the main causes of the recent riots as well as a reason for some people to join the ranks of the PKK as a means of regaining their rights. Yet another drew attention to the hampering role of demonstrations and of Diyarbakır's bad reputation on their education opportunities: "Sometimes teachers are appointed here, or anywhere else in the region, but they are scared. They stay for a month or so and immediately after they get scared and leave. This is bad for our education and the name of our city is blackened" (Sena).[88] This relationship they established between discrimination (as Kurds and Diyarbakırlıs), structural insecurities, and the absence of peace was best explained by the following statement uttered by Kerime (age 14):

> *If they provided the labor they did for the West also for Diyarbakır, very beautiful things could happen here. It would be better than denigrating Diyarbakır. This could provide peace; some steps [for peace] could be taken. If this labor was also given to us people could explain their opinions much better. And right now in Diyarbakır, half of the city is unemployed. There is a need to find a solution for this, it would be better if factories were built here (...) In Istanbul there are many universities. If they built here the same, there would be many educated children right now. There are kids whose fathers are crippled and so they need to work. In Diyarbakır right now the kids work and take the money to their fathers.*

At the same time their concerns about the wider issue of discrimination also echoed in their repeated emphasis on the brotherhood of Turks and Kurds. On one hand, this notion of 'brotherhood' was expressed as an existing fact with historical roots of solidarity, yet long forgotten and waiting to be discovered to achieve peace: *"We all know how Çanakkale War was won, how we fought together against foreign states. That's why this country is both theirs and ours. They shouldn't discriminate."*[89] On the other hand, it was also voiced as a wish for an ideal peaceful future where Turks and Kurds would live as equals. Indeed, when asked about whether peace would be achieved if the guns were silent, all collectively replied as "no!" and one participant continued: "*[we] need to be brothers, to get along well with each other*". Yet they also acknowledged that no matter how desirable it was such a relationship was not possible in the current circumstances of the conflict, the responsibility of which they thought

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[88] "Mesela bazen öğretmenlerin buraya tayinleri çıkar, veya işte Güneydoğu Anadolu bölgesinde olan bir şehre tayinleri çıkar, mesela korkarlar. Mesela bir ay ya da daha fazla kalıp sonrasında hemen korkup gidiyorlar. Ve bu eğitimimiz açısından da kötü oluyor. Hem de şehrimizin adı kirleniyor."

[89] "Çanakkale savaşının nasıl kazanıldığını hepimiz biliyoruz. Nasıl yabancı devletlere karşı birlikte savasştığımızı. Bunu bildigimiz için bence bu ülke hem onların hem bizim. Ayrım yapmamaları lazım."

lay with the Turks: *"I don't think the Turks think like that. They outcast the Kurds They don't see [the Kurds] as brothers. Since they don't see it like that, we cannot either. But if they take a step we will take four steps" (Ece)[90].* Finally, 'brotherhood' was also used as a symbol for the shared suffering and fate for those people from both sides who suffer because of the conflict: *"All are brothers. This soil is ours [together]. You are the same people, you are not different. My father's two friends, one was a soldier and the other was a guerilla. When fighting broke out both died".* [91]

As the discussions above show, in the Bağlar group, peace and conflict was mostly discussed and defined in the light of the more present and immediate experiences and observations of the participants. Yet also evident in the discussions were the influences of past experiences and painful memories inherited from family members regarding the 1990s when the armed conflict was at its peak. While talking about experiences of discrimination in the group, one of the female participants (Ece) hesitantly recounted the loss of three of her uncles after their village had been burned down by the army (as she had heard from her family):

> *… They burned the villages without even letting anyone take their belongings. [Later] my uncles went back to check if there was anything left that could be used. Then the soldiers saw the three of them, and took them on the pretext "show us the way". Later no one ever heard from them again. Only one eye witness told that he saw them and their condition was really bad. And in 2004 they found their bones.[92]*

Not only her story but also her reaction - for she started crying after this and stayed silent for most of the discussion - show how the memories play a significant role in the lives of children and might become sources of trauma. Another story was told by Haydar (age 15) - this time while talking about the soldiers (those who are doing their military service) in the family- but in a noticeably calm tone:

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[90] "Yani Türkler öyle düşünmüyorlar bence, Kürtler'i dışlıyorlar. Kardeş olarak görmüyorlar. Onlar öyle görrmediği için biz de öyle göremeyiz. Ama onlar bir adım atarsa biz dört adım atarız"

[91] "Herkes kardeştir. Bu topraklar bizimdir. Aynı insanlarsın, farklı değilsin. Benim babamın arkadaşı biri askerdi, Şırnak'ta, biri gerillaydı. Ve çatışma çıktığında çocuk da dağa çıkan da öldü."

[92] "Bizim köyleri yaktıklarında 3 dayımı askerler almış… (tereddüt etti durdu) 3 dayım evleri yıkıldıktan sonra gitmişler bakmaya. Eşyalarını bile çıkarmalarına izin vermeden yakmışlar. Dayımlar da gidip bakmış hani eşyalar kullanılacak kalmış mı diye. Sonra ucunu görmüşler askerler bize yol gösterin bahanesiyle onları götürmüşler. Sonra onlardan hiç bir haber alınamamış. Bir tane de görgü tanığı demiş ben onları görmüşüm, halleri çok kötüymüş. 2004 yılında da kemiklerini bulmuşlar." (Ağladı, kendine gelemedi bir üzere.)

One of my uncles went up to the mountain. One day he went to the graves of those who became martyrs (şehit). A man passing by the graveyard saw them. He immediately phoned the soldiers. Then came the soldiers, they surrounded them, and said, surrender! Then they fired and my uncle was dead.[93]

In the group, Ece and Haydar were the only ones to share the painful experiences in their families in such detail. Nevertheless, the inheritance of memories was still there in the hidden transcript of the discussions. While discussing the motives of those children who participate in the demonstrations, or of those who go and join the ranks of the PKK, for example, one of the explanations brought by some participants was shared painful experiences in the families of those children: "*Hocam, they all lived through suffering or so. Be it his mother or his father (…) He looks at those around him [and thinks] one day they will also live the same suffering*""[94] (Ahmet). Similarly when Sena said peace is "*not to be made to suffer*" or Ahmet, "*freedom of the others from living through the same suffering*", they were subtly referring to the past, as well as the hardships that they themselves are encountering in the present. Thus, the participants imagine peace as something that is devoid of these past inherited experiences, both for themselves and for future generations.

Added to this, is the conceptualization of peace by some participants as the presence and availability of those spaces where these past memories as well as present painful experiences can be voiced legitimately and heard and shared by others. For these young people, peace reminds one of, as one participant put it, the desire "*to express [one's] feelings, what kind of suffering they have experienced*" (Kerime). In this sense, most feel that Kurds lack those spaces and are unable to make their voices heard, particularly in the West and among the Turks. This also creates a sense of resentment for some, since they feel their pain is ignored or downplayed: ""*The mothers of the martyrs cry only for their own children. But the mothers of those who go up the mountain also mourn, but these are not mentioned. They say we are the only ones who mourn. Don't think about the mothers of those in the mountains*" (Sedat).[95]

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[93] "Benim bir amcam dağa gitmiş. Bir gün dağda şehit olanların, ölenlerin mezarına gitmiş, bir adam mezarın yanından geçerken onları görmüş. Hemen askere telefon açmış. Demiş burda burda. Sonra gelmişler askerler, etrafı sarmışlar, demişler teslim olun. Ateş etmişler, amcam ölmüş."

[94] "Hocam onların hepsi eziyeti falan yaşamış. Annesi babası olsun…"; "Çevresindekilere bakıyor; başka bir gün onlar da o eziyeti yaşayacak."

[95] "Şehit anneleri diyor sanki kendi evlatları tek şehit olmuş diye ağlıyor. Dağa çıkanların annesi de üzülüyor, ama işlenmiyor. Onlar sade kendileri tek üzülen, bizlermişiz diyorlar. Hiç demiyor dağa çıkanların annelerini."

Furthermore, the discussion reveals that the availability of such spaces and such legitimacy in itself is not considered adequate; also important for peace for some, is the ability and skills of the people in the region to express themselves in meaningful ways. Kerime's above quoted statement that *"If they provided the labor they did for the West also for Diyarbakır … This could provide peace; … people could explain their opinions much better"*, reveals that the youth perceive a lack of ability for self expression in the region and they consider such an ability an important dimension of a peace process. This, considered together with Büşra's reflection of her encounter with a Turkish family that was cited above, is a significant point, for as will be discussed later, it points to the importance of dialogue for a future peacebuilding process, and the potential for the empowerment of these young people as agents of positive social change through non-violent means. This gains more importance when also considered in the context of their belief, noted above, that Turks' negative stereotypes are rooted in their lack of knowledge of the Kurdish people and the region overall.

Without doubt, the imaginations and perceptions of these young people regarding the meaning of peace, also highlight their perceptions regarding the root causes of the current conflict, as well as those mutually constitutive factors that prolong it. An important point is that, none of the participants associated the conflict, or the establishment of peace with a separate Kurdish state. To the contrary, all of them perceived the current conflict to be about a struggle for equal rights and opportunities as citizens within Turkey. Although most of the participants -and particularly girls, as will be seen below - disagreed with the violent means used and emphasized longing for the invention of alternate non-violent means, the conflict itself (the riots, the armed clashes), as noted above, was seen as being rooted in the desire to achieve peace, in a positive sense.

It was in this context that the Bağlar participants also situated the riots and the children's participation in them. The riots were described as a response to a set of mutually constitutive factors involving the past (inherited) and present (experienced) suppression and suffering of the Kurds, and the influence of the families and family histories, as well as peer pressure resulting in conformism, in the name of solidarity with the Kurdish cause

— *Sedat: In our neighbourhood most of the youth, my friends, participate. When they pressurized… They told me "are you not Kurdish?" Like that. First time I was a little anxious. But then you get used to it.*

— *Büşra: Didn't you resist them. I mean what's the point of this?*

⸻ *Ahmet: When one participates he looks for his rights. But if you get caught by the police then it's bad*

⸻ *Sena: They are looking for their rights. In fact I want [to participate] too. It's good that they do it, but [it should be] quiet and calm, not with fights and noise, like this. [96]*

Q. Why do you think then, children participate in the demonstrations?

⸻ *Sinem: With the influence of their families. When their families are Kurdish, they get influenced. They talk next to their kids, like we're Kurdish we lived this and that, and then when there is an event their children go and stone the police. They have a bad feeling toward them, that's why.[97]*

⸻ *Ahmet: They all lived through the suffering that's why.*

⸻ *Sedat: But generally they are influenced by their surroundings. The adults around them. [98]*

A sense of both victimization and agency for children is intermingled in this discourse. The youth are portrayed as both righteous rebels against established forms of power relations and forms of oppression (though many disagree with the violent means they use), and as victims of circumstances and environment; in a relationship where one constantly reproduces the other in the politics of the everyday. Nevertheless, given their own observations of children getting hurt in the demonstrations and the reality of children filling Diyarbakır prisons, however, the more dominant discourse in their narratives is one of victims. In the face of these realities, where alternative forms of resistance and empowerment other than violence are absent, the desires of those who do not approve of violent means for agency in "looking for their rights" go unfulfilled. Moreover, this victimhood is considered not only as a present reality but also as a threat for the future with much broader implications, as suggested by this elaborate description by Kerime:

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[96] - Arkadaşlar bizim mahallede genellikle çoğu katılıyor. Arkadaşlar baskı yapınca yani … Bana dediler ki sen Kürt degil misin? Öyle işte… İlkinde biraz tedirgindim. Sonra işte alışıyorsun..

- Peki sen hiç onlara savunmadın mı? Yani bunun amacı ne?

- Katıldığında hocam hakkını arıyor insan. Ama yakalanırsan kötü polislere.

- Haklarını arıyorlar. yani aslında ben de istiyorum, böyle yapıyorlar iyi oluyor ama sadece sessiz sakin yani boyle kavgalı gürültülü değil.

[97] "Ailelerin etkisiyle. Aileleri Kürt olunca işte etkileniyorlar, onlar çocukların yanında konuşuyorlar. Diyorlar biz Kürdüz, şöyleyiz, şunu yaşadık bunu yaşadık. Sonra olay olunca çocukları da bu yüzden hani polislere taş atıyorlar. Hani onlara kötü bir duyguları var bu yüzden."

[98] "Normalde genelde ama çevreden. Çevreden etkileniyorlar, çevresindeki yetişkilerden"

The Diyarbakır prisons are filled with children. These children, what are they going to do when they get out 14 years later, we should ask that to ourselves. They will be outcasted. (…) Because even if he said I will go to another city, let me save myself from here, and let [such a thing] not happen again. Then, when he says I got out of prison, people will react to this. Both in Diyarbakır and outside... I am sure that 50 percent of the children when they get out will go up the mountain. Because you couldn't go to school. You cannot save yourself, you cannot do different things. And your family can look after you only for a limited time, then they can't. In the end you will go up the mountain. I am sure. Because there are no other things [options] when you get out. I mean to survive.[99]

Kerime's pessimistic foreshadowing of the future reveals a different reality of the link between agency and victimization. Her analysis goes beyond those arguments by some participants who perceived joining the ranks of the PKK as a response to the oppressive power structures, undertaken for freedom and rights (though some did not approve of it). In her perspective joining the ranks of the PKK and hence being agents of violence are perceived to be rooted, not directly in the politics, but in the individual survival strategies of those children (and future adults) who will have no alternate means to escape their miserable life conditions and gain protection. At the same time the way she voices her opinion - "*we should ask that to ourselves* " - reveals a shared responsibility and a desire for agency to prevent this pessimistic projection from coming true. It involves a sophisticated critique of the current state policies and is a warning against their reproductive role in the conflict and violence.

Overall the focus group in Bağlar shows a desire for agency on the part of these young people. They are tired of the conflict and they have a very strong and immediate longing for peace. As Büşra says "*Peace is the biggest need for the human kind".* Maybe even more importantly they believe that this longing is mutual. As put by this female participant in reference to the movie *Güneşi Gördüm (I saw the Sun, 2009)*[100]:

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[99] "Şu an tutuklanan çocuklarla taşmış zaten Diyarbakır cezaevleri. Şu an bu taşlamalardan çıkıp da 14 yıl sonra bu çocukların ne yapacağı, bunu da bir kendimize soralım. Yani çıktıklarında ne yapacaklar. Yine de bir dışlanma toplumda dışlanma olacak. Çünkü, dedi ki mesela ben başka şehre gidicem, kendimi buradan kurtarayım, bir daha olmasın. Çıktığında ben çıktım - bunu söyleyince kesinlikle bir insan buna tepki verecektir. Mesela dışardaki insanlar da, Diyarbakır'da da… yani şu an şu çocuklar tutuklandıktan sonra kesinlikle hemen hemen ben yüzde 50'sinin çıkacağından çok eminim. Çünkü kendisini okul okumaktan gitti. Okul gitti. Kendini kurtaramayacaksın. Daha farklı şeyler de yapamazsın . Ailen de sana bir müddet bakabilir, başka bakamaz. Eninde sonunda yine dağa çıkacaksın, ben çok eminim. Yani kurtulmak için."

[100] The film is about the life of a Kurdish family, the members of which have to immigrate to different geographies within and outside Turkey during the late 1990s when their village is evacuated as a result of the violent conflict. It deals with the

In that movie the man says, "one sides sings 'come, come to the mountains', the other side sings the mountains will harm you'. But", he says, "how wonderful it will be if we only left the mountains to the birds and bees". Both sides want to be saved (Sena, 14)

There is recognition in their narratives that violence, no matter how legitimate it might be considered to be by some, is not providing the desired outcomes for them and they are trying to imagine alternative ways. Participating in demonstrations that are "*quiet and calm, not with fights and noise"* as expressed by Sena, or writing articles in newspapers to defend one's rights, and engaging in non-violent means of protest like planting trees as imagined by Büşra are manifestations of their desires to play more constructive roles to engage with their concerns.

Their desire for alternative means, on the other hand are restrained both by their status as children and by the internal dynamics of the Kurdish national movement. Their desire for agency contrasts with the perceptions of the adults around them who try to keep them away from politics:

My dad says "it's better for you not to talk much; it's ill-advised for you to learn these things. He says you are not yet at the age to learn about it. I mean they say that but these things are already aired on news. They say you don't know, and we don't talk next to you, but we see all these things in the evening news (Sinem, 13).
[101]

In an environment where children are frequent victims of direct violence from the police as well as of the justice system, Sinem's statement is reflective of the impulsive desires of parents to protect their children by preventing their politicization. This feeling is also reflected in Sena's statement: "*My mother always says Turks and Kurds are brothers, and those who go up the mountain, they do wrong"*. However these children do not obtain their impressions and knowledge only from their families. In an environment where street clashes are a daily reality and the media transmits images of the conflict on a frequent basis, it becomes trying to keep

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consequences of the conflict on the everyday lives of internally displaced people, and was one of the first movies of the topic to reach a wide Turkish audience when it was first screened in March 2009. Please see http://www.gunesigordum.com/gunes_en.html and http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1347521/ for more details.

[101] "Benim babam işte fazla konuşmazsanız iyi, böyle bilgileri öğrenmeniz sakıncalı der. Öğrenecek yeterli yaşta değilsiniz der. Hani onlar böyle diyorlar ama yeterince haberlerde falan yeterince veriliyor, onlar diyor sizler bilmiyorsunuz yanınızda bahsetmiyoruz diye ama bunların hepsini akşam haberlerinde görüyoruz."

them isolated from the politics of the everyday for protection becomes futile, and these children themselves are also aware of it.

While the discussion on peace and conflict in the Bağlar group, primarily evolved around the Kurdish-Turkish, or Diyarbakır-West dichotomy, outlining their own identity perceptions as Kurdish and Diyarbakırlıs, discussion also revealed internal divisions and disagreements on identity, both shaped in the political and social dynamics of the conflict. The issue was that of what constitutes Kurdishness, which also revealed to some extent the perspectives of the participants on violence as means to achieve ends:

— *Kerime: After you go past the Euphrates River [to the West] people say, "PKK out! PKK out!" (she pronounces it as pe-ka-ka)*

— *Sedat: (interrupting) do not say "pe-ka-ka"*

— *Kerime: I say "pe-ka-ka".(She continues) There is a need to stop all this. Even if we are, I mean, even if we are bad, these words should not be said to us. That's what I think.*

  Q. (To Sedat) What happens when she says "pe-ka-ka"?

— *Sedat: She shouldn't say "pe-ka-ka"*

— *Kerime: (Mockingly) Should I say "pe-ke-ke"?*

— *Sedat: What kind of a Kurd are you?*

— *Kerime: Kurdishness is lived from the inside not from the outside.*

— *Sedat: Irrelevant!*

  Q. Then what happens when it's said as "pe-ke-ke"? How do you feel? And how do you feel when it's said as "pe-ka-ka"?

— *Sedat: Anyways, let's close the subject. (others laugh)*

— *Haydar: Let's not get into politics or we will be lost.*

— *Büşra: To go up the mountain saying "I am Kurdish" is not a solution in my opinion.*

— *Kerime: It [being Kurdish] is not a matter of going to the events and saying "I am Apocu, I am Apocu". It has to be inside a person.[102]*

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[102] Kerime: Fırat Nehrinden sonra [Batı'ya] gittiğimde buraya PKK dışarı PKK dışarı dışarı ['pekaka' diye telaffuz ediyor]…

Sedat: [lafını bölüyor] Pekaka deme.

In Turkish, the acronym PKK is read as 'pekaka' and in Kurdish as 'pekeke'. Thus, in the Southeast the latter pronunciation is more common among the population. However this pronunciation has also attained a symbolic meaning throughout Turkey, where the former is widely associated with those who see the organization as a terrorist one, and the latter with those who view its political/armed struggle as legitimate. Seen in this light, the debate between Sedat and Kerime (and later Büşra) which starts as one of how to pronounce "PKK" and then evolves into a general discussion on violent means, is also suggestive of the internal debates and divisions within the Kurdish community regarding the link between being Kurdish and being supportive of the goals and means of the Kurdish nationalist movement, which are mostly associated with the PKK.

While Sedat (age 16) spoke of pressures to conformism in reference to the reasons for children's participation in demonstrations and within the victimization context, in this earlier debate he had reproduced a similar discourse in the group. Being, or defining one's self as Kurdish, according to Sedat, required using the 'right jargon' - the language that was supportive of the PKK, or the Kurdish national cause. Kerime and Büşra strongly disagreed with this; they associated this jargon "pe-ke-ke" and Sedat's strong insistence on the use of this acronym with being supportive of the means that was spearheaded by the PKK. They defined themselves as Kurdish yet refused both the association of Kurdishness with support for the PKK or national cause, and being pro-violence - be it in the form of armed struggle or participation in violent demonstrations. Furthermore they protested such an association.

Kerime: Ben pekaka diyorum. (devam ediyor) Buna bir dur denmesi gerekiyor. Biz o kadar yine de biz şey olsak bile, kötü bile olsak, bize bu kelimelerin söylenmemesi gerekiyor. Ben böyle düşünüyorum.

Soru: 'pekaka' deyince ne oluyor?

Sedat: Pekaka demesin.

Kerime: Pekeke mi diyim?

Sedat: Ne biçim Kürtsün?

Kerime: Kürtlük içten olur, dıştan olmaz.

Sedat: Alakası yok.

Soru: Peki ne oluyor 'pekeke' deyince, sen ne hissediyorsun? 'Pekaka' deyince ne hissediyorsun?

Sedat: Neyse konuyu kapatalım.

Haydar: Siyasete girmeyelim. Yoksa cikamazsın içinden.

Büşra: Kürdüm diye dağa çıkmak bir çözüm değil bence.

Kerime: Gidip de olaylarda 'Ben Apocuyum Apocuyum" demekle olmaz. İnsanın içinde olması gerekiyor. ("Apocu" in this sense means "supporter of Apo" – the short Kurdish name for Abdullah Öcalan).

This debate reveals how the interpretations of Kurdishness might take different meanings between these young people. While all three of them embrace the Kurdish identity, for Sedat, Kurdishness is a political identity, rather than a cultural or an ethnic one. For Kerime it is cultural (and arguably ethnic) and is related to how one feels inside. What was interesting here was that, the discussion started very subtly at the beginning, and while these two young people discussed about the right pronunciation, at the same time - as later revealed particularly by the statements of the young women - they were aware that they were at the same time discussing a much larger issue; the issue of accepting violence as a legitimate means to achieve an end, or not. Another interesting point was the context in which the debate started - while Kerime was actually protesting the ill treatment of Kurdish by the Turks. In this sense, the debate also gives an impression on the power of labels used in speech in defining one's own and perceiving another's identity, irrespective of the content of the discourse.

Few days after the focus group, I came across one of the teachers at the Child Education center, and she told me of her personal conversation with Ahmet: Ahmet apparently was surprised to find out during the focus groups that Büşra was in fact Kurdish, for during the majority of the conversations he had believed her to be Turkish. Ahmet's encounter with his teacher suggests that, he was unable to imagine that someone who thought the way Büşra did - she who was most critical of violence during the discussion, and also had argued with Ahmet - could be Kurdish; she had to be Turkish. This reasoning also reveals that personal/community level definitions of identity not only produce their own norms and expectations for conformity as seen in the dialogue between Kerime and Sedat, but also that they might become strict categorizations informing assumptions these young people have of other's identities, rendering the existence of alternative definitions of identity - and arguably alternative means of defending that identity - unimaginable.

3.1.4. Suriçi Educational Support Center

Like Bağlar, Suriçi Educational Support Center (Suriçi) group also witnessed a lively and an intense discussion with in depth descriptions of their views about the conflict and their everyday experiences and concerns. A total of nine participants between the ages of twelve and fourteen, three boys and six girls participated in the group. Unlike Bağlar, however, where the participants focused on a wider range of issues relating future peace and the current conflict, the Suriçi group predominantly chose to focus the discussion directly on the recent riots and identity issues. Other issues that might also have been important such as, economic

underdevelopment and poverty were only marginally mentioned in this group, despite the fact that Suriçi is a place where the economic problems are felt deeply. Again unlike Bağlar group, these children reflected more on the present destructive nature of the conflict in their everyday lives, rather than on an (constructive or destructive) imagination of a future. Nevertheless, the concerns that they have voiced, and issues that they believe needs to be resolved reveals important insight regarding the kind of peace that they would desire.

Suriçi, where these participants live, is a highly politicized district where the demonstrations and clashes with the police forces are frequent. Hence, the recent demonstrations and subsequent events of violence were one of the main themes that drove the discussion and like the Bağlar participants, these young people were also able to provide very detailed testimonies of their observations and experiences of these events. Indiscriminate beatings and arbitrary arrests of children by the police was a particular source of concern for the participants who empathized with those children: *"They take everyone that is passing through, who ever pass by"*, *"Once I saw the police caught a child, one stepped on his foot, and the other on his head. Then they beat him up with sticks"*, *"And they* [the police] *say we have documents, we are allowed to kill you"*, *"We are scared now; I am scared to go out"*.

Feelings of anger, resentment and fear in the face of these direct forms of violence, and particularly against the police, were also accompanied by feelings of injustice, frustration and helplessness rooted in the structural workings of the justice and security system**.** While some acknowledged that the violence that children engaged in at the demonstrations could be punishable, the extent, nature and logic of police's intervention, as well as the disproportionateness of the sentences given to them in courts was still incomprehensible for them: *We know they do their job, but this is [taking it] too far. The duty [of the police] is to take them to court, and they will see their mistake"; "In fact, our people also have some mistake. I mean our children go out [to demonstrations], but I think to give such high sentences is still very wrong. They give too much! I mean, why so much?* (Sabahat) [103]*.* One participant complained that policemen never received punishment for their wrongful behavior, while another expressed disappointment for their inability to do anything in the face of these events: *"for instance, when a policeman speaks [in court], even if we go to the court [to testify] no one pays any attention. You go for nothing. And also people are scared [to testify]" (Aygül).* Yet another pointed out to the biased behavior of the policemen in treating different types of

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[103] "Aslinda hocam bizim halkta da biraz hata var. çocuklarımız falan cikiyorlar ama o kadar ceza vermeleri bence cok yanlis bir sey ."

crimes: *"I don't know why, when there is a murder they don't give it so much priority. But when it's about the police [being stoned/getting hurt] it's really terrible."* (Zilan).

It was these observations and views that shaped their conceptualizations of peace during the discussion. When asked directly, they defined peace as the absence of these direct forms of violence in the context of the recent riots, as "freedom", "right to live", "living without any events/riots", "living without violence", and "freedom for our friends in jail". When asked what they would do bring peace to Diyarbakır they restated these concerns, with one participant also adding her wish for the *"prime minister not to give directions to the policemen"* to beat and imprison children, showing that they were aware of the hierarchical relationships that existed within the workings of the system.

The seemingly abstract reference to peace as "freedom" was linked, in the discourses of the participants, with the issue of inability to live a 'proper' childhood. Drawing attention to the impact of these demonstrations on their everyday lives, they frequently stated that they were not able to live their childhood under the current circumstances and expressed a desire for peace. Implied here was their belief that having a proper childhood for them could only be possible with the establishment of peace. When asked about what they understood from childhood they mentioned freedom from fear, ability to go out freely, and having a proper education. They thought that Turkish children knew about proper childhood: *"They are free to do whatever they want to do. We are not like that. We live in fear. They are free. They don't know what fear is"* (Zilan).[104] They stated that schools were frequently closed down because of the demonstrations and their education was frequently interrupted, and also recounted on their observations of shops being closed down and destroyed, drawing attention to the crippling effects of these demonstrations on the daily life of their neighborhoods.

While a sense of victimhood as Kurdish children underscores their narratives about the clashes with the police, the participants also voice a sense of their own political agency. Two of the male participants stated that they had participated in the demonstrations and thrown stones, while some females 'confessed' to - "let's keep this between us" - supporting the children who participated in the demonstrations, opening up their homes for hiding to those running away from the police. Drawing attention to both the unrecognized vulnerability and the desired, yet denied, agency of children, one participant protested: *"Is it only the police?*

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[104] "Hayatları özgür yani istediklerini yapıyorlar onlar. Biz öyle değiliz ama. Biz korku içinde yaşıyoruz. Onlar özgür. Hiç öyle bir şeyleri yok. Korku diye birşey bilmiyorlar".

We can also go [out] We can also do some things. But a child can make a mistake"[105]. Police violence against them, fuels the politicization of these young people, strengthening simultaneously both their feelings of victimization and desires for agency. In this context some stated that their families wanted to keep them away from politics, but they could not help it: *"It is impossible not to be involved. Whether we want to or not - so many things happen in front of us - we are in the midst of [politics]. Don't you see? All these events? We cannot bear to see children suffer"* (Şevin).[106]

These concerns about the direct forms of violence they witnessed in the daily life were accompanied by feelings of discrimination towards the Kurdish, shedding light on their perceptions of the structural and cultural forms of violence regarding identity issues prevalent within the context of the conflict. For instance, freedom, in this context, was also associated with the ability to be able to speak Kurdish freely. Indeed when asked about why young people participated in the demonstrations and threw stones, many said *"for living freely"*, *"for our mother tongue"*, recounting, based on their own experiences, about how they were unable to use the Kurdish language in public spaces such as schools and hospitals: *" The doctor comes and we have to speak Turkish. But not everyone can. For example if the patient is Kurdish and does not know Turkish, how will she talk?"*[107] (Sabahat); *"They can speak the language they want anywhere, but we can't"* (Zilan).

Added to this - like in the Bağlar group - were feelings of frustration regarding the negative stereotypes, stigmatization, and the subsequent ill treatment that they thought prevailed among the Turkish majority against the Kurds. They recounted their direct experiences and those reported by others that Kurds were badly treated when they travelled outside the region - *"When we Kurds go from here to anywhere where there are Turks, I see their behavior toward us is not very nice"* (Sabahat); *"Our relatives used to go to hazelnut [harvest], when they came back to Diyarbakır, they were telling 'they [Turks] treat us like dogs'"* (Zilan) - and further complained that Turks called *"all the Kurds terrorists"*, making them feel, *"as if we are*

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[105] "Aslında şöyle bir şey var: bir tek polisler mi karışabiliyorlar? biz de [dışarı] çıkabiliriz, biz de şeyler yapabiliriz. Yalnız çocuk hata yapabilir."

[106] "İçinde olmamak mümkün değil. İstesek de istemesek de; gözümüzün önünde bir sürü şey oluyor. Tam ortasındayız. Yani görmüyor musunuz bu olaylardan? Bu çocukların eziyet görmesine dayanamıyoruz."

[107] "Doktor geliyor bizim Türkçe konuşmamız lazım, ama her insan [Türkçe] bilmeyebilir ki. Mesela hasta bir Kürttür, Türkçe konuşmayı bilmiyor. Nasıl konuşacak hocam?"

criminals" (Zilan). [108] One participant reminded of a recent incident when Osman Baydemir (Mayor of Diyarbakır from BDP) sent a fire vehicle to Trabzon due to call of the Trabzon municipality; *"but they didn't want it because Kurds sent it" (Şiwan).* Common to all participants in this sense was a desire for ending these practices of discrimination: *"there should not be any differentiation as Kurds and Turks" (Aygül).* [109]

These young people not only felt angry and frustrated about the discrimination they experienced or observed as Kurdish but also expressed feelings of inferiority, lack of confidence and loss of face in the face of such phenomenon. Indeed in a private conversation we had after the group, while talking about police violence Şevin, reflected on these sentiments: *"We hate them, because of what they do to us. They don't believe that we can do something, become somebody; that we can be successful at something (…) [but] we already see it at school; we are successful even though we are Kurdish."* [110] Yet these sentiments of anger and loss of face were also accompanied by some hope for the future, even if faint, as was visible in her wish to become a journalist:

> *I will be a journalist and will present the right news. Not the false ones but the*
> *right ones about the Kurds. I will try to work so that Kurds will be seen not as*
> *enemies, but as more intimate/closer to them [the Turks]. I mean, we essentially*
> *love them, but because they treat us like that… (private conversation)* [111]

Şevin was one of the most vocal yet pessimistic participants in the Suriçi group. Yet, her above quoted statements present a rich picture regarding the present concerns and future desires of some of these children, while drawing attention to the roles they are willing to play. Şevin's imagination of a future as a reporter, defending community rights and promoting the 'real' image of the Kurds, functions as an optimistic balance for her present pessimism. These young people feel they are seen and treated unjustly as 'enemies' by the Turkish majority, and

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[108] "Biz Kürtler buradan Türkler'in olduğu herhangi bir yere gidersek görüyorum davranışları pek hoş olmuyor"; "Bizim akrabalar fındığa gidiyordu, onlar mesela Diyarbakır'a geldiğinde diyordu, bize köpek gibi davranıyorlar"; "Bütün Kürtlere terörist diyorlar. Biz suçluymuş gibi kendimizi hissediyoruz." (In private conversation)

[109] "Hocam, bence Kürtler ve Türkler diye bir ayrım olmamalı."

[110] "Onlardan nefret ediyoruz hocam. Onlarin bize öyle yapmaları karşılığında. Bizim bir şey yapacağımıza inanmıyorlar bir şey olacağımıza, bir şeyleri başaracağımıza inanmıyorlar hocam (…) zaten görüyoruz okulda. Biz Kürt olmamıza rağmen başarılıyız."

[111] "Muhabir olacam ve doğru haberleri sunucam. Yanlış değil de Kürtler hakkında doğru olanları. Kürtler'in öyle düşman değil de onlara daha çok yakın olmasını şey yapıcam. Yani hocam, biz aslında onları seviyoruz, ama onlar bize öyle yaptıkları için…"

desire a future of peaceful and equal coexistence between Turks and Kurds.[112] Implied in Şevin's statement is her belief that if the misrepresentations of the Kurdish in the prevailing public (Turkish) discourse can be corrected, it will be possible to develop mutual bonds between the two communities and to end their experiences of discrimination, be it perceived or actual. Moreover, in the hidden transcript of her statement is the fact that they feel uncomfortable with their own feelings of 'hatred' and anger and desire those spaces where they can nurture more positive feelings such as "love" for the 'other'. The longing for spaces of empathy by the Turks for the Kurds, is also apparent in her following statement which draws attention to the costs of the armed conflict for the Kurds, which she feels goes unrecognized:

> *We want the guns to be silent too. And we don't want the soldiers to be killed either. But if the soldiers are dying, on our side the guerillas are also dying. And like the soldiers' mothers, the guerillas' mothers also grieve; they grieve for the soldiers, and they grieve for their own children.[113]*

Nevertheless, and despite their desires, the prospect for peace is still seen as somewhat far away by these young people. It is imagined as an ideal, utopian form of life, realistically unachievable in the near future as can be inferred from the following references to magic and religion made while talking about peace: "*Sometimes I say to myself If only I had a magic wand, and I created peace (Zilan, private conversation)[114]*; "*Said-i Nursi said that the day will come when science will rule the world, I mean, there will be no more guns. Two men will face each other and he, whose science is stronger, will win." (Suat)[115]*

The discussions of the Suriçi participants regarding the conflict and the absence of peace, as shown above, mostly focused around issues related to identity, be it about direct or structural forms of violence they witnessed. Also important, besides their own personal experiences and

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[112] It is important to note that, as will be explained later, in addition to the national media influences, the perceptions of these young people vis-s-vis the Türks are shaped in the light of their own everyday encounters with the only Türks they come across with, most notably the police forces and also other government officials such as doctors and teachers.

[113] "Hocam, biz de silahların kesilmesini istiyoruz, biz de askerin ölmemesini istiyoruz. Ama askerler ölüyorsa, bizim de, gerillalar da ölüyor hocam. Nasıl asker ölüyorsa gerilla anneleri de üzülüyor. Askerler için de üzülüyor, kendi çocukları için de üzülüyor."

[114] "Hocam barışın olması için Abdullah Öcalan'i önce çıkarsınlar, dağlardaki olay, yani hiç bir olay olmasın."

[115] "Hocam zaten Said-i Nursi demis ki, gun gelir ilim dunyaya hakim olacak hocam. silahlardan...(kizlar gulusuyor) yani ilim hocam silah milah kalmayacak. iki tane adam karsi karsiya gelecek, kimin ilmi daha kuvetli o kazanacak" – Sait later said that he was attending Medrese – those schools established by the Gulen community to teach Islam. The community is influenced by Said-I Nursi, a prominent Islamic thinker who died in 1960, and by the teachings of Fethullah Gülen, the founder of the community. My informants from BDP at Sur Municipality has stated that these schools are multiplying in Diyarbakır, which they consider as a threat to the Kurdish national movement due their ideological teachings that contradicts the movement and advocates an identity based on Islam rather than ethnicity and identity politics

observations, is the influence of the broader political discourses around them on their conceptualizations of peace. Suat's above quoted references to the teachings of Said-i Nursi, as well as Zilan's statement during the discussion *"for peace first they should set Abdullah Öcalan free; there will not be any events [clashes], in the mountains, and anywhere else"*[116] reveals that the children are also influenced from the broader political debates taking place around them while imagining the conditions for a future peace.

Finally, concerns over underdevelopment in the region and problems of unemployment in relation to the current conflict, although more marginally discussed, also underscore the peace perspectives of some of these children. When asked whether there would be peace if the guns were silent, most replied collectively as "no", except for Şiwan who gave the following elaborate reply:

> *If these generals, instead of spending their money on guns, construct factories in Diyarbakır, or other parts of South East, if they give jobs, there will not be any unemployed in the world. And there will be peace. They spend all their money to buy long-range guns to fight the guerillas in the mountains. (Şiwan)*[117]

Şiwan's reply not only shows that underdevelopment and unemployment is considered as a part of the absence of peace in the region, but also it reveals the link these young people establish between the ongoing armed conflict and their own economic marginalization. Şiwan's reply is based on his understanding that this economic marginality and lack of job opportunities in the region is due to the high investment in weapons. Thus, his imagination of a time when the guns are silent also includes the assumption that if the armed conflict should end, the funds that were used for armament would be freed and could be channelized towards investment and job creation.

The discussion of the Suriçi participants of the conflict and its implications, and particularly their focus on issues related to identity, also reveals important insights regarding their own imaginations of the borders of these identities. These conceptualizations and perceptions (of Turks and Kurds, and of Turkishness and Kurdishness) are shaped around both their everyday experiences and interactions, and the impressions they obtain from the macro-political context of the conflict in Turkey.

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[116] "Hocam barışın olması için Abdullah Öcalan'i önce çıkarsınlar, dağlardaki olay, yani hiç bir olay olmasın."

[117] "Şimdi hocam bu orgeneraller paralarini hocam silahlara verecekleri yerde Diyarbakır'da, Güneydoğu'da fabrika kursa, iş verse, dünyada işsiz kalmaz. Barış olur çünkü. Bütün paralarını dağdaki gerilalarla savaşmaları için bir sürü uzaktan menzilli silaha harcıyorlar."

During the discussion, particularly while reflecting on their perceptions of discrimination, Suriçi participants made frequent references to Turks in general - often referred to as 'they' - yet this 'they' was most often left ambivalent and abstract. In one instance, when one participant said, *"They can speak the language they want anywhere, but we can't"* and all agreed, I asked the group whom they meant by 'they'; they hesitated for a second, and then replied as a collective, "the *police for instance, they speak Turkish","…and the doctors, like that*". When I tried to encourage them to elaborate more on the issue, they preferred to go back to the subject of discussion and did not provide more definitions.[118] In our private conversation with Zilan and Şevin, when they were reflecting on their relationship with their teachers at school once again the issue of identity came up:

— *Zilan: We had a teacher; someone in class chanted a slogan and he threw him out of class. He was the only Turkish teacher anyways"*[119]

Q. How do you differentiate between who is Kurdish and who is Turkish?

— *Şevin: We have one teacher we feel very comfortable with him. When we talk in his presence about the Kurdish [relates issues] he doesn't say anything. For instance he is Kurdish"*[120]

— *Zilan: When we met a teacher he said I am from Diyarbakır. I said [to myself] he is definitely Kurdish. And his brother's name is Welat. Definitely Kurdish. In the beginning, I thought you were Kurdish too, you look like one.*[121]

As exemplified in the above dialogues, these young people's conceptualizations of the 'Turks' are shaped mostly in the context of their limited encounters with Turks, such as the doctors, the police and some of their teachers. This is hardly surprising taking into consideration the predominantly Kurdish population of the city, and the fact that these children rarely meet any Turks in their everyday life except in public spaces such as the street, hospitals, and schools. Thus it is through the nature of these daily encounters in these specific sites, where they feel unable to express themselves as Kurdish and moreover experience

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[118] A similar instance also happened during our private conversation with Zilan and Şevin when they were telling me in frustration about how Türks looked down on them and treated them badly; again, when I asked them whom they meant by Türks they hesitated for a moment and said "for example the police, or the others".

[119] "Bir hocamız vardı, bizim sınıftan biri slogan attı, onu sınıftan attı. Tek Türk oydu zaten."

[120] "Bizim bi hoca var onun yanında çok iyi hissediyoruz, onun yanında Kürtlerle ilgili konuştuğumuz zaman hiç bir şey demiyor. Mesela o Kürttür."

[121] "Mesela birbirimizle tartıştığımzda bir hoca dedi ben Diyarbakırlıyım. Ben dedim bu kesinlikle Kürttür. Kardeşinin adı da Welat. Kesin Kürt. Ben ilk başta sizin de Kürt olduğunuzu sandım. Benziyorsunuz siz."

hostile relations that their image of 'Turks' is reproduced. Seen in this light, their conceptualizations of the conflict - in terms of its daily manifestations - and of Turkishness are mutually produced and reproduced through daily interactions.

Nevertheless, this image of 'Turk', though ambiguous, is not fixed; on the contrary it is context dependent, and hence flexible, and sometimes even confusing. Indeed, Şevin's reflection on her experience when the police came to their school looking for suspicious children to take them into custody gives hints of this flexibility: "*The police came to school that day. They came to the schools where the Kurdish children are. They try to cool us from (make us dislike) the Turks*"[122]. Şevin's statement is significant; for it suggests paradoxically both a wide and a narrow definition of Turks at the same time. On one hand, the police are considered to be representative of the Turks by Şevin, and she admits that their actions influence their own perceptions about the Turks overall. At the same time her admission also reflects her awareness that what she does is generalization. Once again evident in her statement is a feeling of unease with her own sentiments of anger towards the Turks and a desire to find spaces and reasons to negate these sentiments.

The macro context in which the politics of the Kurdish Question take place also has an important impact on shaping the participants' imaginations of identity. An interesting discussion theme in this sense was the debate among participants on what constituted Kurdishness, particularly in the context of the political party preferences in general elections. For most of the participants, except for Aygül who vocally disagreed, voting for the Kurdish parties - and thus supporting the Kurdish nationalist political movement - was an inseparable part of and duty of being Kurdish.

— *Şevin: They say we're Kurdish, but they go and vote for AKP or the other parties. If you're Kurdish go and vote for your own party. If you are not, then go and vote for the Turks. Let Kurd like that not exist!*

— *Aygül: Şevin says, Kurds should not vote for AKP; but they can support any party they want. I mean, they don't have to support BDP because they are Kurdish or AKP because they are Turkish.*

— *Şiwan: That whom you call Kurd should support his own party, should vote for the Kurdish parties, like DTP, BDP…*

— *Sabahat: I agree*

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[122] "O gün polisler geldi okula. Kürtler'in, Kürt Çocukların olduğu okullara geldiler. Bizi Türklerden soğutmaya çalışıyorlar hocam."

⸺ *Zilan: Those who vote for AKP they blacken the name of Kurds. They vote for AKP, and they [AKP] do bad things, cause bad habits.* [123]

From the perspective of most Suriçi participants, the right to defining one's self as Kurdish was only reserved for those who showed solidarity with the Kurdish political movement. In this sense Kurdishness was not defined/imagined as an *ethnic* identity but a *political* one. The reaction of Şiwan to Suat when the latter stated at one point that Abdullah Öcalan was imprisoned to lifetime sentence because he killed thousands of people - "*Is he Turkish or what?*" - as well as Şevin's following statement, given as a response to my question of whether they knew any Turkish friends, are also reflective of the political nature inherent in their definitions of identity:

For instance we have one friend who says we are Kurdish but we vote for AKP. Let him not be Kurdish, let him say he's Turkish. How are you a Kurd? You didn't vote for your own party, you vote for another party. I don't want a Kurd like that. It's better that [a Kurd like that] doesn't exist.[124] (Private conversation)

What is striking about these narratives is that despite their own concerns and frustrations regarding discrimination and inability to express themselves as Kurdish, many of the participants also reproduce a strict category of Kurdishness which creates its own rules of inclusion and exclusion.

During the debate on voting and Kurdishness, I asked the participants once again what they thought Turkish meant, and who thought the Turks were. They all replied at the same time, collectively counting the names of the non-Kurdish political parties: "*Supporters of AKP*"; "*No, no, also MHP, CHP…*" At the same time however, they disagreed over whether Turks

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[123] Zilan: Biz Kürdüz diyorlar ama Ak parti'ye yani başka partilere oy veriyorlar. Kürtseniz kendi partinize verin, Kürt değilseniz o zaman gidin Türkler'e verin oyunuzu. Öyle Kürt olmaz olsun.

Aygül: Şimdi Zilan diyor ki Kürtler AKP'ye oy vermesin ama... Onlar istedikleri partiyi tutabilir. Yani Türk diye AKP'yi ya da Kürt diye DTP'yi tutacak değiller yani...

Ciwan: Kürt dediğin kendi partisini tutmalı.

Sabahat: Aynen.

Ciwan: Kürt partilerine oy vermeli hocam, DTP, BDP (Zilan ve Sabahat aynı anda destekliyor.)

Şevin: AKP'ye veren Kürtler Kürtler'in adını kötü çıkarıyorlar hocam. Ak parti'ye veriyorlar, onlar da kötü şeyler yapıyorlar, kötü alışkanlıklara yol açıyorlar..

[124] "Mesela bizim bir arkadaşımız var diyor ki biz Kürdüz ama Ak part'iye oy veriyoruz. O da Kürt olmasın, ben Türküm desin (heyecanlı kızgın), Kürtsün nasıl Kürtsün? Kendi partine oy vermedin, başka partiye oy veriyorsun. Ben öyle Kürt istemiyorum. Yani olmasın daha iyidir."

could ever vote for Kurdish parties or not, the majority of the participants arguing that they could. Indeed, when someone said that Turks would "*support all the parties except for BDP*", Şiwan disagreed and drew attention to the existence of a Turkish MP within BDP: "*Akın Birdal is Turkish. Although he doesn't speak Kurdish and he isn't Kurdish, he was elected MP from here [Diyarabakır]*".[125] Furthermore Suat also stated that Turks would vote for BDP if BDP provided them with jobs.

Seen in this light it might be argued that while Kurdishness is considered as a political identity and has clearer boundaries in the imageries of the participants, Turkishness is not so clearly defined. It is not seen as a political identity, but comes to represent those people in Turkey who are not Kurdish. It represents the other of Kurdish most of the time in a power relationship, yet might take upon different characteristics depending on the context and the related experiences of the participants.

Overall the discussion on identity shows how young people are actors in meaning making. They interpret and at the same time reproduce these categories in the light of their experiences and observations.

3.1.5. Sümerpark Vocational Training Center

Sümerpark Vocational Training Center (Sümerpark MEB) group was one of the two focus groups conducted with the older young people (aged 16-19), the other being the Bağlar 5 Nisan group. The discussions in both these groups were not as lively as those with younger participants. Both at Sümerpark MEB and at Bağlar 5 Nisan, the participants at first were reserved at the beginning of the discussions. Despite my explanations, the majority in both groups seemed unsure of the intention of the groups and of me as a researcher, particularly due to the vulnerable nature of the topic.

In the Sümerpark group this reservation was more subtle; they did not openly declare any issues, yet the majority of the participants remained silent at the beginning of the discussion, and only when the discussion started to gain some momentum with the involvement of two

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[125] Soru: Peki Türk ne demek arkadaşlar sizce?

Sabahat: AKP'yi destekliyorlar.

(ayni anda): Hayır, sonra MHP, CHP ... (sayıyorlar, gülüşmeler)

Şevin: Hocam BDP dışında bütün partileri destekliyorlar.

Ciwan: Akın Birdal Türktür hocam. Kürtçe bilmediği halde, Kürt olmadığı halde buradan (Diyarakır] milletvekili seçildi.

Şevin: Mesela Turgut Özal Kürt olduğu için onu zehirlediler hocam.

other participants (one male and one female; Roni and Aynur), the others also started to join in. Nevertheless the discussion never became a heated one, and there were occasional silences. In a personal conversation we had in the aftermath of the Sümerpark MEB group, one of the active participants, Roni (age 19), told me that the others probably thought I was a spy for the state/police. When I asked him what I could have done to convince them otherwise and gain their trust, he said, "it *sounds stupid, but it would be enough if you spoke some Kurdish*"[126]. Of course it is difficult to assess the extent to which the reservation of the participants in taking part in the discussion was related to their doubts about the research, and whether they really thought of me as a spy. Indeed another important factor which I believe affected their participation was the domination of the discussion by one 19-year old male participant (Roni), who had spent six months in prison when he was 17 for taking part in the demonstrations and who was very involved and willing to talk about these issues. Nevertheless, Roni's remark and the unwillingness of the participants to talk openly at the beginning, and even later in the discussion, is significant in that it raises the issues of trust and identity in discussions of vulnerable political issues with young people, and therefore is an important methodological issue that needs to be thought through more extensively. Furthermore, taking into consideration that this issue was unique to the older age groups, another topic for further research is the relationship between the issue of trust, political awareness of the participants and their ages.

A total of eight young people participated in the Sümerpark MEB group; six males and two females. The participants were from neighborhoods of Bağlar, from Şehitlik in Yenişehir, and from the Peyas in Kayapınar.

The discussion of the Sümerpark MEB participants mostly focused on the current conflict and its social and political implications, rather than their imaginations of a prospective peace. When asked directly about the meaning of peace, the participants started off with more categorical definitions such as *"freedom",* and *"absence of inequality",* and they chose to focus the discussion on the *absence* of peace in the region along these themes.

The references they made to "freedom" and "absence of inequality" were mostly shaped around identity politics, and the structural forms of violence they perceived in this context. These themes were particularly associated with having the rights to speak Kurdish - "*We want*

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[126] He thought that was stupid because, "the spies themselves speak Kurdish *because* they are spies. It means nothing if you can speak Kurdish".

[to use] mother tongue too, we want the freedom to speak our own language" (Aynur")[127] - with the eradication of discriminatory practices and behavior against the Kurds by the rest of the society, and with political freedom for the Kurdish people as a condition for peace, especially mentioned with regards to the banning of DTP and arrests of its members. When asked about what they would do to bring peace to Diyarbakır, one of the participants said *"I would remove those writings that said "How happy he is who calls himself a Turk""*[128]

Among other themes, during the discussion, negative stereotypes about and subsequent ill treatment of the Kurds prevalent in the West and among the Turks, emerged as the most pressing concern of these young people regarding the absence of peace.

— *Roni: It is always the bad aspects of Diyarbakır that are emphasized. I mean in television, news, tv series etc… But there are also beautiful things. People think that Diyarbakır is a backward, wild city. They have no idea.* [everybody agrees][129]

— *Çiçek : There is an aggressive image of us in the West. They are scared of us*

— *Roni: They say, 'the Kurds have come, they will eat us'*[130]

— *Aynur: They say terrorists, PKK to the Diyarbakırlıs. We want them not to say that*

— *Zülfikar: Turks know us wrong.*

— *Kerem: Let them come and stay among us, those who call us terrorists*[131].

As the above dialogue shows, the Sümerpark MEB participants shared the disillusionment that Diyarbakırlıs in particular, and Kurds in general, were misrepresented and misperceived by Turks as the threatening, aggressive 'other'. In this context one participant also mentioned the experiences of his relatives who worked as seasonal workers in the Black Sea Region and met with ill treatment by the locals. Implied in these statements lies a conceptualization of peace as devoid of discriminatory perceptions and behaviors vis-à-vis the Kurds that they think prevails among the larger Turkish community.

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[127] "Anadil biz de istiyoruz. Kendi dilimizi konuşma özgürüğü istiyoruz."

[128] ""Ne mutlu Türküm diyene" yazılarını kaldırırdım". This is a saying of Atatürk and is hung over many streets in Diyarbakır.

[129] "Diyarbakır'ın kötü yönü hep gösteriliyor, yani televizyonda haberlerde dizilerde falan. Ama güzel şeyler de var. İnsanlar sanıyor ki Diyarbakır geri kalmış vahşi bir şehir. Bir şey bildikleri yok. (Herkes onaylıyor)

[130] "Batıda bizimle ilgili bıçakçı bir imge var. Bizden korkuyorlar."; "Diyorlar, 'Kürtler geldi, bizi yiyecek.'"

[131] "Gelsin aramızda kalsın, yaşasın bize terörist diyenler."

These young people not only thought that these perceptions were unfair, but also they believed that it was the partial and biased representation of the Kurds and Diyarbakır in the national media that lay at the source of these stereotypes and ill treatment. They felt alienated, and yet they also held the view that these perceptions could be corrected if the Turks came and lived among them, got to know them better and experienced the 'real' face of Diyarbakır and the Kurds. Their statements draw attention to both the lack of personal engagement and social interaction between the members of the two societies as perceived from the perspective of these young people, and to how this lack of engagement, particularly in the context of Diyarbakır, is perceived as one of the sources of the current conflict by these youth. It points to their desires to introduce themselves and make themselves known in the rest of the Turkish society in their own localities, and their belief that this might contribute to the achievement of peace.

The feelings of alienation in the social context of the relations between the two communities were also accompanied by similar sentiments regarding the political context of the conflict. While discussing the meaning of peace, one of the participants, Roni, stated that: *"War is something done to struggle against injustice. For rights and rule of law. Or else nobody goes up to the mountains just for the sake of becoming a terrorist".*[132] Roni was a 19 year old who had spent six months in prison while he was 17 for taking part in the demonstrations and had been let out conditionally. He was from a politically active family; his mother was also imprisoned for her political activities when he was still a child:"*I never experienced childhood, they took my mother away on a Sunday*"[133]. Despite the time he spent in prison he was still participating in the demonstrations at times, though "more carefully".

Roni's comment draws attention to how he thought the political root causes of the Kurdish armed movement were missing in the Turkish public opinion; that fighting was considered just as 'violence for the sake of violence' and how this troubled him. Indeed, in a private conversation we had after the focus group he told me that he thought the conflict could only be resolved if the Turks were made to understand the Kurds, what they have been through till now, and the reasons that necessitated them to take on arms. He also told me that he had given an interview to the national CNN Turk Television where he had expressed the same belief, and that as a consequence later was out casted by his friends in the BDP, on the

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[132] "Savaş, yani adil olmayana karşı mücadele etmek için yapılan bir şey. Hak, hukuk için. Yoksa kimse sırf terörist olmak için dağa çıkmaz."

[133] "Hiç çocukluk görmedim ki bir Pazar gelip annemi götürdüler."

grounds that he had talked to a "collaborator" channel. He seemed sad about not having been understood and said, *"I don't know whether it is them who are way backward, or me who is way ahead"*.[134] I asked him what he thought could be done to help Turks understand. He seemed thoughtful: "*I mean they need to understand. We need to be able to tell. But how, I don't know. This is what I am trying to figure out these days*".[135]

Roni's remarks give hints as to the kind of peace and peace process that are desired by the Kurdish youth in Diyarbakır. Peace is imagined as having the group rights and unbiased rule of law for the Kurds, while the peace process is imagined to require open channels of dialogue - particularly for the Kurds to express themselves, their desires and concerns and to be understood. Roni's desire to "make the Turks understand" involves his assumption that if larger social and political issues that initiated the Kurdish resort to arms - as well as the reasons for the recent public uprisings - were understood by the Turkish public, this could start a process for the resolution of the conflict in the medium term. Though not elaborated in as detail, this desire for dialogue and self expression for the Kurds in general and youth in particular, also came up in the group discussion when one female participant, while discussing the phenomenon of children throwing stones, said "*You will say [throwing] stones is not a solution. But then let them talk*" (Aynur) and was supported by a male participant "*it is the message that is important*". Their remarks draw attention to their desires for spaces and opportunities of self expression, and to their belief that alternative means, other than violence, of "delivering the message" are currently lacking. Indeed when asked about why they thought that the youth participated in the demonstrations, the participants gave a number of reasons that were reactionary. These included both more present, pressing situational concerns such as the closure of the DTP, current "state policies of fear and violence", "revenge" from the police for the indiscriminate violence at the demonstrations, and unemployment, as well as historical, socio-cultural factors such as the personal and collective history of past violence by the state - such as the evacuation of the villages, in the form of collective memory. Unfortunately, none of these factors were discussed in depth, despite the fact that all of the male participants had participated in the riots at least once in the past. Nevertheless, it is still important to note that participation in the riots was viewed by the Sümerpark MEB youth as a means to deliver the message about their related concerns. In other words violence was perceived as a method of self expression. Furthermore these

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[134] "Bilmiyorum ki onlar mı geri kalmış, yoksa ben mi çok aşmışım".

[135] "Yani [Türklerin] anlamaları lazım. Anlatabilmemiz lazım. Ama nasıl, bilmiyorum. Ben de bunu düşünüyorum bir süredir"

'messages' or concerns also give clues as to the kind of peace these young people would like to have. It shows the need to deal with both direct and structural sources of violence as well as the need to address the past traumas through reconciliation. The lack of spaces for non-violent political self expression, however, is not only constrained by the Turk vs. Kurd dichotomy. It is also constrained by being young - "*No one cares about what the young people, children think; no one initiates a dialogue*"[136] (Aynur) - and by the internal pressures and differences of opinion within the Kurds, as exemplified by the outcasting of Roni by his friends.

Nevertheless, in the absence of these spaces, direct violence -be in the form of riots or arms - is still considered by some to be a legitimate means to an end. Roni's statement that, "*…For rights and rule of law. Or else nobody goes up to the mountains just for the sake of becoming a terrorist*" also reveals paradoxically, armed struggle in the context of the conflict is considered to be undertaken for the sake of a positive peace where rights and rule of law for the Kurds is established. During the discussion, and while talking about the stigmatization of the Kurds as 'terrorists' and 'violent' people, I asked the participants whether they thought the struggle could also be led by alternative, non-violent means. One participant said in reference to the Diyarbakırspor-Bursaspor game, *"We would receive the same treatment [from the Turks] even if we gave them flowers"* (Suat), revealing the sense of hopelessness that was prevalent among the youth. Another said, in reference to the PKK's take up of arms, *"nobody would take it seriously without guns"* (Ahmet).[137]

It should also be noted that the latest police violence at the events were also discussed in the group. However, interestingly, and unlike other groups, the events were discussed in terms of their political implications rather than in the context of physical insecurity for the youth in the absence of peace. In reference to a young person who was killed at the demonstrations by police gunfire one participant said, "*There were real bullet prints on the walls. They say 'put [the guns] plastic [bullets]', 'no, put real ones so that they will come to their senses'. They killed, why? To silence.*"[138] One reflected on his experience of watching the police intervene in the demonstrating crowd, and another told of a police car driving over a woman. Yet these testimonies were shaped in a way so as to emphasize the political/physical struggle between the police and the demonstrators, and the latter's oppressive behavior vis-à-vis their rebellion

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[136] "Gençlerin, çocukların düşünmesi önemsenmez; diyaloğa geçilmez."

[137] "Silah olmadan kimse takmaz"

[138] "Duvarlarda gerçek kurşun izleri vardı. Diyorlar, '[silahlara] plastik [kurşun] koy', 'yok, gerçek koy, akılları başlarına gelsin.' Öldürdü, niçin? Susturmak için."

as a strategy, rather than the victimization of the crowd and young people. In other words, they emphasized the systemic relationship between the police and the Kurdish demonstrators, and the police was perceived as a representative of the state in this context of political violence [meaning making]. When I asked them whether they were participating in the demonstrations, the male participants replied that they used to participate, but because of the indiscriminate beatings and imprisoning of the police forces they were staying away from the streets now. *"The crowd used to be strong; but it is cornered now"* said Ahmet, and Kerem added strongly, *"We don't like the state".* Both these remarks are significant for the agency of these young people in meaning making and participation in political violence. Furthermore, they disagreed over whether the state, in terms of its policies regarding the Kurdish Question could change towards a more positive stance or not. It is unfortunate, however, that this discussion remained superficial, and the issue was not explored further, for it could have provided important insights into the kind of peace these young people imagine with regards to the Turkish state and their expectations from it. I believe that this theme, which came up only in this group, is one that needs to be explored further. On one hand it is important to understand the type of change those who believe that state can change desire from the state, for it draws attention to the potential for politics of hope. On the other hand, it is also important to understand why those who believe the state cannot change believe so, and what they think of alternative solutions in such a state of hopelessness.

3.1.6. Bağlar 5 Nisan Youth Center

Bağlar 5 Nisan Youth Center group (Bağlar 5 Nisan) was the second focus group that was conducted with the older young people (aged 17-20). A total of eight participants were present in the discussion, three males and five females. All were residents in neighborhoods of Bağlar.

Like the Sümerpark MEB group, the Bağlar participants were also reserved, and seemed unsure of the intention of the discussion and of me as a researcher, particularly due to the vulnerable nature of the topic. Yet unlike Sümerpark MEB where the reservation was subtle, in the 5 Nisan group the reservation of the group for discussion was more vocal. At the beginning many in the group were undecided about whether to stay and participate in the discussion or not, for my explanation of the purposes and the content of the focus group remained ambiguous and untrustworthy to them, due to the vulnerability of the subject. Nevertheless, when I explained to them that they did not have to participate and they could leave if they

wished, all of them stayed and said that they wanted to see what this was about.[139] Similarly, they were reluctant to fill in the survey forms at the beginning, and expressed their desire to decide to fill in the forms at the end of the discussion - which most of them did so at the end. At the beginning of the discussion there were long silences and I had to rephrase the questions several times in order to break these silences. Although the discussion gained momentum after a while, still only half of the participants effectively participated, while others were listening attentively. Besides the issue of trust, for some, the reservation in this group also stemmed from their perception that initiatives like these did not lead to any solutions. One female participant explained this view as, "*They come and do surveys with us but it never leads to anywhere, nothing changes*".

In the Bağlar 5 Nisan group, the participants focused the discussion on the current Kurdish Question and its implications. When directly asked, the participants in the group defined peace categorically as "*equality*", "*brotherhood*", and "*lack of discrimination between people with regards to religion, language and race*". For these young people - all of whom were migrants, and most of whom were from internally displaced families[140] - peace was not conceived as merely the absence of armed conflict/cessation of direct violence, but was seen as a phenomenon directly related to the provision of physical, social and political security for the people in the region, or in other words as also the absence of structural and cultural forms of violence. Indeed when asked, in the beginning of the discussion whether there would be peace in the region if the guns were silent, two female participants gave the following replies:

> *No. State leaders should provide insurance/guarantee for lives. Or there will be anxiety. Health guarantees, comfort should be provided (Berivan, 20).[141]*

> *I think it would be an important beginning; we cannot say it's bad. But racial discrimination should be abolished. There should be a respectful environment. People should be able to speak comfortably. There should be distance between*

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[139] I asked the participants at the beginning for those who wanted to participate in the discussion, they demanded I ask it otherwise in the form of who did not want to participate.

[140] According to the information collected through surveys, two of the participants were from families who had migrated to Diyarbakır for economic reasons. The families of the rest were victims of forced migration, and they migrated to Diyarbakır when their villages were evacuated and burnt down during the early 1990s.

[141] "Devlet büyükleri yaşam güvencesi sağlamalı. Yoksa tedirginlik olur. Sağlık güvencesi, rahatlık sağlanmalı."

the people (she means respect)*. Everybody should be able to say their ideas freely, and should be able to seek their rights (Kevser, 17) .*[142]

Both of Kevser and Berivan were from internally displaced families, who had to come to Diyarbakır as a result of evacuation of their villages. In the survey form she filled in, Kevser wrote, *"My family lived through forced migration. They came here from the village. I lost my father when I was in young age. They always suppressed [us]."* [143]   Although these painful issues were not mentioned during the discussion, still it might be argued that the perceptions of these young people regarding peace were shaped in the light of their experiences and (personal or inherited) memories of displacement and its everyday consequences. In this regards, although cessation of violence was seen as a necessary step towards achieving peace in the context of the Kurdish Question, it was not perceived as an end, and their definitions of peace at a broader level also entailed descriptions of mutual respect, coexistence, equality, freedom of expression and tolerance among people, as well as provision of better life conditions, which they felt were currently lacking in the context of the Kurdish Question. These desires were also voiced by another female participant, when she wrote in the survey, *"All I want is freedom of thought. The right to live … It is necessary to increase respect and social interaction among people. The right to know people better… "*[144] *(Fatma, 18)*

Throughout the discussion these definitions of peace - or rather the absence of peace - were mostly shaped around their own perceptions and personal observations of discrimination in the context of the current conflict. Once again, at the broader level, their views about the misrepresentation of their city in particular and Kurds in general in the media, and the resulting stereotyping and ill treatment were sources of major concern for these youth; *"In the Parliament the negative things they say [about Diyarbakır/Kurds] demeans Diyarbakır. We experience out casting outside the city"*, *"Media distorts things"*, *"But we are aware of everything"*.[145] One female participant wrote of her views as follows:

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[142] "Bence önemli bir başlangıç olur, kötü denemez. Ama ırk ayrımı ortadan kalkmalı. Saygılı bir ortam olmalı. İnsanlar rahatca konuşabilmeli. İnsanlar arası mesafe olmalı (saygı anlamında diyor bunu). Herkes özgürce düşüncesini söyleyebilmeli, hakkını arayabilmeli."

[143] "Ailem zorunlu göç yaşadı. Köyden buraya geldiler. Köyümüz yakıldı. Ben babamı küçük yaşımdayken kaybettim. Sürekli baskı yaptılar."

[144] "Tek istediğim düşünce özgürlüğü, yaşama hakkı. Saygı ve genel anlamda insanlarla kültürel sosyal kaynaşmanın artması gerekir. İnsanları yakından tanıma hakkı."

[145] "Mecliste söylenen olumsuz şeyler Diyarbakır'ı kötülüyor. Şehir dışında dışlanma yaşıyoruz"; "Medyada yanlış yansıtılıyor"; "Ama biz herşeyin farkındayız."

What I want to add is this: that the media's representation of Diyarbakır is different [from what it is], and the fact that people act according to the media, that people always have a bad point of view about Diyarbakır. (…). Especially in the school years these things are experiences frequently (Hüsnagül, 18).[146]

A repeating issue in this context, like some of the other groups, was how being Kurdish came to be wrongfully associated by Turks with being a PKK member: "*They chanted in the Bursa-Diyarbakır match [the first match in Bursa] 'PKK out, PKK out'. They [Turks] see Kurds and PKK as one*".[147]

Added to these broader political concerns were the impact of the conflict on their own lives and their perceptions of their own future as young people. Thus, during the discussion, discrimination as a consequence of the conflict was particularly voiced in the context of their plans and dilemmas of receiving a higher education at a university, which constituted their most immediate concern.

— *Fatma: My brother studies [university] in Kars and is always under surveillance. Why?*

— *Gül: In the universities in Ankara we do not interfere in anyone or their language, but here, the ones who come here [to study] interfere in us.*

— *Fatma: We hesitate to choose [the universities in] the West in the university exam. We feel very ignorant. The preparation schools are bad. It's hard to get prepared in the villages.*

Q. Why do you hesitate?

— *Fatma: Because we hear about how they are treated.*

— *Serhat: The youth from the East are always out casted. For instance when one's looking for a house to rent they do not rent you when you say you're from the East. For instance in the Blacksea [region]. But if you enter the Gulen Community, you'll live very comfortably. But then the political ideas are a problem.*[148]

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[146] "Eklemek istediklerim, medyanın Diyarbakır'ı farklı bir şekilde tanıtması, insanların da medyaya göre hareket etmesi, insanların Diyarbakır'a bakış açılarının hep kötü olması. İnsanların kendi düşüncelerini özgürce ifade edememeleri. Özellikle okul yıllarında sıkça yaşanıyor böyle olaylar." (In response to the survey question "Is there anything you would like to change about what you said during the discussion? Is there anything you would like to add?")

[147] "Bursa-Diyarbakır maçında (ilk maç) PKK dışarı diye slogan attılar. Kürtlerle PKK bir tutuluyor."

[148]   - Abim Kars'ta okuyor, sürekli gözetim altında. Neden?

As the above dialogue shows, for the Bağlar 5 Nisan group participants, besides its broader political implications, the absence of peace and the resulting stereotypes against the Kurds were also seen as a barrier against their ability to realize their immediate personal objectives and dreams, and thus created a sense of hopelessness and frustration. All of the participants were preparing for the nation-wide university entrance exam, and studying or even planning to study in the West posed a dilemma for them.[149] On one hand they desired to go to the Western cities to receive a good education. Yet at the same time, based on their own observations and heard experiences of those around them, they were also anxious about the probable pressures and ill treatment they would face as Kurds in their everyday life if they studied at a universities outside the region.

Meanwhile, a sense of inferiority, entrapment and lack of self confidence vis-à-vis the 'West' and Turkish accompanied these feelings of anxiety. These feelings were rooted in their perceived underdevelopment of the region and the resulting lack of resources, opportunities and skills, and their economic marginalization in comparison to their age-mates in other parts of Turkey, as well as the social and political marginalization and discriminatory behavior experienced by the Kurds which made them feel misunderstood and inferior while causing them a loss of face.

One significant theme in this light was the perceptions of these young people of the 'West'. While discussing the misrepresentation of Kurds one participant draw attention to the power relationship between East and West, "*There is a gap between East and West. The West sees itself as more powerful (Alattin, 20)*"[150]. Although he did not articulate on what he meant by "more powerful", implied in the statement was the perception that Kurds (or the East) were seen as 'weak' by the West and yet were not known well enough. While discussing the

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- İstanbul-Ankara'daki üniversitelerde biz karışmıyoruz kimseye, kimsenin diline. Ama buraya gelenler (Dicle'deki Türk öğrencilerden bahsediyor) bize karışıyorlar.

- Üniversite sınavında batıyı tercih etmekte tereddüt ediyoruz. Kendimizi çok cahil hissediyoruz. Dersaneler kötü. Köylerde hazırlanmak zor.

- Soru: Neden tereddüt ediyorsunuz?

- Çünkü duyuyoruz nasıl bir muamele gördüklerini.

- Doğulu gençler hep dışlanıyor. Mesela kiralık ev ararken vermiyorlar doğuluyum deyince. Mesela Karadeniz'de. Ama mesela Gülen Cemaati'ne girsen çok rahat yaşarsın. Gerçi siyasi görüşler sorun oluyor (Kürtlük'le ilgili kastediyor). [Please see footnote no:114 for more information on Gülen Community.]

[149] In Turkey, universities with the best education and resources are located in the Western cities such as İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir. In this sense, West represents a dream for tens of thousands of senior high schools students who compete at the nation-wide university entrance exam in order to be able to study at these schools.

[150] "Doğu-Batı arasında mesafe var. Batı kendini güçlü görüyor."

association of Kurds with the PKK one male participant said, "*We are not bad [people]*"[151]; upon which a silent female participant turned to me and asked, *"Do we look [like] bad [people]?* [152] Arguably, implied in their statement "we are not bad" and their question to me as a Turkish moderator "do we look bad?" was a shared frustration with being misunderstood and wrongfully known by the Turks, and a subtle, yet a strong desire to correct these misperceptions and saving face.

Indeed, similar to some of the other groups, participants in this group also shared the belief that this lack of engagement with the West (or Turks) and lack of initiatives by Turks to get to know the Kurds and the region better was the source of the negative stereotypes towards them: "*Those from the West do not come here. Maybe 2-5 percent of them*" (Serhat).[153] Accordingly, they believed that if the Turks -or 'Westerners' as one participant put it- took more interest in the region and visited and interacted with them in their own localities their negative stereotypes and misperceptions could be corrected. Fatma's earlier quoted written remark that it was *"necessary to increase respect and social interaction among people"* and to have *"the right to know people better",* reflected that sentiment, as well as a desire for increased interaction among Turks and Kurds for the improvement of relations. Likewise, Hüsnagül reported with visible content, on her interaction with a student from the West who had arrived in Diyarbakır to attend university;"*…He said, it's beautiful here, I have known [this region] wrong till now*"[154]. In reply to how they thought the current conflict could be resolved, Kevser stated "*There should be a common idea [among Turks and Kurds] regarding what peace is".* [155] Her point was similar to that which was stated in Sümerpark MEB by Roni, and was significant for it draw attention to both the importance of mutual understanding between the peoples, for sawing the seeds of peace, and presented a future perspective and direction for engagement.

Finally, feelings of inferiority and lack of self confidence were also boosted by their marginalization as young people. When asked, they stated with frustration that they could not make their voices heard in the political arena, including the pro-Kurdish BDP: "*The youth are not given a voice. It's the state leaders that are always at the fore front. Youth are always at*

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[151] "Biz kötü değiliz."

[152] "Kötü görünüyor muyuz?"

[153] "Batılılar buraya gelmiyor hiç. 5% - %2 oranında belki."

[154] "Bir keresinde Batı'dan gelen bir öğrenciyle tanışmıştım. Dedi [burası] çok güzel. Buraları yanlış tanımışım dedi."

[155] "Barışa yönelik ortak bir düşünce olmalı kendi içinde [Türkler ve Kürtler arasında]."

the backstage" (Abdullah, 17). [156] When I told them that this discussion could be an opportunity for them to voice their perspective one female participant replied in disillusionment, *"Our talking does not bring any solutions. Many people come here and conduct surveys in issues related to peace and other things, but there is no action (Fatma)."*[157] Later in the discussion, however another participant presented a different view on this matter, interpreting the surveys as a space of self expression: *"But it seems like this situation [voicelessness of youth] is changing. They are doing surveys and so with us (Gül)"*[158]. Furthermore, in the surveys they filled in after the discussion, most of the participants stated that they were happy for having participated in the discussion, and for having had the opportunity to voice their opinions. One participant (Abdullah) added in his written feedback that he hoped their views would be communicated to the related people and institutions for a solution and the study would not just remain as research.[159] These comments prove important both for understanding the views of these young people of their own agency, and for designing better interventions. Although spaces of self expression are important for and needed by these young people, they also feel the need to know that their very act of self expression makes an impact. Thus, without the feedback on the results and aims of research, as well as a thorough explanation of the long processes involved, such research initiatives lack an empowering impact, and risk being undermined, and causing frustration. This will be discussed in more detail in the discussion section.

A significant point in this regard was that these youth were very open and self-aware about these sentiments. Indeed, when asked, this sense of inferiority and lack of self confidence was also self-identified by one of the participants as one of the reasons that made them reluctant to participate in the focus group discussion.

Finally, it should also be noted that although the discussion in the group mostly focused on the present, and particularly on the concerns of the participants as young people, it might be argued that many of these youth still, in different degrees, carry the burden of the past and of the violent conflict, whether they experienced it themselves, or heard about it from their families. The suggestion for this argument lies in the short replies they wrote in response to

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[156] "Gençlere hiç söz verilmiyor. Devlet büyükleri hep ön planda. Gençlik hep arka planda kalıyor."

[157] "Konuşmamız çözüm getirmiyor. Bir çok kişi buraya geliyor anket yapıyor, barışa yönelik ya da diğer konularda ama icraat yok."

[158] "Bu durum değişiyor gibi ama anketler falan yapıyorlar bizimle."

[159] In response to the Survey 2, Question no. 2: "We have completed our work. What do you think about your participation and the overall discussions? How do you feel?"

the survey question, "When and for which reasons did you or your family moved into where you are currently living?", where they made emphasis either on the forced character of the migration they (or their families) had to experience, or on the fact that their villages were burnt down. Unfortunately the statements they have written has been very limited, and do not leave much space for analysis. The only exception has been that of one anonymous young woman[160], who wrote the following detailed statement as a reply to the question of "how do you feel?"

> *I felt very bad because I thought about what had happened. My family used to live in the village in the past. After their village was burnt down they settled in cities. We settled in Silvan. Some people emerging in the name of religion, Hizbullahs, killed half a million people in Silvan. In those events I also lost my father. My grandfather's [family] migrated to Istanbul; we lived [in Silvan] alone, as if we were going to die at any moment; with that psychology. How can a person who has lived through these things think sanely? What would you have done if you had lived through these things?[161]*

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[160] This young woman did not speak throughout the discussion, and chose to fill in just the second survey's first question without putting her name on it. Thus information about her is missing and she has not been counted as a part of the total number of people who participated in the discussion.

[161] "Olanları düşündüğüm için kendimi çok kötü hissettim. Ailem daha önce köyde yaşıyordu. Köyleri yakıldıktan sonra şehirlere yerleştiler. Silvan'a yerleştik. Din adına çıkan bazı insanlar, Hizbullahlar, Silvan'da yarım milyon insan öldürdüler. O olaylarda ben de babamı kaybettim. Dedemler İstanbul'a göç ettiler; biz yanlız başımıza her an ölecekmiş gibi o psikolojiyle yaşadık. Bunları yaşayan bir insan nasıl sağlıklı düşünebilir. Siz bunları yaşasaydınız ne yapardınız? "

3.2. Reflections of Youth on Discussions: Focus Group as a Space of Self Expression

Following the focus groups the participants in each group were asked to fill in surveys that asked them about how they were feeling about the discussion that had just ended, to allow them private space to reflect on their feelings and thoughts about the discussions, group dynamics and the research.

The feedbacks they have provided reveal that, as intended, the discussions have provided these youth - irrespective of their views and roles in the discussions - with a space of self expression that they have been strongly longing for, yet have been lacking. In other words, the written responses of the participants, similar to the discussions, also emphasize their self-perceptions as a voiceless, marginalized collectivity. At the same time, while it has been their marginalization as Kurds/*Diyarbakırlı*s that was primarily emphasized during the focus group discussions, in the surveys, their marginalization due to their status as children and youth also become clearer in a complimentary fashion.

Seen in this light, the reactions of the participants to the discussions also reveal important insights into the functions and benefits of using focus group methodology with marginalized youth in Diyarbakır, and can be categorized under three main interrelated headings: psychological relief brought by self expression, a sense of empowerment and self value, and discovery of their own competencies as children. Furthermore, their reactions also are important for their informative value on reflecting how they feel about this particular research and research method, and for highlighting their future expectations from research that will be conducted with youth in general.

Right after we ended the focus group discussion in Suriçi, Şevin rose to her feet and cheerfully exclaimed, "*Oh be! Walla, I let it all out and feel relieved!*" The other children also supported her with similar enthusiasm: *"Me too!", "me too!"*[162] Likewise in Bağlar, Kerime said after the discussions with visible happiness, "*Hocam, it was very good that you came. We said everything inside and feel relieved…*" and Haydar interrupted: *"Come again Hocam!"*[163] Sentiments of individual relief and relaxation were also present in the other groups. This was observed even in the older age groups of Sümerpark MEB and Bağlar 5 Nisan, where the participants had been reserved and unwilling to talk at the beginning of the discussions. Except for Sümerpark CB where the participants had to go home because it was the end of their hours

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[162] "Oh be! Walla içimdeki herşeyi döktüm rahatladım".

[163] "Hocam gelmeniz çok iyi oldu. İçimizdeki herşey söyledik, rahatladık"; "Yine gelin Hocam!"

in the center, following the end of discussions the participants did not leave immediately and willingly stayed for a couple of minutes, sometimes reflecting on their thoughts about the discussion and sometimes asking me questions about myself, my opinions and my study as well as about my impressions of Diyarbakır.

One clear shared feeling that emerges from these reactions I received from the participants, as well as their written feedback is a strong sense of relief and "lightness" as a result of voicing - "letting out", "pouring out" - their "accumulated" concerns, opinions and emotions.

I feel very good myself. I said everything that was in my mind about Diyarbakır and felt relieved. Nothing remained inside. (Hasret, Sümerpark CB)[164]

I feel lighter. Like I opened up myself to someone... (Sena, Bağlar)[165]

I feel very good. To tell you the truth I feel relieved, because I shared everything inside me with you. (Sedat, Bağlar)[166]

I feel very good. We had very nice discussions and we let out whatever we have inside and felt relieved. (Haydar, Bağlar)[167]

I felt very good. Everything I told was [accumulating] inside me. I felt relief by telling them. (Sabahat - Suriçi)[168]

Very good. We're very happy to have shared our opinions. (Ayfer- Suriçi)[169]

Very relieved. Since long, I hadn't told about these things inside me to anyone, so I felt relieved. (Aygül - Suriçi)[170]

I felt very relieved. If I hadn't let everything inside me out I think some things might have happened. (Zilan - Suriçi)[171]

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[164] Ben kendimi iyi hissediyorum. Aklımda olan Diyarbakır ile ilgili bütün sorunları söyleyip rahatladım. İçimde kalmadı

[165] Kendimi çok hafiflemiş gibi görüyorum. İçimi birine açmış gibiyim.

[166] Çok iyi hissediyorum kendimi. Açıkçası rahatladım. Çünkü içimdeki herşeyi sizlerle paylaştığım için

[167] Kendimi gayet iyi hissediyorm. Çok guzel tartışmalar yaptık ve içimizde ne varsa ortaya döktük rahatladık

[168] Çok iyi hissediyorum. Anlattığım herşey içimdeydi. Anlatarak ferahladım.

[169] Çok iyi. Düşüncelerimizi paylaştığımız için çok mutluyuz.

[170] Çok rahat. Çoktandir bu içimdekileri kimseye anlatmamıştım, Onun için rahatladım.

[171] Kendimi çok rahat hissettim. İçimdekilerin hepsini dökmeseydim bence birşeyler olabilirdi.

I feel very relieved. I really liked talking about my opinions with someone from the West and telling about myself, my family and my friends. Someone needs to listen to us, needs to understand us … (Aynur, Sümerpark MEB) [172]

Their own statements reveal how these young people feel a pressing basic need to talk about their observations, thoughts, feelings and experiences and reflect on them, and how in the absence of spaces and opportunities to do so they are doomed to "keep it all inside". The shared sense of relief brought about by talking that is so frequently emphasized by especially the younger age participants also draws attention to the psychological implications of 'talking' and having these spaces (or outlets) of self expression for these children. Cairns (1996) and Punamaki (1996) suggest that active participation in politics (and political violence) provides youth with resilience and coping ability in the reality of political conflict. This issue, in the context of Kurdish youth without doubt, deserves further investigation, yet it is my impression that their inability to reflect on their observations and sentiments and to act as active political agents hurts them at the psychological level and risks feelings of depression or participation in violence. Despite the fact that what she means by "some things" remains ambiguous (but which can possibly be interpreted as 'going crazy', or hurting other people, or engaging in acts of violence herself), Zilan's statement that, *"If I hadn't let everything inside me out I think some things might have happened",* is a clear sign of the harmful psychological implications of being voiceless for these youth.

A sense of collective and individual empowerment and self-value as children/ youth (and as Kurdish children and youth in particular), accompanies those sentiments of relief and emerges as the second major theme in the responses of the participants to the survey questions.

I think to it's very good to ask children for their opinions, to take us seriously (Berivan, Sümerpark CB) [173]

I'm very happy to have contributed to the topic. And I also took [learned about] everyone's opinions. (Esra, Sümerpark CB) [174]

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[172] Şu anda çok rahatladim. İçimdeki düşünceleri batıdan gelen bir insanla konuşmak ve kendimi, ailemi çevremi anlatmak çok hoşuma gitti. Birilerinin bizi dinlemesi, anlaması gerekiyor….

[173] Bence çocukların da görüşlerini almak, bizi önemsemeleri çok iyi.

[174] Ben de konuya katıldığım için mutluyum. Herkesin de düşüncesini aldım.

This study made me very happy. I thought I told about war and peace in a good way. End of the war will make me very happy. Who wouldn't want to have a happy and peaceful peace? (Yakup, Ben u Sen)[175]

I feel very good, because those issues were inside me. I would have wanted to speak with politicians, and finally I spoke and felt relieved. I let out what was inside of me. (Sinem, Bağlar)[176]

I am very happy for having expressed ourselves. I hope our voice will be heard in all over Turkey. (Ece, Bağlar)[177]

I felt very good. It's so good that we came across such a study. It's so good that we reflected on our thoughts, on our perspectives. We are thankful. (Büşra - Bağlar)[178]

It's a very nice feeling to have someone come and listen to us. We feel good. (Kerem, Sümerpark MEB)[179]

… And I hope that the things we have told will be of use and a solution will be found. (Aynur, Sümerpark MEB)[180]

I couldn't participate very actively but I felt very happy (Suat, Sümerpark MEB)[181]

I feel that I participated actively and told about myself, and my desires, views and hopes in a very comfortable way. I feel very good. (Roni, Sümerpark MEB)[182]

I am happy to have participated. I want to have a happy and reliable peace atmosphere. (Gül, Bağlar 5 Nisan)[183]

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[175] Bu çalışma beni çok mutlu etti. Savaşı ve barışı iyi bir şekilde anlattığımı düşündüm. Savaşın bitmesi beni çok mutlu eder. Mutlu ve huzurlu bir barışın olmasını kim istemez ki?

[176] Kendimi çok iyi hissediyorum, çünkü böyle konular icimdeydi. İsterdim ki siyasetçilerle konuşmak isterdim ve sonunda konuştum. İçimi döktüm. Ve rahatım.

[177] Kendimizi biraz olsun ifade ettiğimiz için çok mutluyum. Umarım sesimiz tum Türkiye'de duyulur.

[178] Çok iyi hissediyorum. İyi ki boyle bir çalışmayla tanıştık. İyi ki düşüncelerimizi görüş açılarımızı yansıttık. Teşekkür ediyoruz

[179] Bizi birinin dinlemeye gelmesi çok güzel bir sey. Kendimizi iyi hissediyoruz.

[180] Ve umarım bu anlattıklarımız bir işe yarar, bir çözüm yolu bulunur.

[181] Pek aktif katılamadım ama mutluluk duydum.

[182] Aktif olarak yer aldığımı ve kendimi ve de istek, görüş ve umutlarimi rahat bir şekilde anlattığımı düşünüyorum. Kendimi çok iyi hissediyorum

[183] Katıldığım için mutluyum. Mutlu ve güvenilir bir barış ortamının olmasını isterim.

I think you made a good activity with your talking. I feel good. I always want to talk about such things. I would like to participate in such studies as much as I can. (Kevser, Bağlar 5 Nisan) [184]

Visible in the statements is the fact that the sense of empowerment and self-value is a result of having the opportunity to *both* talk *and* be (or hoping to be) heard. Being consulted on, and thus having the opportunity to talk about peace and conflict related issues that are most relevant to their lives have provided the participants with a sense of making a contribution and having a voice (to the process of resolving these issues). The loosely structured format of the groups in this sense, which allowed for treating these youth as experts of their own social worlds and challenges of the everyday (Johnson 1996), has made them feel "good" about themselves by suggesting them that their opinions matter for at least "someone" (for an outsider, a Turk, myself the researcher), despite their marginalized status as both youth/children and Kurds. In other words, the discussions have made them feel empowered vis-à-vis their alienation from sources and means of power as both young people and as Kurds.

It should also be noted that my own background as a non-Kurdish researcher/moderator from the West also has had a symbolic value of empowerment for these youth as Kurdish. Although only Aynur openly wrote about it (above), many other participants in the aftermath of the discussions told me that it was very good that someone from the 'West' came to listen to them. In this sense my 'being from the West' was also an empowering factor for them; it gave them the hope that their voices would be heard in the 'West' and by the Turks, which they felt was the most necessary. This sentiment draws attention to the existing hierarchies of identity perception; how being a Turk (regardless of my status as just a student) is perceived as having more power of influence. While it is an important point in terms of revealing the relationship between identity, power and the perceptions of the youth, it is also a point that needs to be taken into consideration while designing research/interventions like this; it might be misleading for the participants in the short/medium term, and might have a contrary impact resulting in apathy or hopelessness if the expectations of the participants about the research/interventions are not met by the results. I will come back to this issue below.

The focus group discussions, especially for the younger age groups, have also functioned as a forum where they shared their own and learned about each other's perspectives. The

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[184] Bence iyi bir etkinlik yaptınız konuşmalarınızla. Kendimi iyi hissediyorum. Hep böyle şeylere konuşmak isterim. Elimden geldikçe bu tur calismalara katılmak isterim.

written feedback of the participants in the surveys show that they appreciated this interaction - talking to and listening to each other, and sometimes disagreeing with and sometimes supporting each other's opinions - and that this interaction has also provided them with a sense of empowerment as children.

> *It was really good. I think that my friends' and my opinions are very nice and interesting. Now I am more motivated to participate in discussion like this. (Ömer, Ben u Sen)[185]*

> *I learned a lot of my friends' opinions on peace. (Hasret, Ben u Sen)[186]*

> *I think it was very good. We said our opinions. Everybody said their own opinions. (Ahmet, Bağlar)[187]*

> *I felt very happy. And sometimes we argued when we thought different. (Şiwan, Suriçi)[188]*

I believe that, the fact that these opinions were voiced only by the younger age participants is partially related to the group dynamics - the discussions in the younger groups were much livelier as previously stated. Yet, I also have the impression that the younger participants, in comparison to the older ones (at Bağlar 5 Nisan and Sümerpark MEB) also engage in political discussions on the conflict among themselves much less. They might be talking about the latest events and their experiences and observations among their close friends (as some said they did), but it is less likely that these moments of sharing are 'discussions' where they think, analyze, ask questions and reflect in depth on these experiences and observations. In this sense, arguably, the focus group discussion format has provided these young people with a platform to discover both their own and their peers' opinions, as well as their own abilities of discussion and self expression in a constructive fashion, and hence has had an empowering impact by providing them with a sense of competency on political issues as children.

Overall, these statements of feedback draw attention to the fact that - similar to the concerns some stated during the discussions - these youth want to have a voice; they want to

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[185] Gayet güzel geçti. Arkadaşlarımın ve benim fikirlerimin çok güzel ve enteresan olduğunu düşünüyorum. Böyle tartışmalara katılma hevesim arttı

[186] Barış hakkında bir sürü arkadaşımın fikrini öğrenmiş oldum

[187] Bence çok iyiydi. Bazı arkadaşlarımızın düşüncelerini ve kendi düşüncelerimizi söyledik. Herkes kendi fikirlerini söyledi.

[188] Çok mutlu oldum. Bazen de ayrı olduğumuz durumlarda tartıştık.

talk, they want to be heard and they want to be taken seriously. And they believe that their talking, if heard by the authorities or those who have access to power, can contribute to the resolution of their own problems, particularly at structural levels. Furthermore, especially among the older age participants exists the belief that such prioritization of youth related dimensions of the conflict, which would involve their own participation and take into consideration their views, would also contribute to the peace building process:

> *I feel that it's good to have studies like this, which are generally missing, more often. I'd like [them] to take my and my friends' opinions seriously. (Zülfikar, Sümerpark MEB)[189]*

> *In fact these studies need to be done. Such studies where young people will express their views will have a lot of benefits for the youth. There is always a need for the youth to discuss many issues and to try to invent solutions (Alaattin, Bağlar 5 Nisan)[190]*

> *This was of course good for us to express our opinions. Especially to prioritize youth in these issues was very good. The increase in studies like this will definitely help build peace, though a little. (Fatma, Bağlar 5 Nisan)[191]*

> *I like your work. I wish you success in your thesis. In addition, it will be a humanly help if you also communicated your impressions, frustrations, or your likings about us to people and institutions. I mean this study needs not to remain as just a study. Thank you. (Abdullah, Bağlar 5 Nisan)[192]*

Vriens's (1999) argues that peace interventions about youth need to make "young people conscious of their own responsibility for peace" and allow them to arrive at their "own point of view about their situation, and their influence on and their contribution to the peace process". Seen in this light, the sense of willingness and desire to be involved in similar discussions in the future, in belief that this will contribute to the addressing of their conflict-related concerns and

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[189] Çalışmanın eksik olduğu bu tür konuşmaların daha sık yapılması bana göre daha iyi. Ben ve arkadaşlarımın görüşlerini önemsemelerini isterim.

[190] Aslında bu tür tartışmaların yapılması gerekir. Gençlerin birçok konuda görüşlerini beyan edeceği bu tür çalışmaların gençlere birçok faydası olacaktır. Gençlerin birçok konuyu tartışıp bir çözüm geliştirmeye çalışmasına her zaman ihtiyaç vardır.

[191] Bu düşüncelerimizi ifade etmek için elbette iyi oldu. Öncelikle bu konularda gençlere öncelik gösterilmesi pek ala da iyi oldu. Bunların bu tip çalışmaların çoğalması elbetteki barışa yönelik az da olsa katkı sağlayacaktır.

[192] Çalışmanızı beğendim. Tezinizde başarılar dilerim. Ayrica bizimle ilgili izlenimleri hayal kırıklıkları veya begenileri kişilere veya kurumlara ulaştırmanız insani açıdan bir yardım olur. Yani sadece bir çalışma olarak kalmaması lazım. Teşekkürler.

problems and will allow them space to "*invent solutions*" reveals, to a certain degree, a sense consciousness and responsibility on their part for the resolution of the conflict. It appears that, although might be temporal, the focus groups have provided the participants with a space to think about the possibility of their own contribution to peace process as it relates to their everyday lives. This is a significant point for it for it draws attention to the roles these youth might willing to play as peacebuilders at grassroots level in a prospective conflict transformation/peacebuilding process that will take place in Turkey in the context of the Kurdish Question. In a similar vein, these perspectives of the youth also provide important insights regarding their desires and needs regarding format of future research that will be conducted with them. Enabling them to act as future peacebuilders wit innovative solutions would benefit from designing those interventions where the Kurdish youth will be involved both in the planning phases of research that might be conducted with them (Bagnoli and Clark 2010), and in the formulation and application of solutions (Chui 2003).

As importantly, the feedback of these older age participants also reflects their expectations from these types of research conducted (or will be conducted in the future) with young people. They want to see that the studies will lead to results. This is a very important point that relates to the responsibility of the researchers who work closely with children and young people. As briefly mentioned above, taking into consideration the expectations of young people about the research is an important dimension of such responsibility. The youth are willing to take part and contribute to such research with the hope and belief that their contribution will make a difference and will yield significant results for themselves. Frustration and a sense of apathy, previously voiced by Fatma from the Bağlar 5 Nisan group, because the many surveys done with them had not yield any visible results, was a warning sign in this regards. Then, one important dimension of doing studies with youth would need to involve being aware of their expectations of the research and correcting these expectations if they are mislead. Accordingly the youth needs to be informed sincerely and realistically about the possible impact the research might have, about the audience it will be able to reach, and about the time-frame in which the researcher expects to attain that impact. In other words, the participants of the research (or interventions) need to have a realistic vision about their participation, and need to have a sense of research as part of a longer term-process, rather than as one which will lead fast and visible results in the short term. In this respect, involving them in the planning, formulation and application process can also raise their consciousness of the process as a whole, both empowering them and protecting them against feelings of apathy and hopelessness.

In short the reactions of the participants to the focus group discussion format show that this method, apart from (or in addition to) its academic methodological advantages, has also been promising for this specific study due to its relieving and empowering impact on the participants. The sense of empowerment brought about by these specific discussions should not be exaggerated however; as previously noted both the feeling of relief and the sense of empowerment for this specific study is temporal. The real impact of this research for empowerment can only be realized by sharing its results with the participants and asking for and incorporating their feedback into the body of the research – a task that I haven't been able to realize at the time of this writing due to time restraints, yet one that I am planning to realize in the near future.

CHAPTER IV | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this study has been to explore the myriad of ways in which Kurdish children and young people from internally displaced, lower income families in Diyarbakır perceive and interpret the current conflict, and conceptualize and imagine a future peace.

The focus groups conducted show that these young people imagine peace in a multiplicity of ways. Common to all focus groups in this sense, has been the participants' conceptualization of peace in positive terms; in all the groups conducted and among all age categories peace was not seen solely as the absence of armed conflict, but was imagined as the absence of a set of direct, structural and systemic insecurities that these youth have been witnessing and experiencing within their communities and in their everyday lives.

During the discussions, as intended, the participants used the focus groups as a forum for self expression to voice their opinions, concerns and desires as they related to the discussion topic. Although the discussion dynamics and prioritized issues varied from group to group, nevertheless in all the groups the participants explored, gave evidences, and shared reflections on these various forms of insecurities they prioritized. They identified, analyzed, debated, and established complex connections between those different components of insecurities (or forms of violence), while reflecting on the ways in which these would relate to the establishment of a future peace as they imagined. These complex connections, on the other hand, as well as the nature of the interactions within the groups, also provided important insights into their needs, perspectives and the roles they play in their current settings, as well as the ways in which they construct their own meaning out of their own experiences and observations particularly with regard to the current conflict, politics and identity issues.

4.1. Discussion: Describing Conflict and Envisioning Peace

The conflict descriptions and peace images of the Kurdish children and youth in the focus groups were predominantly shaped in the context of their more immediate experiences and observations occurring in their social environments (i. e. situational factors). Continuous political violence at street level, current concerns about social and political exclusion (absence

of political rights, lack of opportunities, discrimination and stereotyping, and lack of spaces of self expression as both Kurds and as youth), and economic marginalization (widespread poverty, unemployment, underdevelopment) were the main themes that dominated the overall discussions as a manifestation of the absence of peace. In addition, peace was also conceptualized by some of the younger participants as one of social harmony and solidarity, shaped in the context of the relationships they observed within their neighborhoods and communities.

The participants reflected on the implications of these situational factors of the conflict for their everyday life as both individuals and as members of a Kurdish/*Diyarbakırlı* collectivity. While they chose to focus on each of these situational factors in varying degrees depending on the intensity of their exposure to such events within their society and their impact for their lives, overall these were identified by these young Kurds to be the main manifestations of the absence of peace in Diyarbakır (and in the region). Furthermore, far from being distinct categories, in the discourses of the participants these were frequently connected in different ways, sometimes in a mutually constitutive manner.

While the immediacy of their experiences and observations of these situations primarily determined the content and focus of the discussions on peace, it was felt that the interpretations of the participants of these present events (and hence their conceptualizations of peace and the current conflict) were also shaped through those social and cultural contexts that were specific to each group and individual, and that provided the processes, institutions and sites for their (political) socialization and sense of community. The most visible of these included the neighborhoods, families, schools, peer groups and the media. In this sense, how and how much they were exposed to the history, memories and politics of the Kurdish Question in these sites was also a factor in shaping their interpretations of the conflict, as well as the ways in which they imagined and desired peace.

4.1.1.   Absence of Peace as Social and Political Exclusion

Perceptions and grievances about negative stereotyping, stigmatization and consequent ill treatment of Kurds and *Diyarabakırlı*s at the societal level by Turks, was a dominant theme that appeared in most groups (except for Ben u Sen where the issue was touched only marginally, and for Sümerpark CB). These sentiments and perceptions were accompanied by common beliefs that Kurds were not known or understood by the wider Turkish society. These perceptions were informed both through the personal - or heard - experiences of these young

people of personal interactions with Turks, and through their observations regarding the representations of Kurds and Diyarbakır in the national media. The lack of knowledge and understanding by 'Turks' were perceived to take place at two distinct levels: at the social relationship level, and at a political level. At the same time, in some of the groups, these perceptions of social and political exclusion were also causally linked with the economic marginalization and underdevelopment of the region. Seen in this light, overall, the imaginations of focus group participants entailed descriptions of equality and brotherhood, mutual love and respect, coexistence, tolerance for the other's opinions, freedom of expression and having legitimate spaces of self expression, as well as having equal social and economic opportunities.

4.1.1.1.   Social and Political Exclusion at Societal/Grassroots Relationship Level

Feelings and experiences of discrimination, stigmatization, misperception and ill-treatment by the Turkish society were the most pressing concern for most of the young people who participated in the focus groups. A shared grievance was the Turkish majority's perception of all the Kurds - and *Diyarbakırlı*s in particular – which directly related them with the PKK and its actions, and the consequent stigmatization and criminalization of Kurds as 'terrorists', enemies, or aggressive people (Ben u Sen, Bağlar, Suriçi, Sümerpark MEB, 5 Nisan). These perceptions, on one hand, were based on personal and heard experiences of ill-treatment through interactions with Turks; some reported on the experiences of those Kurdish relatives who went to study in the universities outside the Southeast and were faced with discrimination and surveillance (5 Nisan), others of those who went to the West (such as Bursa, or the Blacksea region) to work as seasonal agricultural workers and were treated 'like dogs' (Sümerpark MEB, Suriçi, Bağlar). On the other hand, media was also a barometer for them to see how they were represented to and were perceived by the Turkish majority. Many complained that the national news, as well as some TV shows such as *Tek Türkiye* and *Ölümsüz Kahramanlar* were misrepresenting the Kurds as criminals and creating stereotypes about them, while also ignoring their own perspectives, stories and experiences, and the 'good things' about Kurds and Diyarbakır (Bağlar, Suriçi, Sümerpark MEB). Indeed, most participants established a strong causal relationship between the representations of the Kurds in the media and their treatment by Turks. They thought that Turks seldom came to the region engaged with them, and therefore did not really know the Kurds as a people, forming their impressions instead on what they saw and heard from the media. Accordingly, a common belief among the

participants was that if Turks came to the region and stayed among them and got to know them in their own localities, these negative impressions could be corrected.

Added to this was their related belief, based on their observations from the media, that the Turks did not know about the past memories of suffering and current grievances of and political demands for collective rights by the Kurds (Bağlar, Sümerpark MEB, Suriçi). Thus, was their concern about not having their perspectives represented in the media: some complained that while the pain of the dead soldiers were always aired and voiced, the suffering of the guerillas' mother who died in the mountains were never shown (Bağlar and Suriçi). Others complained how the PKK's resort to arms as well as the riots in the streets were represented just as violence for the sake of violence, without providing for past memories of suffering that provoked and the legitimate demands that lay beneath them: "*nobody goes up the mountain just for the sake of being a terrorist*" (Sümerpark MEB). In this sense, theirs was a demand for recognition of their pain and demands - many of these young people were from internally displaced families and had their own family stories of death and suffering - and a desire for empathy from the Turkish society. Accordingly, once again was the belief that the resolution of the conflict could only be possible if the Turkish society was willing to understand the Kurdish perspectives, their anger and reasons for resorting to violence. This belief was rooted in the assumption that if the Kurdish perspectives were understood, this could change the conceptualization of past and present means of violence from a criminal activity, to a struggle for rights as equal citizens.

Furthermore, during the discussions these young people also brought up the practical implications of misrepresentation and discrimination on their daily lives and their future perceptions. Some brought up the economic implications of this problem, which they thought manifested itself in the individual and collective discrimination against Kurds vis-à-vis Turks in terms of employment opportunities, and the lack of investments in the in the region due to direct link established between Kurds and the PKK. Others discussed the issue with reference to its impact on their present and future educational opportunities: they reported on how the misrepresentation of Diyarbakır was causing teachers to flee the city, and expressed how the stories they have been hearing about the outcasting of Kurds in the universities outside the region were making them anxious to go out of the region to study at universities.

Focus groups revealed that the participants felt a set of mixed emotions in the face of these observations and experiences of misrepresentation, degradation and discrimination as a collectivity. They expressed anger and frustration, as well as feelings of inferiority, lack of

confidence and loss of face. At the same time the desire to change these circumstances by making themselves known through engagement with the Turks that was so strongly felt in most groups drew attention to politics of hope for the future. Having the spaces and the skills to explain themselves to the Turkish society and individuals and be heard was not only suggested as a feasible probable solution by these young people that could constitute an alternative means to violence; it was also expressed as a need for many who felt uncomfortable with their own feelings of anger, lack of confidence and loss of face. Indeed, when some recounted on their experiences of positive encounters with Turks, their expressions and tones of voice immediately changed to a more confident, and pleased one (Bağlar, 5 Nisan).

The focus groups, thus, suggest that as Kurds, these young people want to be included; theirs is a desire and a call to be heard and to be understood by the larger segments of the Turkish society. On one hand they are loyal to their community which is united by culture, history and memories of shared suffering, and political demands. Yet at the same they bring up their past and present grievances and political demands (as will be seen below), as well as their frustrations with practices of discrimination and stigmatization not to suggest a separation but to draw attention to problems that need to be tackled for union. In this sense, their conceptualization of a future peace involves their desires for living as equal citizens within Turkey. It involves coexistence, tolerance, freedom of speech, having respect for the 'other', having spaces for expression of pain, and "being brothers". It involves living without conflict and discrimination and in harmony with the Turkish society as Kurds, being able to voice their thoughts and sentiments as Kurds legitimately, and showing and receiving respect from the Turks in return.

Furthermore, the focus group discussions also point to an unrecognized level in which the current conflict is played out. Çelik and Blum (2007) have argued that, conflict as a form of social tension between Kurds and Turks is most evident in the big cities primarily in the Western Turkey, while the nature of the conflict in the Southeastern cities, due to the predominantly Kurdish-majority character of the region, takes the form of one between the state and the Kurdish residents. While it is not possible to generalize it to the whole region, the discussions of youth, shows that the nature of conflict in Diyarbakır is not limited to one between the state and the Kurdish people; it also takes place at a societal level in the form of a social tension between Kurds and ('absentee') Turks. Without doubt this is a different form of social tension; on one hand it is directly connected to the social tension between Turks and

Kurds that take place outside the region, since it is partially based on Kurds' own experiences of unfriendly and discriminatory interactions in the West – be it lived or told. On the other hand, it is also based on observations and impressions attained from the media. In this regards, this social tension in Diyarbakır that is felt and experienced by these young Kurds is more indirect, unidirectional, and is divorced from daily encounters of violence in comparison to that occurring in the West. Nevertheless it is very real and needs to be acknowledged as one of the levels in which the conflict manifests itself, especially while trying to design effective forms of intervention at grassroots level.

4.1.1.2.   Social and Political Exclusion at Political and Rights Level

Another theme that emerged from the focus groups was feelings of political exclusion as Kurds, and a desire for the attainment of cultural and political rights. While their grievances about exclusion at the relationship level was mostly conceptualized vis-à-vis their relations with the Turkish society, at the political level it was conceptualized (sometimes ambiguously) vis-à-vis their relations with the state and its institutions.

The participants brought up the issues of political exclusion mainly in the context of the reasons for the demonstrations and the violent means adopted by the PKK. As will be discussed in more depth below, at one level both were conceptualized as rebellions to force the state to grant cultural (and especially linguistic), political (freedom for Kurdish political parties and freedom of expression), and economic (such as provision of employment opportunities) rights for the Kurdish, and also as means to voice and prevent past sufferings (such as the evacuations of villages, murders,etc.) that the Kurdish community had been through.

One issue that was discussed relatively more depth in this context was the linguistic rights (Suriçi and Sümarpark MEB). Having the right to speak Kurdish, which they defined as their mother tongue, was seen as an important manifestation of the suppression of Kurdish identity by the state. The fact that some of the participants in the Suriçi group who voiced this view had Turkish as their first language and were not as fluent in Kurdish as in Turkish was an important point that drew attention to the symbolic political meaning linguistic rights - and the description of 'mother tongue' - have attained in the conflict between the Kurdish minority and the state and how this perspective was also adopted by these young people. At the same time their concerns for speaking Kurdish was not only political, it was also voiced as a practical concern of the everyday life when they reflected on how their parents, or grandparents who

could not speak Turkish failed to express themselves when they went to hospitals, or other state institutions (Suriçi).

Interestingly, except for the Sümerpark MEB group, the references to state as the 'other' and as a party in the conflict were limited. Furthermore, the distinction they made between state and its institutions was also blurred at times. For instance police violence at the demonstrations were conceptualized both as a reflection of state's policy and as individual acts cruelty. Similarly, the police was taken to represent Turks on one hand, and the state on the other, also blurring the distinction at times between the Turkish state and the Turkish society. This I believe is an important point that reflects the current dynamics and complexity of the conflict. The fact that this also resembles paradoxically to their complaints about how all Kurds are seen to represent the PKK also invokes important questions regarding the levels in which the conflict takes place, is perceived to take place, and the relationship between these different levels identified.

4.1.1.3. Perception of self and the 'other': Constructions of Identity

During the focus groups, and particularly in Bağlar and Suriçi groups, participants defined and discussed what constitutes Kurdishness in two distinct ways. On one hand were those who saw Kurdishness as an ethno-political identity. According to this definition, the right to define one's self as Kurdish was reserved for those who empathized with the Kurdish national movement, its causes and means and its institutions - such as the BDP. Accordingly, identity was defined and reproduced strictly in the context of the current conflict. On the other hand, were those who resisted this definition. In Bağlar, the association was rejected by some participants due to its perceived association for support for the violent means to reach goals. For those youth, Kurdishness was a cultural identity that was 'felt inside', and did not require any other preconditions. In the Suriçi group, where majority argued that Kurds had to vote for "their own" party, one female participant opposed the view on the grounds of freedom of political choice. Despite their disagreements on what constitutes Kurdishness, however, all the participants in these groups identified themselves as Kurdish, were united in their concerns of discriminatory perceptions and practices by the Turkish society and the state, and shared similar visions of a desired future peace. Nevertheless their perceptions of identity did influence their perceptions about the availability/possibility of alternate means to achieve peace; in comparison, while those who adhered to the ethno-political definition embraced a more confrontational discourse, those who embraced a cultural definition were the ones that advocated dialogue and creation of spaces for self expression for the resolution of the conflict.

In this sense, the nature of interaction within the groups also provided important insights into the political debates and existing forms of social pressures within the Kurdish society, and about how the children themselves were not immune from these debates.

What constituted Turkishness, for these young people was a more ambiguous issue. In many groups it was observed that the word "Turks" was used to refer both to the wider Turkish society and to the state and its representatives or officials including the police, teachers and doctors. In several instances when I asked the participants what they meant by 'Turks' either they provided unclear answers or changed the subject, which I interpreted was due to their own confusion and to lack of clear definitions, but rather collective images. The issue was discussed more in depth in the Suriçi group, where some participants identified a Turk as someone who would vote for all the parties but the Kurdish ones. This conceptualization which was a mirror image of the definition of Kurd in this group however was not embraced by all and two participants opposed this view stating that Turks could vote for the Kurds if their interests required so, and that Kurdish BDP had a Turkish MP from Diyarbakır. In this context, in opposition to Kurdishness, Turkishness was not described as a political identity.

Notwithstanding the issue of definition, there were some common images of Turks in the minds of the participants, as revealed through the discussions. In the face of their own victimhood they felt as Kurds in various ways, Turks as a society were perceived to be free, more prosperous, having more economic and social opportunities and not have the major problems they had to face. Turkish children were seen to have an ideal childhood, living without fear.

Overall it was observed that except for one or two exceptional instances, the participants did not demonize Turkish people, nor used negating stereotypes to demean them. Rather they focused their efforts in the discussions on explaining their own grievances, and used the Turks as benchmarks to support the legitimacy of their desires for equal rights and opportunities.

4.1.2. Absence of Peace as Socio-Economic Marginalization

Widespread poverty, unemployment, underdevelopment of the region was the second major theme that was discussed in the focus groups in the context of peace. The most emphasis on this issue was given in Sümerpark CB and Ben u Sen groups, in which the concerns of the participants on their economic marginalization were voiced in a detached way from the

current conflict. In the other groups, the issue was linked with the conflict, however was not discussed in as depth.

In the light of their personal experiences and observations the participants in Sümerpark CB and Ben u Sen described peace as an environment devoid of economic problems, particularly of poverty and unemployment. Other problems in Diyarbakır, and particularly crime, were also associated with their economic marginalization; in the absence of social security systems to address the victimhood of the economically deprived, crime - and particularly crime by children - was viewed as a means of survival necessitated by environmental factors, and was also seen to be due to the failure of the city governors (and thus the state) in addressing the structural problems in the city (Sümerpark CB). Yet in the absence of state mechanisms to resolve the problems of economic marginalization, a discourse of social solidarity and communal support were revoked in both groups, and peace was described as a place where people would help each other whenever in need.

The discussions on economic marginalization in these groups also revealed a sense of how the participants viewed their own economic agency, particularly in the context of children who had to work to support their families. In the relatively well of Sümerpark CB, the participants reproduced the mainstream conceptualizations of childhood and adulthood, where the latter had to work and the former had to be looked after and go to school, and thus those children who had to work were seen as victims of poverty. In Ben u Sen, however, which is characterized by high levels of poverty and widespread unemployment, the participants embraced a context dependent view; where adults were perceived to be irresponsible despite their poor circumstances, and the children had to take upon their roles for supporting households, the act of working was seen as a form of victimhood for children that was not appreciated. However, in circumstances where the adults in the family were also working (or desired to work yet were unable to do so), the act of working for children was seen an a means of sharing the responsibility for supporting and upholding their family vis-à-vis challenges of the everyday. In this regards, the discussion in Ben u Sen proves important to draw attention to how children, in the economic context too, are agents not only through their actions but also through their meaning making practices. It suggests that the agency of children regarding 'working children' takes place in two interrelated levels; at the actual level of assuming economic responsibilities - which is the more visible one that is addressed by most studies (Çelik 2007, Yükseker 2007b, KHRP 2008) - and at the level of meaning making, that reflects their desires (or choices) for sharing that responsibility through their conceptualizations of

themselves as victims or actors - an issue which I believe deserves further academic investigation.

In the other groups, poverty and economic marginalization was seen to be directly connected to the broader dynamics of the conflict, and particularly to social and political exclusion. The underdevelopment in the region and lack of employment opportunities were seen to be rooted , first, in the lack of investments in the region due to the discrimination of the Kurds and the bad impressions about them (Bağlar), and second, in the high investment in weapons by the state that (they believed) would be utilized for economic reconstruction in the region in absence of the conflict (Suriçi). Hence was the belief and vision that an end to conflict and the establishment of peace would also provide improved economy for the region. In Bağlar 5 Nisan group participants emphasized that the end to overt violence would not necessarily mean peace, and a true peace would have to involve provision of social security and health guarantees that would ensure the well being of the people in the region.

4.1.3. Absence of Peace as the Existence of Political Violence at Street Level

Continuous political violence at street level, or in other words the recent demonstrations in Diyarbakır was a major theme that emerged in most of the groups, the exception being the 5 Nisan group. During the discussions, the participants particularly focused on children's participation in these events. Indiscriminate beatings and arbitrary arrests of children by the police, the high sentences given to children in courts, and the reasons for children's participation in these events were the most commonly addressed issues, and were discussed as manifestations of not living in peace, but in conflict. In this context their desires for peace also involved a desire for these situations and acts to come to an end.

The most emphases on this issue among other groups was placed by Bağlar and Suriçi participants, who also provided the most detailed testimonies of police violence directed specifically to children and expressed themselves most openly. Demonstrations and accompanying police violence was a reality of the everyday for all the young people in these groups whom by their own account witnessed clashes with the police in their own neighborhoods regularly. Some of the boys in these groups had also experiences of participating in the demonstrations and throwing stones at the police. Arguably, it was the immediacy and commonality of these experiences of the participants in each group and a shared sense of worry, grievance, and helplessness that made it easier for them to focus the discussion on this issue, enabling them to speak more freely while also reflecting openly on

their feelings (Madriz 2003). Indeed, in Sümerpark CB, where only some participants brought up their experiences of witnessing police violence, and in Ben u Sen where none did so, discussion of the events did not receive the same focus and enthusiasm they did in Bağlar and Suriçi. Nevertheless, participants in all these groups were united in their concern for those children who were victims of (sometimes arbitrary) police beatings, and the presence of street violence emerged as a shared manifestation of not living in peace.

The way Sümerpark MEB participants discussed the issue significantly differed from these four younger-age groups. Unlike the younger-age groups which predominantly discussed the events in terms of its implications for children, the male participants in Sümerpark MEB - all of whom had at least once participated in the demonstrations - approached the issue from a political, strategic point of view. They chose to discuss police violence at the demonstrations in the context of its impact of on the Kurdish political resistance at street level, and stated that the police violence had weakened the 'crowd' and that they themselves also were not participating because it was too risky.

In contrast to all groups the demonstrations were not discussed in the 5 Nisan group. In this group, where all the participants were preparing for the national university entrance exam, the priority was placed on the education and youth related macro dimensions of the conflict.

4.1.3.1. Street violence: Feelings of insecurity and victimhood

Depictions of children as victims of police violence and the justice system was a prominent theme that came up in the discussions with younger participants on the recent demonstrations. In Bağlar and Suriçi, and to some extent Sümerpark CB, participants provided detailed testimonies of witnessing police violence directed at children. Many emphasized that police targeted even those children who had not participated in the events. While some participants expressed disapproval with the children's engagement in violent behavior at the demonstrations, or expressed acknowledgement that their behavior was indeed punishable, still none could understand neither the extent and arbitrariness of the police violence, nor the high sentences passed on to the children in courts - and indeed they seemed quite confused on this matter and could not offer any reasonable explanations for neither of the two phenomena. The only explanation for this came from the Sümerpark MEB group, where the behavior of the police was interpreted as a state strategy to suppress the Kurds.

The testimonies provided by the Bağlar and Suriçi participants in the discussions, as well as their own high engagement with the issue revealed their sentiments of their own vulnerability in the face of these events which have become frequent in their neighborhoods. In their narratives they simultaneously revoked the vulnerable child discourse - "children can make mistakes"- and expressed parent-like concerns for the children involved, which reflected both their own feelings of empathy and their desires to be able to act as agents to address these problems. Yet, their feelings of victimhood were also accompanied by their frustration with the workings of the state system, and their helplessness to aid these children in legitimate ways. In addition in Bağlar group one female participants provided a sophisticated analysis of this victimhood from an alternate, futuristic point of view: she explained how the children who were sentenced to long terms of prison would lack the necessary skills to survive as normal people in the everyday life when they got out, and therefore how they would have to join the ranks of the PKK for survival, drawing attention to the perpetuating impact of the state policies on the perpetuation, and even future escalation of the conflict. In this sense she established a direct causal link between the current and future victimhood of the children, and engaging in political violence (i.e. being a PKK member) in the future (Collier 2000 and O'Higgins and Martin 2003).

The discussions also revealed, to some extent, how some of the families - irrespective of their own political perspectives - were trying to protect their children from the threats posed by street violence in particular and from politicization in general. Avoiding talking politics in the presence of children, or advising them against taking an interest in the latest political developments because they were "too young" (Bağlar, Suriçi), speaking against participation in the demonstrations (Ben u Sen), or broadly trying to portray a sense of societal coexistence by emphasizing the brotherhoods of Turks and Kurds (Bağlar) were some of the discursive means by which families were reported to try protecting their children. However, the discussions also showed that especially in sites where the conflict at street level is severely experienced at street level, these mechanisms do not work, since 'politics' becomes an unavoidable reality of the everyday in the presence of actual experiences, observations and media images.

Despite their obvious pessimism, nevertheless, it was also observed that participants resisted habituation to these violent events. While they express anger and helplessness in the face of their experiences, and - as will be seen below - even though some even express support for the demonstrations, these young people and particularly young females still see the events as transformable.

4.1.3.2. Reasons for children's involvement in the demonstrations

These young people interpreted the reasons for children's participation in the events, and particularly the act of throwing stones, in various ways. One perspective, similar to those discourses advanced by state officials, was that children were manipulated and sometimes forced by adults to take part in the demonstrations in exchange for money. This perspective was expressed by the Ben u Sen participants, and by some of the participants in Sümerpark. From this perspective, children were conceptualized as innocent, apolitical and unconscious beings who were victims of adult directives. The common thing between those young people who voiced this view is that none during the discussions expressed any direct experiences of having been in or witnessing the events. Furthermore, during the discussions these views remained simplistic and were not supported by more complex ways of interpretation.

Those who had voiced direct experiences of witnessing police violence, on the other hand, adopted a different perspective, and provided more diverse ways for the interpretation of involvement in the demonstrations and the act of stone throwing. On one hand, it was conceptualized as a reaction and response to (being subjected to or observing) the extensive and irrational police violence (Sümerpark CB, Sümerpark MEB). In this sense, children's involvement was interpreted to be provoked by the hostile and unjust behavior of the police, and was seen as an act to 'get even' or 'take revenge'. In this sense, the clashes between police and children were seen as an impulsive confrontational form of engagement, (partially) divorced from the wider political and ethnic implications.

At the same time, it was also conceptualized as a reaction to the wider state policies, and as a means to voice and correct present and past the grievances of the Kurds. It was seen as a reaction to past suppression and suffering of the Kurds, such as the evacuation of the villages (Sümerpark MEB), and as a means to prevent similar events from repeating in the future (Bağlar). It was also interpreted as a means to voice disapproval with the current state/government policies on the Kurdish Question (Sümerpark CB, Sümerpark MEB) and, thus, as a means undertaken for the attainment of cultural, social, economic and political rights for the Kurds. These included freedom for the Kurdish language (Suriçi), for addressing poverty and unemployment and economic marginalization of the Kurds (Sümerpark MEB, Bağlar), and for freedom for Kurdish political parties (Sümerpark MEB). Thus, in clear contrast to the image of children as apolitical beings and victims of adult manipulation, children by this later group were conceptualized as conscious political actors and agents. Their involvement in the riots was seen as strategic, purposeful, and political acts, undertaken to promote the desired social

changes for their political community (Sambanis 2002, McEvoy 2000, Urdal 2006, Muldoon et al. 2008). The police, in this sense, although not voiced openly by all, but only by Sümerpark MEB participants, was seen to represent the state. One striking point was that, despite their strong emphasis on social and political discrimination at the grassroots level and in their relationship with the Turkish Society as Kurds, none of these young people discussed the demonstrations in this context, nor did they conceptualize it as a reaction to the Turkish Society.

During the discussions, these conceptualizations did not always mean support for the violence undertaken by children. Many children in Sümerpark MEB, Suriçi and Bağlar groups, and particularly the young females, stated that they did not approve of the violent behavior of the children and acknowledged that their acts were punishable. Yet at the same time the harshness and indiscriminateness of the police violence, the arbitrary arrests and the high sentences given to children provoked their resentment and feelings of injustice indiscriminately. Some young females believed that there was a need to voice the past and current grievances of Kurds, that demonstrations was a means to voice those grievances, and that if it were possible, that they would prefer peaceful demonstrations (Bağlar). Others stated that while they did not (and would not) participate in the demonstrations or approve of their violent character, they still supported them; sometimes passively by heart and for what they symbolized (Bağlar, Suriçi), and sometimes actively by hiding those children who were trying to escape from the police in their houses (Suriçi). Still others stated that there was a need to invent new and more peaceful forms of protesting (like planting trees, writing articles), and that there was a need to create those spaces of dialogue to nurture mutual understanding. Nevertheless, within their current circumstances where alternative non-violent means of protesting were unimaginable or unrealistic, no matter how undesirable, violence was seen by many as an inevitable means for most for expression of their grievances.

In addition to these two distinct and conflicting perspectives, in Bağlar group some participants also drew attention to the influence of their social environment on children's participation in the riots. The indirect influence of the families, through talking at home about their own suffering and painful past and present experiences, and thus creating a sense of victimhood and rebellion, was one of the factors they voiced. The second factor was peer pressure for participation ("Are you not Kurdish?"). The definition of Kurdishness as a political - in contrast to ethnic-identity, and consequently of Kurds as a political community, as well as the children's desires to be a part of that community, were underlined in this view (Leonard

2010). In this sense participation in the riots became a performative, rebellious action to prove one's loyalty to the community, establishing a form of social pressure for conformism. These views draw attention to the internal social dynamics that influence children's participation in the events. Furthermore, while the previous interpretations draw attention to the purposeful agency of children, in these views voiced by the Bağlar group a sense of victimization and agency are intermingled. Youth are portrayed as both righteous rebels against established forms of power relations and forms of oppression (that they observe, experience and/or hear), and as victims of circumstances and environment; in a relationship where one constantly reproduces the other in the politics of the everyday.

4.1.3.3. Youth and street Violence: Observations and hypotheses

Overall, some important findings, observations and hypotheses for further research emerge from the different perspectives shared by participants in the focus groups on political violence at street level. First, the discussions draw attention to the role of indiscriminate police violence alone in provoking children to participate in the demonstrations, and hence, ironically, to the escalatory and perpetuating impact of the police behavior on the street violence.

Second, it is observed that regardless of differences in gender, those children who have more direct experiences and observations of the demonstrations and police violence are more likely to describe and emphasize the agency of children in addition to victimhood - although this does not always mean more analysis. Seen in this light the focus group discussions suggest that the sites and surroundings for children's political socialization play the key role in determining their experiences and hence their interpretations of the demonstrations (and of conflict) as well as their perspectives of victimhood and choices of agency.

The case of Ben u Sen in particular is particularly informative in this sense, for purposes of comparison. The interpretations of the participants, in this socially, geographically and economically marginalized neighborhood, of the demonstrations and of children's participation show that despite the common belief, internal displacement and the subsequent unemployment and poverty alone are not sufficient to explain children's motives for participation in the riots. The focus groups suggest that, it is within their sites of (political) socialization - such as neighborhoods, families and peer groups - that these young people construct the meanings they attest to their different experiences and observations, establish (or not) connections between them (for example between economic marginalization and the

politics of discrimination towards Kurds) and judge their own and their surroundings' reactions. In the case of Ben u Sen, absence of direct experiences and observations of the events due to the geographical marginalization of the neighborhood in particular, seems to have had a significant impact on their perspectives of the demonstrations; despite their own concerns about poverty, a connection between the current suffering of the Kurds (particularly in the context of poverty) and the riots was missing from their interpretation of the events. The similarity of their discourses with that of the state, which was also observed for some of the Sümerpark CB participants, suggests that in the absence of direct experiences and observations of violence, and media becomes a particularly important means of shaping their perceptions – an issue that demands further research.

The differences in these interpretations can also be explained from a needs and coping mechanisms perspective. As noted earlier, Bar-Tal (1998) argues that formation of particular societal beliefs about the conflict, the self, and the enemy 'other' enable the society members (and thus children) to cope with the conflict in their individual and social lives by strengthening their sense of society. Furthermore Cairns (1996) and Punamaki (1996) argue that active participation in politics and political violence provides youth with resilience and coping ability in the reality of war and political conflict. As the focus groups suggest, participation in politics for children is not limited to active participation in the events. Participation in the events is only one visible form of their agency, and these young people also create politics through their interpretations and acts of meaning making. For those young people whose everyday reality is characterized by actual experiences and observations of political violence in the streets of Diyarbakır, being able to explain and make meaning out of their experiences, thus, can be interpreted not only as a consequence of the conflict, but also as an unconscious strategy necessitated by the need to be able to cope with these realities through meaning making. In other words, the perspectives of those participants that emphasize the political agency of youth and interpret participation in the events as a reaction or as a political means of responding to collective grievances and of furthering collective community (Kurdish) interests might be viewed as strategic and empowering moves that help them cope with the reality of routine violence that also threatens themselves.

In a related way, the focus groups also draw attention to the significance of these demonstrations for reproduction of a particular form of collective political identity (Leonard 2010). Especially taking into consideration the impact of peer pressure in getting involved in these events, it is possible to argue that the demonstrations are not only sites for the

manifestation of perceived collective interests for the Kurdish ethno-political community for these children; they also become sites where the ethno-political discourse is reproduced and the boundaries of the political community and belonging are drawn. Thus participating in or supporting these demonstrations also become manifestations of loyalty to the community for some, and create its own forms of social pressure for those who want to belong. This draws attention to the reproductive role of demonstrations of the conflict. In a political environment where other, more legitimate means of furthering community interests do not exist, or is not possible, or cannot be imagined, the demonstrations and acts of violence become not only the only means for protest, but also attain a symbolic meaning of showing solidarity with the community and the Kurdish national cause.

An important observation, in this sense, is that where ability and/or the desire to imagine alternative means other than violence exist, the demonstrations lose their functions as sites for manifestations of identity and belonging. The discussion that took place in the Bağlar group, where some of the female participants advocated dialogue and creation of spaces and building of skills for self expression for the resolution of the conflict, while resisting the ethno-political interpretations of Kurdish identity (that defining one's self as Kurdish required taking part in the demonstrations, using the 'appropriate' language, or supporting the means of the PKK), and embracing a cultural definition, is informative in this sense. The relationship becomes more concrete when compared to the female participants in Suriçi who advocated a strong political definition of identity, and strongly supported the demonstrations, while not demonstrating the same ability to imagine alternative means to violence. This finding from the focus groups is especially important for suggesting a link between the identity perceptions of youth and the ability to imagine innovative peaceful means of voicing grievances for breaking the cycle of violence and the subsequent resolution of the conflict. The fact that the Bağlar girls were also proud of their identity as Kurdish also shows that pride in identity does not necessarily correspond to radical, violent politics. It reveals, similar to the findings of McEvoy-Levy (2000) in Northern-Ireland, how loyalty to the community and "cultural identity [are] compatible with peaceful citizenship" – a point that needs to be taken into consideration while designing empowering peacebuilding interventions with youth.

The focus groups also tell us much about the roles, perceptions and interpretations of girls whose perspectives in studies on youth and conflict in general and in the case of the Kurdish youth in particular are generally underrepresented. While the boys are at the forefront of the demonstrations and their presence is more visible - especially in terms of

conflict reproduction - the focus groups show that while they are not directly involved in clashes, girls are also as well informed about and engaged in the everyday politics going on around them. Indeed during all the group discussions, it was the young women who participated more actively and enthusiastically and analyzed, debated, and challenged each other's perspectives. In comparison to young men they were also the ones who provided the more sophisticated explanations on and established connections between different matters. Furthermore, again in comparison to boys, they also demonstrated more desire for and ability to imagine non-violent means in resolving the conflict. In this sense girls are as active agents as boys, no matter how invisible, when they construct meanings out of their own experiences and observations, when they support the events or hide their friends in their houses. They also demonstrate potential for more constructive agency when they try to imagine alternative ways to bring peace. The perspectives of young females, thus, are important for designing peace interventions.

In explaining the gender differences for roles played by young men and women, the most common explanations are that of cultural norms, societal expectations and personal aspirations based on gender roles. In the context of the Kurdish children and the participation of predominantly boys in the demonstrations, a commonly held view relates to the attitudes of the families constructed around those cultural norms and societal expectations; while boys become freer as they get older, the girls' mobility outside of the home is slowly constrained by their families. Although the focus groups conducted are inadequate to make strong statements regarding the reasons for the gender differences, the fact that regardless of the differences of their perspectives none of the female participants were previously involved in the demonstrations suggest that cultural norms and the gender roles shaped around them are indeed influential. In this context, a so far ignored dynamic suggested by the focus groups that might also help explain the differences, relates to the social/personal/peer networks of these children and the expectations shaped around them. As already stated peer pressure plays a specific role in the boys' participation in the demonstrations: demonstrations become a site to prove loyalty to the community. For the girls, arguably, as felt from the focus groups, such mechanisms and performative expectations do not exist within their peer groups. Hence the manifestations of their politicization take place in more rhetorical forms. While this is one of the reasons that render the presence and perspectives of young females invisible within the conflict, it also suggests that the constraining social pressures they face in their everyday lives (such as having to prove their Kurdishness) are also weaker in comparison to young males, which might also help explain the complexity of their explanations and their ability to imagine

alternative, non-violent means to bring peace. While this is a hypothesis and needs to be supported by further research, the observation nevertheless highlights the potential roles that the young females might play as peacebuilders within their communities with appropriate forms of interventions and peace education programs.

Finally, it is obvious that trying to keep youth from the streets through recreational activities, as suggested and undertaken by some state institutions, is not a solution that would solve the problem of child involvement in the demonstrations. As the focus groups show, regardless of their participation or support, these demonstrations are hardly viewed as 'recreational riots' undertaken for fun or boredom by these young people, and they are viewed as political means by many. Furthermore, these children and young people are political actors not only when they engage in the demonstrations. They are also actors when they discuss, interpret and share their experiences and make meanings out of it. So what is needed is two folds. First, it is necessary to address the structural root causes that lead them to support such violent means in the first place, starting with the prevention of police violence that targets children. Second it is also important to provide them with skills that will enable them to imagine and construct alternative means to violence to voice their concerns in meaningful ways, and to create spaces for them to express themselves.

4.2. Conclusion

The present research reveals that the perceptions of the young Kurds of peace basically evolve around having equal citizenship (socially, politically, economically and in their relations with the state) rights in Turkey and having constructive relations with the Turkish society. Their concerns and needs draw attention to a desire that is directed towards integration and union, and not separation, which they believe can be achieved through addressing of present grievances in particular. The fact that, even their concerns about discrimination by the Turkish society does not involve a demonization of the Turks, but rather reflects a desire and need to be known, heard and understood by them, is promising in this respect. They see the conflict, at its current form, as not intransigent but as transformable and some are willing to make their own contribution to this process of transformation.

The focus groups reveal a self understanding of the participants as both as vulnerable victims and as social actors in their current settings characterized by conflict, and in a mutually constitutive manner. This also supports the conceptualizations of the new paradigms in

sociology, anthropology and psychology of children and young people as both 'beings' and 'becomings'.

There are several layers in which the social and political agency of youth as 'beings' is played out in Diyarbakır. First, these youth are also social actors; some work (or desire to work and take responsibility) to support their households economically, some participate or support the demonstrations, some write in a children's newspaper to make their voices heard. Furthermore, they also reflect on those children who join the ranks of the PKK - be it in defense of political rights, or as a means of survival - and those children who engage in crime - by force, or because of poverty.

But most importantly, these children and young people are active agents in making meaning out of their own experiences and observations. The complexity in which the participants have discussed peace and conflict as well as the related social and economic phenomena, as discussed above, is a clear manifestation of this agency. In general terms, they reproduce both conflict and the (constructive and deconstructive) means through which they believe it can be resolved, through their interpretation and discursive practices as a result of their everyday interactions. They observe, think about, and interpret their observations, impressions and experiences, analyze and construct meanings out of them, and consider and decide on their own roles and responsibilities in the light of these constructed meanings. They observe the hierarchical relationships within the society and the state (be it of children vis-à-vis adults, Kurds vis-à-vis Turks or state, poor vis-à-vis rich, or women vis-à-vis men), assess their own position in these sets of relationships (mostly in the context of their marginalization) and play active roles in the construction of their social and political identities in the light of these observations. They are also active agents in meaning making when they identify their own vulnerabilities and desires, when they distinguish between right and wrong, when they imagine the desired (prosper and just) future, and when they think about what can be done, what they themselves can do to realize that future. They demand spaces of self expression as both children/youth and Kurds, and some believe that they can contribute to the resolution of the conflict and conflict related problems through provision of such spaces. Finally, they are also agents when they feel apathy, hopelessness, inconfidence and loss of face in the light of their feelings and observations.

While they express a strong (yet invisible) sense of agency, these children and young people also perceive themselves as victims in several ways. As Kurds they feel marginalized vis-à-vis the Turkish society; feel that they are discriminated against, stereotyped and do not have

the legitimate spaces to voice their past and present grievances. Again as Kurds, they feel discriminated against by the state in terms of social, cultural, and economic rights and opportunities. As children and youth of Diyarbakır, they feel under threat due to the harsh behavior of police at the demonstrations, and due to the high and unjust sentences given to children in courts. Poverty and unemployment that are so widespread in the region significantly affect them, and so does crime in the city. In the absence of proper educational opportunities in the city and the presence of news of discrimination outside the region, they are anxious of their own futures. Reflecting the 'becoming child' discourse, many feel that they do not have (have not had) a proper childhood because of the economic, structural and political problems in the city that are associated with the conflict, and at the same time they feel voiceless due to their age within their own society and are frustrated by their own marginalization from established sources of power. Finally, some also feel as victims when they feel they have to succumb to the societal and political norms and pressures.

Overall, feelings of victimhood and sense of their own agency are intermingled in the discourses of the participants, one reproducing the other, both at discursive and actual levels. As mentioned earlier the studies conducted on the children and youth in the region, and in the context of the conflict, emphasize their vulnerability and mostly focus on their status as victims. This is without doubt a fundamental step that needs to be taken in to consideration while working with youth affected by conflict. However, addressing the vulnerability of these youth cannot be realized without also acknowledging their agency in multiple ways, and particularly their agency in meaning making. The research shows their definitions of peace involve a recognition of both their victimization and their agency. These young people imagine and define peace as the eradication of those direct, structural and cultural forms of violence that affect their everyday lives. More importantly they refuse habituation to violence and, particularly the young females, see the conflict as transformable.

At the same time, as young Kurds they not only desire, but also psychologically need those spaces to make their voices heard, as well as the recognition of their (present and potential) agency. In this sense many are willing to state their opinions and make their contribution to a prospective peace process. Many also share and are constructively motivated by the belief that their own perspectives can help resolution of the conflict related problems, at least within their own localities. In a similar sense, some are also disillusioned by their own lack of agency and influence, and in the absence of legitimate spaces to express themselves and being unable to imagine peace as a realistic future, risk opting for violence as a means. In

this sense, acknowledging the agency of children and youth in multiple ways, providing them with a space of self expression and hearing their perspectives and suggestions, and constructively involving them in the peace process at the grassroots level by empowering them and equipping them with the necessary skills that will enable them to act as peacebuilders, not only is a vital but also an urgent necessity. The research also shows that the perspectives of young females must not be overlooked. It shows that their invisibility at the street level disguises their present and potential status as social (constructive and deconstructive) actors, and that young females have at least as much to contribute to and gain from being involved and empowered by such initiatives as the young males.

Moreover, the research also suggests that their perceptions both victimhood and agency are shaped more in the light of their more immediate concerns, experiences and observations. While they doubtlessly assess these immediate circumstances in the light of the socio-cultural factors and the history of the conflict, nevertheless they are more sensitive to the recent developments, events and problems that they are witnessing and experiencing on a daily basis in their various sites of socialization. This suggests that any interventions or policies that are directed at youth would need to require a careful analysis of the situational factors that influence youth, as well as their sites of socialization, while taking also into consideration the differences that would be influenced by differences in gender and age.

The research shows that the children and youth of Diyarbakır, for the time being, are willing to take on responsibilities to contribute to a peace process at grassroots, and appreciate research and initiatives that promote their involvement. This is the most promising and most important finding offered by this research. Yet the strong influence of situational, immediate factors in shaping their perceptions, as well as the risks of their disillusionment in the absence of the sustainability of such initiatives, mean that acting on and with youth needs to be realized immediately.

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Appendix A: Focus Group Draft Protocol (in Turkish) [193]

Giriş:

Son yıllarda, çatışmaların olduğu bölgelerde gençlerin barışın inşasında önemli birer rol oynayabilecekleri ve bunun oluşturulan barışın sürdürülebilirliğine önemli katkılar yapabileceğine ilişkin çeşitli görüşler öne sürülüyor. Sizin bu konularda ne hissettiğinizi, nasıl bir barış hayal ettiğinizi, Türkiye'de nasıl bir barış istediğinizi ve barışın inşasında oynayabileceğiniz rol hakkında ne düşündüğünüzü öğrenmek istiyoruz. Tartışma süresince hepinizin fikirlerini dile getirmesini istiyoruz. Doğru ya da yanlış cevap diye bir şey kesinlikle yok. Hepinizin barışı nasıl tarif ettiğinizi ve tarif ettiğiniz barışa nasıl bir katkı sağlayabileceğinizi anlamamızda bize yardımcı olabilecek önemli tecrubeleri ve dusunceleri var. Cevaplarınız ve kimliklerinizkesinlikle gizli tutulacak.

I. Barış Algıları

Her gencin barışın ne olduğuna ilişkin kafasında hem tecrübeleri hem de gözlemleri ışığında farklı bir resim olacaktır.

1. Barış sizce ne demek?
    (Bir arkadaşınıza, ya da "barış"ın ne olduğunu hiç bilmeyen birisine bu kavramın ne demek olduğunu açıklamanız gerektiğini hayal edin. Neler söylerdiniz? Kafanızda nasıl bir manzara canlanıyor?)

    [Odak "barış"ın gençlerce algılanan anlamı üzerinde]

2. Sizce silahların susması barış demek olur mu?
    (Bir ülkede savaş ya da silahlı çatışma olmadığını düşünün, bu o ülkede barış var demek anlamına gelir mi? Neden, nasıl?)[194]

    [Odak çocukların "barış"ı savaş yokluğu olarak olumsuz anlamda mı, yoksa daha kapsamlı olumlu anlamıyla mı anladıkları üzerinde]

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[193] "Odak Grup Protokol Taslağı"

[194] From the research of Hakvoort and Oppenheimer (1993)

3. Sizce siz barış içinde mi yaşıyorsunuz?
   [Odak gençlerin kendi içinde bulundukları ortamı algılayışları üzerinde]

   Eğer cevap "hayır"sa...

4. Sizin barışınız nasıl bir barış? Sizi nasıl etkileyecek?
   (Barışın gelmesinin hayatınızı hangi alanlarda ve nasıl etkileyeceğini düşünüyorsunuz/ istiyorsunuz?)

   [Odak "barış"ın gençler açısından arzulanabilir sonuçları üzerinde]

II. *Kendilerinin bir aktör olarak rollerine yonelik algılar*
Gençler barışın inşasında bir rol oynayıp oynamayacakları üzerine daha hiç düşünmemiş olabilirler. Odak grup çalışması boyunca yapılan tartışma ve hayal ettikleri barış onları bu yönde düşündürtebilir.

1. Diyarbakır'daki en büyük patronun siz olduğunuzu olduğunuzu hayal edin. Barış getirmek için neler yapardınız?
   [Odak gençlerin kendi şehirleri bağlamında (yerel mikro-bağlamda) barış için atılması gerekli adımlar hakkındaki düşünceleri ve stratejileri üzerinde]

2. Şimdi de Türkiye'nin patronu olduğunuzu hayal edin. Barış getirmek için neler yapardınız?
   [Odak gençlerin ülke bağlamında (genel makro-bağlamda) barış için atılması gerekli adımlar hakkındaki düşünceleri ve stratejileri üzerinde]

3. Şimdi de bütün Dünyanın patronu oldunuz. Barış getirmek için neler yapardınız?
   [Odak gençlerin küresel bağlamda (evrensel olarak) barış için atılması gerekli adımlar hakkındaki düşünceleri ve stratejileri üzerinde]

4. Şimdi siz tekrar kendiniz oldunuz. "Sizin Barışınız"ın tahsisi için siz neler yapıyorsunuz? Yapmak istersiniz? Yapabilirsiniz?
   [Odak gençlerin barış inşasında oynayabilecekleri ve oynamak isteyebilecekleri kısa vadeli roller üzerinde]

5. Yine kendinizsiniz. Sizce hem Diyarbakırdaki, hem Güneydoğu Anadoludaki hem de Türkiye'nin tamamında insanların uzun yıllar barış içinde yaşayabilmesi için size düşen görevler neler?
(Barışın sürekli olması için sizce siz önümüzdeki yıllarda neler yapabilirsiniz? Yapmalısınız?)

[Odak gençlerin barışın sürdürülmesinde oynayabilecekleri ve oynamak isteyebilecekleri daha uzun vadeli roller üzerinde]

III. Toparlama

1. Tüm bu konuştuğumuz konularda bilmemiz gerektigini düşündüğünüz/eklemek istediginiz başka bir şey var mı? ya da ... nin sizin icin ne ifade ettigi konusunda.

Appendix B: Survey Questionaires (in Turkish)

Yazılı Anket 1[195]

İsim (Sadece ilk isim) :

Doğum tarihi ve yeri :

Cinsiyet:

Din / Mezhep:

Doğduktan sonra ilk konuşmayı hangi dilde öğrendiniz?

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[195] First Name

Date and place of birth

Gender

Religion / Sect

In which language did you learn to speak first when you were born?

In which language do you speak among your family?

Where are you currently living? (district / neigborhood)

When and for which reasons did you or your family moved into where you are currently living? Could you explain briefly?

How many of you are there in the family? How many siblings do you have?

Are you attending school (YES) (NO)

If YES; which grade are you?

If NO; why do you not attend school?

Are you working at home or outside in exchange for money? If your answer is YES could you briefly explain the type of work you're doing?

Apart from you, are there any members in your family who are working in exchange for money? Who are these members, and what kind of works do they do?

Apart from home and coming to …… [center] how and with whom do you spend your free time? What are you doing during those times? How does your family react to it?

Apart from what you are already doing right now, what would you like to do in your free time? What kind of opportunities would you like to have?

Evde ailenizle hangi dilde konuşuyorsunuz?

Şu anda nerede oturmaktasınız? (ilçe / mahalle)

Siz ya da aileniz, şu an oturduğunuz yere ne zaman ve hangi nedenlerle taşındınız? Kısaca açıklar mısınız?

Aileniz kaç kişilik? Kaç kardeşiniz var?

Okula gidiyor musunuz?　☐ Evet　☐ Hayır

Cevabınız EVET ise; Kaçıncı sınıfa gidiyorsunuz?

Cevabınız HAYIR ise; Neden okula devam etmiyorsunuz?

Evde ya da dışarıda para karşılığı çalışıyor musunuz? Yanıtınız EVET ise kısaca yaptığınız işi anlatır mısınız?

Sizden başka ailede para karşılığı çalışan var mı? Bu kişiler kimler ve ne iş yapıyorlar?

Ev ve ………………. [merkez] dışında boş vakitlerinizi nerelerde, kimlerle geçiriyorsunuz? Bu zamanlarda neler yapıyorsunuz? Aileniz bunu nasıl karşılıyor?

Şu an yaptıklarınızın dışında boş vakitlerinizde neler yapmak isterdiniz? Ne tip imkanlarınız olsun isterdiniz?

Yazılı Anket 2[196]

Çalışmamızı tamamladık. Katılımınız ve tartışmalarla ilgili neler düşünüyorsunuz, kendinizi nasıl hissediyorsunuz?

Tartışmada söylemiş olduklarınızla ilgili değiştirmek istediğiniz ya da eklemek istediğiniz herhangi bir şey var mı?

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[196] We have completed our work. What do you think about your participation and the overall discussions? How do you feel?

Is there anything you would like to change about what you said during the discussion? Is there anything you would like to add?