

# **Pedagogies of Solidarity in the Midst of War: The Prefiguring Post-National Futures: The case of the Peoples' Democratic Congress (HDK), Turkey**

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*Turkey Case Study: The Peoples Democratic Congress (HDK)*

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## Preface

This case study of the Democratic Congress of the Peoples (HDK), Turkey, is part of a broader project, funded by the UK's Economic & Social Research Council, under grant number ES/R00403X/1: '*Social Movement Learning and Knowledge Production in the Struggle for Peace with Social Justice: Case Studies from Four Conflict-Affected Contexts*'. This preface will provide a generic overview of the research rationale, theory, methodology and aims of this project.

### Research Rationale

In an era of increasing global inequality, conflict and rising authoritarianism (Streeck, 2016; Piketty, 2014; Scarhill, 2013; Rogers, 2016) social movements often represent a first line of defence for some of the most marginalised communities on the planet, seeking to defend and extend the conditions for a basic and dignified human existence. That is to say, 'social movements matter' (Cox, 2018; SC, IDS and UNESCO, 2016; McAdam et al, 1999). Yet in the developing world, they often operate, organise and advocate in conditions of state repression, threats and insecurity, conditions which can serve to undermine movement cohesion, solidarity and effectiveness (Earl, 2013). This is particularly the case in countries affected by or emerging out of armed conflicts.

This research seeks to explore the learning and knowledge production processes of four very different organisations that are part of broader social movements, located in four distinct countries and continents, as they advocate for peace with social justice in contexts of violent conflict and/or its aftermath. These institutions, who are core partners in the proposed research, are NOMADESC, a grassroots NGO based in Colombia; The Housing Assembly, a grassroots organisation from South Africa; The HDK (Peoples' Democratic Congress), an umbrella organisation that brings together different social movements in Turkey; and the Madhesh Foundation, Nepal, an organisation that works with and for the excluded Madhesh community of the Terai planes of Southern Nepal. Each organisation, in different ways, advocates with and for marginalised communities seeking to defend and extend their basic rights to education, health, housing, life, dignity and equal treatment before the law. Each organisation, to different degrees, has also been victim of state repression, violence against its members and activists, and sustained surveillance and persecution.

The research combines detailed case studies of the learning and knowledge production processes of each social movement institution, and incorporates within that a dynamic process of inter-movement learning and knowledge exchange, facilitated through a series of workshops and field visits to each of the country contexts, with the objective of building collective knowledge and inter-movement solidarity.

The overarching aim of the study is to identify and critically analyse the strategic knowledge and learning processes of the four social movement organisations operating in conflict affected contexts. This was done through a co-produced process of intra- and inter-movement reflection on these strategic knowledges and learning processes with a view to improving their effectiveness and supporting the promotion of more equitable and sustainable peacebuilding processes.

The specific objectives are:

- I. Critically examine the learning and knowledge production processes of four social movements in conflict affected contexts
- II. Strengthen the respective social movements' learning and knowledge production processes, their reflexivity and strategic development
- III. Promote South-South and North-South dialogue and relationships to promote improved practice and international solidarity
- IV. Enhance national and global understanding of social movement learning and the role of social movements in promoting sustainable peacebuilding
- V. Co-produce four detailed social movement case studies and a critical comparative synthesis, extracted from the case studies.

These objectives will be achieved through empirically grounded, co-produced case studies of each respective social movement organisation, combined with inter-movement engagement, drawing on popular education techniques and ethnographic research methods to answer the following research questions:

*RQ1) How do social movements, located in complex conflict affected situations learn and produce knowledge, and how does this process of learning and knowledge*

*production assist in the development of strategy to achieve the demands of their constituencies?*

*RQ 2) What knowledge have the social movements developed and what have they learned?*

*RQ 3) What have been the effects of these social movements on the promotion and realisation of peace with social justice within their country context?*

*RQ 4) What can we extract from the four case studies about learning and knowledge production within social movements in complex, conflict-affected contexts that can assist in assessing the possibilities for strengthening civil society movements' role in building peace with social justice?*

## Theory

For the purpose of this research, we draw on the work of Paul Routledge (2018:4), who defines social movements as:

*organisations of varying size that share a collective identity and solidarity, are engaged in forms of conflict in opposition to an adversary (such as a government or corporation), and attempt to challenge or transform particular elements within a social system (such as governments, laws, policies, cultural codes and so on).*

Our particular definition, emphasises the geographical nature of social movements, which sees them as:

*networks of people, resources and connections. Most operate at the intersection of a series of overlapping scales – from more local municipalities, through regions to the nation state and, increasingly, international forums. These different politics of scale – and their associated networks of activity – provide movements with a range of opportunities and constraints (ibid:6).*

As a body of work, social movement research emerged from North America and Europe in the 1950s, with the functionalist 'resource mobilisation theory' (RMT) becoming a dominant strand that focused on social movement organisation, resources, and opportunities (Tilly, 1985; Tarrow, 1999; McAdam, 1982). Resource mobilization theorists have been criticised for their overtly structural approach and a tendency to extract the struggles of social movements from the broader analysis of the socio-economic context (Choudry, 2015; Scandrett, 2012). They also tended to arrive at levels of abstraction and generalisation which inevitably

produced reductive, simplified theory. ‘New Social Movement’ (NSM) theory emerged from Europe to challenge RMT (see Buechler, 2013; Touraine, 1981; Melucci, 1980) and the inadequacy of orthodox structural approaches, both Functionalist and Marxist, to account for social movements which began to emerge from 1968 onwards as significant subjects of struggle, but which could not easily be slotted into the traditional class analyses of these theories, e.g. the peace movement and the women’s movement. NSM theorists tend to have a concern for questions around why new social actors emerge, and take into account cultural factors such as the construction of collective identities and lifestyles. Some strands seek to analyse motivation, experience and communication networks of individual activists involved in social movements (Melucci, 1980). Such theories can be useful in helping us to grasp the internal dynamics and heterogeneous characteristics of social movements. In development studies, the political and economic struggles of social movements have increasingly been linked to battles over knowledge, coloniality and modernity, with alternative ways of knowing, being and producing at the heart of debates (c.f Escobar, 2004). Finally, there are important literatures on the way social movements in the contemporary era of globalization, use space and operate across borders to strengthen their claim-making (Kriesi et al, 2016; Routledge, 2018).

One general criticism, which has been made of much social movement theory, is that they often lack relevance for the movements themselves and '*often have little of substance to say about the struggles of the day*' (Cox and Nilsen, 2014:17). Flacks (2004) surveying the ever-growing field of social movement scholarship asked '*What is all this analysis for? In what way does the validation, elaboration, and refinement of concepts provide useable knowledge for those seeking social change?*' (ibid:138). From Flacks' critical starting point, a small but significant body of literature has emerged over the past decade which seeks to radically turn the mainstream trend on its head, challenging the detachment of the scholar from the movement by prioritising the aim of making research relevant and accountable to social movements themselves (Bevington and Dixon, 2005; Novelli, 2006, 2010,2004; Choudry, 2015; Cox & Nilsen, 2014; McNally, 2013). Flacks, Bevington and Dixon call for a new wave of ‘movement-relevant theory’ that is useful to those involved in struggles for social change (2005). This type of research represents an opportunity to increase both the academic utility and credibility of social movement research and its support for social impact. In relation to

this, the study of social movement organising and learning processes has been identified as one particularly relevant area for social movement analysis, which seeks to be movement-relevant (Zibechi, 2007; Santos, 2006; Della Porta and Pavan, 2017).

Moving slightly away from social movements to issues of conflict, in much of the literature on peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding there is a recognition that the voices of civil society, and the social movements that emerge from them, are often insufficiently included in determining the nature of peace agreements and post-conflict development policies (Pugh et al, 2016; Richmond & Mitchell, 2011). Too often, national political elites, armed movements, and international actors fail sufficiently to take into account the demands of civil society actors and social movements for access to basic rights and basic goods – demands and grievances that underpin many conflicts - favouring agreements that prioritise security, democratic elections and the promotion of markets (Paris, 2004). These peace agreements often result in what Galtung (1976) has famously termed ‘negative peace’, characterised by the cessation of armed violence without addressing the underlying drivers of conflict that underpinned the violence. Instead Galtung argued for ‘positive peace’, which seeks to end both violence and the underlying causes of that violence. At the heart of the drivers of conflict in many contexts is inequality, in its multiple economic, political, cultural dimensions (Cramer, 2005; Stewart, 2005; 2010): unequal access to resources, land, food, housing, education, healthcare, and unequal treatment before the law and/or the political system, particularly for different cultural and ethnic communities. As a result, for many social movements in conflict affected contexts, the struggle for peace cannot be separated from the struggle for social justice – with many drawing on the discourse of ‘peace with social justice’ as the rallying call. For many analysts, failure to build ‘positive peace’ lies at the heart of why many peace agreements fail and relapse into violence. Strengthening social movements and the organisations that they form, and seeking to pressure states to redress inequalities, is therefore a crucial peacebuilding measure. How these organisations develop strategies, develop their members and build capacity, extend contacts and solidarities with other movements, and their effects on national policy in these conflict contexts is central to the concern of our research, yet has often been overlooked by research on security, conflict and peacebuilding (Richmond, 2016).

Linked to the role, nature and importance of social movements is also the role of knowledge within these movements. Social movement knowledge production and learning have been key to the historical evolution of social scientific thought. Central to this argument is both a critique of top down knowledge, which presumes that academics theorise and social movements produce empirical evidence and receive theory, to a much more grounded understanding that social movements at the point of praxis build knowledge from below that can move social scientific thought forward and change the world. Laurence Cox (2018), Aziz Choudry (2015), Shukaitis & Graeber (2007) argue that those at the coal face – suffering the harshest contradictions of contemporary neoliberal capitalist development - have privileged knowledge about the nature of the system under which we all reside.

Similarly, it is when academics engage with social movements that provides the most fruitful potential for breakthroughs in social science. Critical theory owes its roots to intellectuals' engagement with social movements – not just Marxism, but feminism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism etc. However, since the 1980s onwards critical theory, particularly in the USA and Western Europe, has become distanced from grassroots struggles and has developed in very particular directions. This has made it less relevant and powerful – and also distorted its focus (Shukaitis & Graeber 2007).

Part of the argument – and position - we are developing here, also feeds into the broader debate around the ‘decolonization’ of knowledge – the subaltern knowledge of social movements-in its worker, indigenous, feminist, black and anti-racist forms has been silenced/undermined/hidden through processes of both imperialism and elitism – that have prioritised Northern knowledge over Southern knowledge; University Knowledge over Social Movement knowledge, Elite academic over Movement Intellectual, Middle class knowledge over working class and peasant knowledge; Traditional Intellectuals over Organic Intellectuals. This is not a plea for the abandoning of Universities, but for reconnecting and reinvigorating them, alongside a recognition and vindication of alternative modes of knowing and thinking, to produce what Boaventura de Sousa Santos called an ‘ecology of knowledges’ and a challenge to the process of ‘epistemicide’ that is impoverishing our capacity to see, think and move beyond our contemporary, highly unequal and brutal world.

Knowledge, therefore, takes on a particular importance in the pursuit of social transformation and social justice. The importance of education and knowledge production in the

contemporary era has not been lost on those engaged in processes of hegemonic globalisation, and it is common to hear corporations talking of themselves as ‘learning organisations’, ‘knowledge institutions’ and discussing the ‘learning society’, the ‘information society’, ‘the knowledge economy’ and recognising the need to set up structures able to change and adapt to new circumstances, be that fast capitalism, lean production, flexible accumulation, which reflect the need for more mobile structures and a workforce skilled to adapt to a fast changing environment (Ranson, 1994; Jarvis, 2001). In this context it appears logical to ask how social movements are taking seriously the necessity to rethink strategies through processes of research, investigation and learning. In social movement studies there has been little focus on knowledge and education processes. However, more recently, from both the margins of the field (Cox, 2018; Choudry, 2015; Novelli & Ferus Comelo, 2010) and from the centre (Della Porta & Pavan, 2017) there is an increased recognition that knowledge in social movements really matters:

*In their effort to pursue or resist social and political changes, these actors do not limit themselves to protesting in the streets or the squares. Rather, they form collective spaces of knowledge production wherein collaboration and participation lead to the ‘rethinking [of] democracy; the generation of expertise and new paradigms of being, as well as different modes of analyses of relevant political and social conjunctures (Casas-Cortes et al., 2008:20 cited in Della Porta & Pavan, 2017)*

Della Porta & Pavani (2017:300) call for the study of ‘repertoires of knowledge practices, which they define:

*as the set of practices that foster the coordination of disconnected, local, and highly personal experiences and rationalities within a shared cognitive system able to provide movements and their supporters with a common orientation for making claims and acting collectively to produce social, political, and cultural changes.*

Gramsci’s ‘philosophy of praxis’ (Marxism) was accompanied by his interest in a ‘pedagogy of praxis’ (Pizzolato and Holst, 2017) which saw the construction of both hegemony and counter-hegemony as fundamentally pedagogical. Gramsci (1971), noted a distinction between ‘common sense’ (which reflected hegemonic knowledge) and ‘good sense’ (that knowledge emerging from the peoples own analysis derived from the everyday), and his work had a strong focus on workers education.

So what types of knowledge do social movements produce? As Chesters notes (2012:153):

*social movements have long been bearers of knowledge about forms of oppression and injustice, expressing political claims, identifying social and economic grievances and bringing new or neglected issues to public prominence.*

As Casas-Cortes et al. (2008:42-3), note, this knowledge is often:

*embedded in and embodied through lived, place-based experiences, [able to] offer different kinds of answers than more abstract knowledge [...] situated and embodied, rather than supposedly neutral and distant.*

Classically, we can see that social movement knowledge production has operated at three levels. Firstly, all movements seek to provide a structural critique: *how can we understand the oppression we are suffering?* This might be thematic – why are people being pushed off their land? To more macro-societal, such as a critique of capitalism/feudalism etc. Secondly, and emergent from the first, they develop a strategic critique – how can we challenge the oppression we are facing? This is both in terms of modes of resistance (strikes, protests, occupations etc) and institutional forms (the centralized party, the umbrella organisation, popular front/united front, the trade union etc). Thirdly, movements develop an alternative vision: What is our alternative vision to the problem? This might be thematic – solutions to social housing, or societal: the vision of a new society - communism/socialism etc. In summary, what the above is suggesting is that social movement knowledges produce knowledge on the nature of the system, the strategies and tactics to overthrow it, and defend the space once taken, and finally develop visions of what it might be replaced with: Critique, Resistance, Alternatives. According to Cox (2018) because academic/top down knowledge has become separated from the movements it has been less able to address Resistance & Alternatives, and therefore focussed largely on Critique. However, to paraphrase Marx, the task is not just to understand the world, but to change it. In order to do that – we need to reunite the trilogy of Critique, Resistance, Alternatives in order to build real viable alternative solutions to the highly unequal and brutal world that we live in.

As Gramsci notes every ‘revolution has been preceded by an intense labour of criticism’ (Gramsci, 1977:12). Within this process, Gramsci talked of the important role of ‘organic intellectuals’, committed to an alternative counter-hegemonic project and able to articulate, strategise and transmit this to broader publics (Gramsci, 1971). While Gramsci often portrayed this function rather mechanistically and unidirectional, another influential Marxist educator, Paolo Freire, would later provide a far more dialectical conceptualisation of this process.

According to Freire (2000, 1972), true education is not a monological but a dialogical process between teachers and learners: leaders cannot merely tell activists what to do. If this occurs, then even a victory is a hollow achievement. Nor can education ever be understood as ‘neutral’, but instead a process riven with differences in power and placed at the service of competing political projects. Popular education is seen as one of the vehicles through which the process of challenging unequal structures can be achieved (Kane, 2001). It has, at its centre, a fundamental commitment to social change in the interests of oppressed and marginalised classes. Furthermore, there is a direct relationship between this type of education and the institutions and organisations, such as trade unions and social movements, that have historically emerged to defend the interests of the poor and the marginalised – movements that this education seeks explicitly to strengthen (Jara, 1989 cited in Kane, 2001, p.9). This organic relationship means that the ‘organisation’ becomes the ‘school’ in which popular education takes place, and their ‘struggles and actions, their forms of organisation, their ‘culture’, in the broadest sense, constitute the starting point of popular education and its field of enquiry’ (Kane, 2001, p.13).

In that sense, ‘popular education’ needs to be seen as not only involving formal educational events in social movements, but as part of much bigger processes which, though appearing ‘informal’ and ‘arbitrary,’ are very deliberate. In this definition, both the ‘popular education’ events that take place, and the actual practice of ‘strategy development’ and ‘protest actions’ can be seen as examples of popular education, whereby the ‘school’ (the social movement) learns. The first occurs whereby people consciously engage in educational practices (schooling), and the second whereby people are learning through social action. Foley (1999) suggests that a broad conception of education and learning should include *formal education* (taking place in educational institutions), *incidental learning* (taking place as we live, work and engage in social action), *informal education* (where people teach and learn from each other in workplaces, families, communities, social movements) and *non-formal education* (structured systematic teaching and learning in a range of social settings). There is also a need to think through the relationship between individual learning processes and movement learning processes – which represent the transfer or fusion of individual experiences into the collective or institutional learning. We also have to ask questions about the temporality of

learning – short, medium, long term processes and the way different forms of learning interact.

If we are to explore these educational processes, then we need to extend our gaze beyond formal training courses for activists and develop an analytical framework that is ‘open’ and which allows for the rich diversity of ways that social movements (their organisations, activists and supporters) engage in learning. In studying these different types of education and learning, Foley (1999, p.10) suggests this needs to be firmly grounded in an analysis of the political economy, ideology and discourse of the focus of study. Recent work has built on these foundations to theorise how processes of neoliberalism and globalization have affected social movement learning and praxis, and the way movements are learning to operate transnationally to achieve their objectives (see Novelli and Ferus-Comelo, 2010). Similarly, Choudry’s (2015) work on *‘Learning Activism: the intellectual life of contemporary social movements’*, provides both a vindication of the importance of social movements as sites of knowledge production, and an insider’s view of the complex ways that education, knowledge and strategy development are built in and through social movement struggles. More recently, Choudry & Vally (2017) have deepened the historical aspects of this, to evidence the importance of learning from the history of previous struggles, through archive work, to inform the battles of today.

### Methodology

In the multiplicity of approaches which have emerged within popular education, there has long been an interest in research strategies which are able to somehow capture the collective learning and knowledge production processes that take place within social movements (Torres Carrillo, 1999; 2010). This has meant an overlap between popular education and participatory research, since participatory research methods and strategies have been developed to be implemented in popular education contexts (*ibid*). The most prominent example here is the work of the Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda, whose technique of ‘participatory action research’ (PAR) has been enormously influential and is recognised as one of the most commonly used research techniques in popular education, especially in Latin America (*ibid*, Fals Borda, 1979, 1987, 2008).

During the 1990s, a participatory popular education research method known as the ‘systematisation of experiences’ gained prominence within the field of Latin American popular

education. Based on the recognition that unique, valuable knowledge can be produced through popular education processes, the systematisation of experiences is a collective process which seeks to deepen understanding and improve practice through collective reflection and analysis of experience (Jara, 1997, 2015; Kane, 2012; Torres Carrillo, 2010, Ruiz Muñoz, 2004). According to Kane (2012: 78) systematisation:

*enables organisations and educators to learn from each other's experiences, successes, problems and failures; it helps educators analyse and evaluate their own work; it is part of the educative process itself, in which encouraging people to interpret developments helps them reach new levels of understanding.*

There exist a range of different systematisation methodologies, however it can be understood as an intentional, collective process of knowledge production which tries to '*recover and interpret the meanings that manifest themselves in social practices, with the purpose of strengthening them*' (Torres Carrillo, 2010: p196). The following passage from Chilean popular educator Oscar Jara (1994:196) demonstrate the relevance of systematisation for the study of social movements:

*... the new scenario of this end of the (20<sup>th</sup>) century has raised questions over the practices and theoretical conceptions of Latin American social movements and social sciences. We are faced with new questions and challenges. It is a privileged historical moment full of creation, but the answers to the new questions will not arise from any other place but from accumulated historical experience. Unfortunately we have not yet accumulated the necessary learning contained in these (social movement) experiences. Systematisation, as a rigorous learning exercise and critical interpretation of lived processes, remains a pending task and today more than ever can decisively contribute to the re-creation of the social movement practices and to renew theoretical production within social sciences, based on the daily experience of the peoples of Latin America, in particular those committed to processes of popular education and organisation.*

The systematization of experiences means a critical interpretation of an experience (process or event), beginning with its reconstruction and ordering, in order to discover the logic of the process, the factors that have influenced it, how they are related to each other, and why things happened as they did (Jara, 2015; Torres, 2004). To reconstruct, to order or organise, in order to understand and interpret what happened and to then be able to draw lessons from that experience and transform practice (Jara, 2004). It is an investigative process that seeks to allow the experience to speak for itself, through all the voices of those who have been part of the experience (or at least a representative section) (Jara, 2004). According to Jara, one of the

purposes of systematisation is to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and ideas, for example between different social and pedagogical processes, because it allows the protagonists of a process to communicate their process effectively.

Jara argues that,

*it is not the same to exchange stories about experiences, as to exchange systematized products of experiences; because many times in the exchanges of experiences we waste the opportunity to have exchanges of substance and we limit ourselves to exchanging stories in which each person or organisation tells what they do and everybody says: 'oh, yes, very interesting ...' and the others reply: 'Well, that was your experience ... Now, mine ...' and it does not get beyond this* (Jara, 2004)

In line with this, our approach builds in ample space for critical, collective reflection and engagement in order to create spaces where the protagonists of the movement can engage in dialogue and exchange.

#### Phase One

The initial stage of the systematisation involved a process that sought to 'reconstruct' the lived experience of the movement, using any and every means of data available, and in line with the thematic threads identified for the process. This involved individual interviews with key informants, archive and documentary analysis, newspaper articles, photos, videos, and much more. This phase required a process of organising and classifying information, which facilitated a descriptive account of the evolution of the movement in question, based upon multiple sources. This is the foundational phase and involved forming some initial analysis in identifying emergent themes and points of interest, which were later fed into the subsequent phase of the process. This stage was carried out in a collective manner and had the participation of many people who have been protagonists in the process to guide and support the research process.

#### Phase Two

This is the key moment of the systematisation process, which seeks to 'discover the logic of what happened in the course of the experience' (Taberes Fernandes et al, 2002: 26). Based on the initial framing of the systematisation process, this phase involved a collective process of reflection and analysis by those people who have lived the experience. The point here is not to arrive at a single, unified viewpoint, but to access the multiple voices in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of the lived experience. This necessitated engaging with a broader

cross-section of constituencies, then stage 1, with multiple workshops and focus groups with leaders, activists, supporters. These participatory space allow for a rich engagement between the researchers and the participants to develop research findings, check them with participants and refine and develop ideas.

#### Phase Three

The Systematisation processes then led to the production of a final written report, but will also involve producing a number of other creative end products such as videos, leaflets and theatre productions. One important consideration is the issue of the communication of the knowledge produced in the process. This concerns not only how this is going to be made available, but also to whom and in what languages and media? And, why these audiences and not others? It is also the case that some of the knowledge produced will be for internal use only, not to be shared with broader audiences. These are important questions, and decisions which were taken collectively as the research progressed.

#### Phase Four

In this phase, with the case studies produced, we then moved into a dialogical process of attempting to explore whether the synthesis of the four case studies, might produce more than its component parts. What collective insights could we draw from the cases on the nature of social movement knowledge production and learning in the contemporary era? The outcomes emerged out of a one week retreat by the core research team and multiple meetings to explore, debate and discuss key emergent ideas from the research that would underpin the final synthesis document.

#### Process

To clarify, there are two parallel, but interlinked processes taking place across the two-and-a-half-year research period. Firstly, there is *National Data Collection Process*: This ‘systematisation’ process has taken place in the respective country of each of the social movements. This included multiple focus groups, in-depth interviews with key movement activists, review of movement documentation, in order to develop detailed narratives of their experiences and processes of movement organisation and develop the social movement case studies. Secondly, there were a series of *Inter-Movement Meetings and Engagement*. These research team meetings were held across the cycle of the project – and in the countries involved in the project. These meetings provided a moment for the researchers to engage in

a public event targeted at social movements and academic researchers in the respective countries, and an opportunity for the visitors to learn more about the particular history and struggles of social movements in the host country. Throughout the research period, research teams have been able to engage regularly and to share experiences, challenges and insights.

### Conclusions

We hope that you enjoy these studies, that they are thought provoking and useful, and that they help to move the discussion forward. On behalf of the research team we can attest to the extremely inspiring and transformative process that we have been through during this project. We wish to thank all the amazing activists and leaders from the respective movements that we have had the privilege to engage with for sharing their thoughts, their passions and their stories: their struggles have become our struggles in rich, unpredictable and inspiring ways.

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**Birgül Kutancı – Adnan Çelik**

**July 2021**

## Acronyms, abbreviations and names of organisations

- AKP** : *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Turkish) – Justice and Development Party
- ANAP** : *Anavatan Partisi* (Turkish) – Motherland Party
- Ata Soyer Sağlık Politika Okulu** (Turkish) – Ata Soyer Health Policy School
- BDP** : *Başış ve Demokrasi Partisi* (Turkish) – Peace and Democracy Party
- CHP** : *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (Turkish) – Republican People's Party
- DDKO** : *Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları* (Turkish) – Revolutionary Cultural Eastern Hearths
- DEHAP**: *Demokratik Halk Partisi* (Turkish) – Democratic People's Party
- DEP** : *Demokrasi Partisi* (Turkish) – Democracy Party
- DGM** : *Devlet Güvenlik Mahkemeleri* (Turkish) – State Security Courts
- DİSK** : *Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu* (Turkish) – Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions of Turkey
- Diyonet İşleri Başkanlığı** (Turkish) – Directorate of Religious Affairs
- Doğu mitingleri** (Turkish) – Eastern Meetings
- DP** : *Demokrat Parti* (Turkish) – Democrat Party
- DTK** : Demokratik Toplum Kongresi (Turkish) – Democratic Society Congress
- DTP** : Demokratik Toplum Partisi (Turkish) – Democratic Society Party
- DYP** : *Doğru Yol Partisi* (Turkish) – True Path Party
- Emek, Demokrasi ve Özgürlük Bloğu** (Turkish) – Labour, Democracy and Freedom Bloc
- EMEP** : Emek Partisi (Turkish) – Labour Party
- Eğitim-Sen** : *Eğitim ve Bilim Emekçileri Sendikası* (Turkish) – Education and Science Workers' Union
- ESP** : *Ezilenlerin Sosyalist Partisi* (Turkish) – Socialist Party of the Oppressed
- EDP**: *Eşitlik ve Demokrasi Partisi* (Turkish) – Equality and Democracy Party
- FP** : *Fazilet Partisi* (Turkish) – Virtue Party
- HADEP** : *Halkın Demokrasi Partisi* (Turkish) – People's Democracy Party
- Halklar ve İnançlar Komisyonu** (Turkish) – Peoples and Beliefs Commission
- HDP** : *Halkların Demokratik Partisi* (Turkish) – Peoples' Democratic Party
- HDK** : Halkların Demokratik Kongresi (Turkish) – Peoples' Democratic Congress
- HEP** : *Halkın Emek Partisi* (Turkish) – People's Labour Party
- İHD** : *İnsan Hakları Derneği* (Turkish) – Human Rights Association
- İTC** : *İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (Ottoman Turkish) – Committee of Union and Progress
- JİTEM** : *Jandarma İstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele* (Turkish) – Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism
- KESK** : *Kamu Emekçileri Sendikaları Konfederasyonu* (Turkish) – Confederation of Public Employees' Trade Unions
- KHK** : Kanun Hükmünde Kararname (Turkish) – Decree-laws
- MGK** : *Milli Güvenlik Kurulu* (Turkish) – National Security Council
- MHP** : *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* (Turkish) – Nationalist Movement Party
- IMF** (English) : International Monetary Fund

**NATO** (English) : North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

**OHAL Valiliği** : *Olağanüstü Hal Bölge Valiliği* (Turkish) – Governorship of Region in State of Emergency

**PKK** : *Partiya Karkerê Kurdistanê* (Kurdish) – Kurdistan Workers' Party

**PYD** : *Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat* (Kurdish) – Democratic Union Party

**RP** : *Refah Partisi* (Turkish) – Welfare Party

**SHP** : *Sosyal Demokrat Halkçı Parti* (Turkish) – Social Democratic Populist Party

**TİHV** : *Türkiye İnsan Hakları Vakfı* (Turkish) – Human Rights Foundation of Turkey

**ÖDP**: *Özgürlik ve Dayanışma Partisi* (Turkish) – Freedom and Solidarity Party

**TİP** : *Türkiye İşçi Partisi* (Turkish) – Workers' Party of Turkey

**TKP** : *Türkiye Komünist Parti* (Turkish) – Communist Party of Turkey

**TSK** : *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri* (Turkish) – Turkish Armed Forces

**TÜİK** : *Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu* (Turkish) – Turkish Statistical Institute

**YPG** : *Yekîneyên Parastina Gel* (Kurdish) – People's Protection Units

**YPJ** : *Yekîneyên Parastina Jin* (Kurdish) – Women's Protection Units

**Yeni Yaşam Derneği** (Turkish) – New Life Association

**YSGP**: *Yeşiller ve Sol Gelecek Partisi* (Turkish) – Greens and the Left Party of the Future

**YSK** : *Yüksek Seçim Kurulu* (Turkish) – Supreme Election Council

## Introduction

You should not need a soothsayer, then, to see that the movements of 2011 are not finished. Their explosion was strong and the repression against them severe, but their effects will continue. Even when out of view they are accumulating potential like a battery storing up an electric charge in wait for its next release. (Hardt & Negri, 2017: 36)

M. Hardt and A. Negri (2019) mark the year 2011 as a milestone for a new strong international social movement. Those movements that appeared abruptly all over the world, building on an accumulated tradition of struggle and resistance, put forward new demands for equality and justice against the global inequalities created by neoliberal capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy. In that same year, the Peoples' Democratic Congress (HDK) was founded with the coming together of the Kurdish freedom movement and Turkey's socialist movements through the political form of a 'Congress', a horizontal and egalitarian form of association based on multiplicity and commonness. With a political platform based on prefigurative policies it aimed to construct the future '*from today and in today*', and a holistic approach towards the autonomy of the political sphere by embracing the premise of '*building political, economic and social emancipation together*' by making it subject to a '*new life*'. It is as if the HDK heard Negri and Hardt's call and responded directly.

This research addresses how four different social movements from Turkey, Colombia, Nepal and South Africa produce knowledge and learn *within the struggle, through the struggle* and *for the struggle*. It is rooted in an appreciation of Southern epistemologies of subaltern peoples which have often been discredited, erased and neglected by the dominant cultures of the global north (or '*the West*' as used commonly in Turkey) who are fighting against capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy. The 'Epistemologies of the South' approach has been framed drawing on the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2018) to challenge the dominance of Eurocentric thought and make the claim that global justice can only be achieved by an epistemological change which ensures cognitive justice, and only with this transformation can those oppressed social groups represent the world through themselves and on their own terms.

HDK's struggle as a social movement not only calls for a structural material change but at the same time also signals an epistemological break which seeks to provide that cognitive justice precisely in the way Sousa Santos described. The goal of 'democratic confederalism' whose

theoretical and political framework was specified by the political and ideological leader of the Kurdish freedom movement Abdullah Öcalan (2017), is the backbone of HDK's '*new life*' ideal-agreed upon by all the social actors in the organisation- both materially and epistemologically. HDK seeks to challenge the very colonial and patriarchal nation-state form that has bolstered capitalism (*capitalist modernity*) and seeks to create a new political ethos and counter-hegemonic construction (*democratic modernity*). This report explores the learning and knowledge-making processes of the HDK. All of the above context increases both the need for and importance of seeking to understand these learning processes, and the knowledge created by the HDK through its struggles.

### **The Framework of the Report**

This report consists of five main chapters. In the first chapter, we develop the common theoretical framework of the research that took place in Turkey, Colombia, Nepal, and South Africa and its implementation through the Latin American methodological approach known as the '*systemisation of experiences*'. Then we explain the specific research process in Turkey, including data collection, methodological challenges and the ethical approach. In the second chapter, we explore the historical and social conditions which created the HDK, its mission and foundation, its programme, structure and ideological-political bases and its general political economy framework. The third, fourth and fifth chapters of the report form the main body of the report and draw upon the data collected to answer the main questions of the research which explore the how, what and why of learning and knowledge-making in the HDK. In this context, in chapter three we explore how knowledge-making and learning processes take place in the HDK. In chapter four we analyse the nature, type and content of knowledge produced by HDK as a social movement. In Chapter Five, we focus on the effects of this knowledge-making and learning process led by HDK at the individual-level, the organisation-level and the societal-level. In the conclusion of the report, we then critically reflect upon the research findings in relation to how knowledge-making and learning take place, its nature and content and its overall effects and what this means for HDK and Social Movements more generally in Turkey and beyond.

## 1. Research Methodology & Approach

Andrew Sayer (2000) notes that it is the nature of the object of the study that determines what research methods are suitable and also what kind of knowledge it is possible to have of different phenomena in the world. In seeking to understand what learning experiences and knowledge-making takes place in the collective spaces of the HDK and analyse the effects of these learning experiences and knowledge on society and social relations, we adopted a ‘systematisation of experiences’ approach. The ‘systematisation of experiences’ approach is a constituent part of ‘participatory action research’ (PAR) and was developed and inspired by the eminent Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda (Fals Borda, 1979, 1987, 2008). While there is a great deal of diversity (both epistemologically and methodologically) within the PAR (e.g. Cameron and Gibson, 2005; Graeber, 2007), they collectively seek to adopt a plural and engaged research design and analysis that allows the research to capture a first-hand analysis through the active participation of those researched subjects (see Jara, 2006; Kane, 2012; Torres Carrillo, 2010; Ruiz Muñoz, 2004). Systematisation of experiences is a collective process that recognises that unique and valuable knowledge can be produced through public education processes that actively involve social movement activists and aims to understand and develop social movement practices through the analysis of collective reflection and experience (Jara, 2006; Kane, 2012; Torres Carrillo, 2010; Ruiz Muñoz, 2004). Systematisation not only helps organisations and educators learn from each other's experience, success, problems, and failures but also helps them analyse and evaluate their work (Kane, 2012: 78). Although there is no ‘one size fits all’ systematisation approach, it is of paramount importance that the key activists play an essential role in this research process and in the experiences to be systematized (Jara, 2006). This involvement should include participation in the development of the methodological framework design, decision making, and analysis throughout the process (Jara, 2006; Van de Velde et al, 2009).

However, it is important to note that our decision to adopt ‘systematisation of experiences’ goes beyond our methodological consideration of accessing and gathering rich fist-hand data for our research project. There were also key ethical, social and political considerations (which defines the ethical framework of this research) behind our decision, which we think are important to mention briefly before we move on to outline how we carried out our ‘systematisation of experiences’ in our study with the HDK.

As mentioned earlier, ‘systematisation of experiences’ is not only a suitable methodological framework for identifying and analysing the lived and collective experiences of activists, but it is also a process whereby a deeper critical reflection and understanding takes place with a strong commitment to (re)create new forms of knowledge which are relevant and useful for all those involved in social transformation (of both self and communities). Thus, through systematisation of experiences, research becomes a critical ‘praxis’ and also a process of ‘solidarity’ (Novelli, 2006; Mathers and Novelli, 2007) where our concern is not just analysing and theorising the world we live in, but also creating what Santos calls ‘emancipatory knowledge’ (2014) that can bring about an alternative social order.

Our research praxis is influenced and inspired by various critical epistemologies (post-colonial/de-colonial, feminist, Marxist) focused on social movements and resistance. While there are great tensions that exist both within and between these diverse epistemological and methodological standpoints, they collectively urge us to rethink and undo the ways we are thinking about and conducting our research, while at the same time engaging in making new forms of ‘transformative’ knowledge (Rose, 1979: 279) that can bring about a better world. As the task is immense, we are asked to go beyond those unnecessary divisions between academia and society (researcher and researched), theory and practice, body and mind, and pay attention to issues such as collaboration, reflexivity, and reciprocity (Novelli, 2006; Mathers and Novelli, 2007; Harraway, 1991) while we are conducting our research praxis. Central to this critical body of work, which is crucial for this research, is the problematisation of those ‘provincialising’ (Chakrabarty, 2000) epistemologies and methodologies (Western, Eurocentric and Universal) for our analysis. Thus, what remains important here is not just identifying how various forms of power (colonial, national, gender) operate in the making of today’s social structures (the world as it is), but also crucially the question of how these forms of powers continue to shape our epistemologies and methodologies (the way we see and interpret the world) to the extent that imagining an alternative world becomes unthinkable (Mignolo, 2002). To this extent, our research praxis challenges those epistemological and methodological hierarchies and limits that are set by hegemonic forms of power over our ways of being, knowing/thinking and hope to offer us new alternative perspectives (Escobar, 2008; Mignolo, 2002; Santos, 2014) by paying attention to *‘the epistemic potential of local histories embedded in or arising from colonial difference, locating there some of the most meaningful’*

*sources of political action and alternative world constructions'* (Escobar, 2008: 23). By focusing on and bringing to the fore these hidden and invisible stories, histories, knowledges that remain largely unseen, and recognising the diversity and riches of their wisdom and knowledge, we hope to contribute to what Santos (2014: 190) calls an 'ecology of knowledges' where a dialogue between those diverse epistemologies and methodologies gives birth to plural and multiple ways of knowing whilst simultaneously challenging those epistemological and methodological hierarchies.

Central to our research praxis is the issue of collaboration and the co-production of knowledge. We strongly believe in the agency of activists in the production of knowledge and by defining them as knowledge producers (regardless of academia and academic inquiry) (Graeber, 2007) we have adopted a dialogical research praxis that goes beyond the unnecessary distinction and binary between academia and social movements and researcher and researched. This dialogical process necessitated a process of constant dialogue right from beginning to end of the research project (research design, questions, analysis and dissemination) (Freire, 1973). This approach problematises the conventional relationship between researcher and researched and requires a new configuration of roles between the two. Rather than seeing them as research objects, something to research on, we see activists as active subjects who are capable of analysing, theorising, understanding and changing the conditions of their social lives (Fals-Borda, 1991). While recognising the differentiated and situatedness of the knowledges we each hold (both those of researcher and researched but also each of the activists), each and every one is a knowledge-maker, capable of not only finding solutions to present problems but also bringing new alternatives into being (see Escobar 2008; Jara, 2006; Van de Velde et al, 2009; Casas-Cortés et al. 2008, Graeber 2009; Chesters 2012; Melucci 1996; Novelli and Ferus-Comelo, 2010). Our main concern and role as researcher was not just to extract and gather suitable information/data for our research, but also the question of how this research process can create a space for collective critical reflections and conversations between and within the activists of the HDK, a process that may facilitate activists themselves to gain a deeper understanding of their situation as they reflect, share and learn from their collective memories and narratives, from which they come up with new ideas and practices for future actions (Jara, 2006; Freire, 1973; Abu-Lughod 1986). In this sense, the research process is as important as the product, and we remain convinced of that.

Creating this space is crucial for activists to allow them to reflect upon their own narratives and feelings of particular events and processes. It is in this process that social actors come to recover and reformulate their collective historical memory through their lived experiences.

This is very much related to the issue of reciprocity and mutual recognition of the meaning of (knowledge) power, not just during the research but also after the data collection process had been completed. While we are all obliged to produce rigorous academic work and are responsible to produce ‘academic’ outcomes, we strongly believe that our responsibilities do not only lie with the academic community, but also to those activists who are collectively responsible for all the ideas produced in this research. Hence, we are strongly committed to return these co-constituted/produced knowledges back to activists at the HDK in various forms so that it can be useful and relevant to their needs.

As Graeber (2004: 11-12) argues:

One obvious role for a radical intellectual is... to look at those who are creating viable alternatives, try to figure out what might be the larger implications of what they are (already) doing, and then offer those ideas back, not as prescriptions, but as contributions, possibilities – as gifts’, which we hope can be passed on to future generations of social movements.

The issue of reflexivity and power as highlighted by critical feminist scholars (England, 1994; McDowell, 1992; Harding, 1987; Hartsock, 1987) is very important in every research process, even where both sides share a strong commitment to social transformation and social justice. Drawing on critical analytical insights from a feminist perspective (Haraway, 1991; Harding, 1987; Hartsock, 1987; hooks, 1989) we recognise that our ‘differentiated’ bodies/minds are products of different socio-political, economic and cultural forms of power and relations (Haraway, 1988: 583, Haraway, 1991). We take issues of reflexivity very seriously and think critically with regards to our own subject positionality and situatedness, and recognise differentiated power dynamics operating both between researcher and researched and within the activists at the HDK, and that these shape our own knowledges. However, this does not prevent us from asking difficult questions about the unequal power relations present and questioning the prevailing unjust social relations of power. That means our analysis is not just focussed on identifying ‘how’ and ‘what’ but also ‘who’ ‘why’, ‘for what purpose’ ‘for whom’. By doing this, we hope *‘to open up the possibility of choosing a different perspective from which the problematic becomes one of creating an alternative world’* (Cox, 1981: 128). Thus,

the necessity of asking such difficult questions emerges from our commitment to social transformation and emancipation, and to a just and equal world. Our work in that sense can be seen as an effort on our part to bring such a world into being. More so, we do not see issues of reflexivity as a zero-sum game or necessarily all negative. Instead, we argue that despite our differentiated subjectivities and situated knowledge, reflexivity can help us to reimagine diversity and difference in an alternative way that creates alternative possibilities for those hidden and marginalised '*worlds and knowledges otherwise*' (Escobar, 2008: 17, see also Benhabib et al, 1995).

With this research we move beyond simple binaries of success and failure as our collective research endeavour has shown us that developing an understanding of the social world and realities of activists is far more complex and dynamic. We are aware of our own limitations in fully grasping what goes on in reality. Our intention is not to argue that this research captures the full complexity nor represents the whole picture, but rather represents one particular narrative and situated knowledge amongst many in Turkey. With this research we hope to validate the important knowledge and learning processes taking place in the collective spaces of the HDK while they struggle for a better Turkey at great personal and collective risk. As the recent history of Turkey reveals, this process will continue regardless of our research.

This research praxis is multi-spatial, carried out in different geographical locations (but by no means inclusive of all spaces and all geographies). Our intention here was not to provide a comparison but rather in line with our research praxis to analyse how similar processes and events are being experienced by people living in different geographical locations which would give us access to the situated knowledge and experiences of political struggle in different places.

Lastly, while we focus on the historical specificity of the context within which the HDK operates and shed light on local and national realities, we do not operate within a framework of 'methodological nationalism' as we believe that there is a level of interconnectedness and interconnection between local/national realities and those of regional and global ones, each influencing and transforming each other in complex and dynamics ways. To this extent, our research recognises both the particularities and diversity (of histories, memories, knowledges and practices) but also multi-dimensional spatial connections to other spaces and places, each affecting and influencing each other (often in unexpected ways) (See Katz, 2001)

Furthermore, we are not naïve enough to think that this research praxis is problem free. There remain great differences and tensions between our interests and the interests of activists. The tensions between our immediate needs (and those of our research project) and the needs and priorities of the activists we are working with should not be underestimated. We know that this can become even more complicated in the increasingly authoritarian and conflict-affected context of Turkey.

Studying social life and the world that we are a part of as researchers, and the situatedness of this research are all complex issues and we do not want to downplay these things or presume to have resolved all of these issues with our own research praxis. Burawoy (1998: 11) states in accordance with some of these methodological considerations that '*living in the time and space of those one studies makes it difficult to fit the world into a predefined template. One begins with one set of questions and ends with very different ones*'. Atkinson and Coffey (2002) draw attention to the principle of reflexivity whereby they argue that the methods used to describe the world are (to some extent) constitutive of these described realities. In other words, the research methods used are not separate from the world, but '*imply or depend on particular kinds of transactions and engagements with the world*' (Atkinson and Coffey 2002: 807). Therefore, due to a systematic relationship between a research method and a particular representation, each kind of transaction '*generates a distinctive set of descriptions, versions and understandings of the world*' (*ibid*). For this reason, reflexivity and self-awareness on the part of the researcher are important tools in ensuring that the research is systematic.

## **Framework of systematisation**

Considering the nature of the process of systematisation of experiences and the potential for the process to be become so broad as to become unmanageable, it is important to limit the object or experience that will be systematised both spatially and temporally (Van de Velde et al, 2009). Another vital point is to decide on cross-cutting and interrelated thematic areas that will help us organise information in line with the objectives of the systematization process. Thematic areas are central categories or elements of the experience that we want to systematize. These should reflect different dimensions of experience, and help us unite and differentiate them from other themes. The main questions here are '*What is the central focus of this systematisation and what are the main points we want to systematise? What is the 'main theme' that connects all experiences?*' (Van de Velde et all, 2009).

In the context of our research, we had four basic questions that define the limits of the systematisation of experiences and focussed us on the main theme:

- (1) How does the HDK located in complex conflict-affected situations learn and produce knowledge, and how does this process of learning and knowledge-making assist the HDK in developing a strategy that can meet the demands of its components?
- (2) What type of knowledge has the HDK produced and what has the HDK learned in relation to key dimension such as Security; Objectives; Leverage for Change; Communication; Internal Cohesion; Inter-Movement Alliances; International Solidarity?
- (3) What have been the effects of the HDK (the learning and knowledge produced) on the promotion and realisation of peace with social justice in Turkey?
- (4) Regarding the learning and knowledge-making process the HDK, what can we extract about learning and knowledge-making within social movements in complex, conflict-affected contexts that can assist in assessing the possibilities for strengthening civil society movements' role in building peace with social justice?

While applying the systematisation of experiences approach, we have designed our research around the first three basic questions. In the research, we included the cities in Turkey where the HDK has been heavily organised since its founding. Moreover, we decided that the period to be included in the research would be from the foundation of the Labour, Democracy, and Freedom Block in 2010 (which was an initiative that foreshadowed the establishment of the HDK, and consisted of different political parties, union organisations, and individuals coming together for the 2011 general elections in Turkey), through to the present day.

In line with our research framework, outlined above, we formed a working group consisting of activists who actively work within HDK and ourselves as the two main researchers (Birgul Kutan based in the UK, and Adnan Çelik based in Turkey) to work in partnership and collaboration from the inception of the research and throughout the process. Within this group, we tried to address the struggles of HDK, which was established by organisations and individuals from different political, ideological, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, to maintain and influence the social justice agenda in Turkey. Given the disperse nature of the HDK and

the increasingly tense and conflictual environment in Turkey, this small working group maintain closed and ongoing relations.

In this research, we have adopted ‘the political economy injustices’ framework (Carroll and Ratner, 1996: 609) which we believe allows us to analyse the broader social/historical context within which the HDK operates as a ‘counter hegemonic organisation’. This approach also allows us to make a systematic analysis of the movement’s experiences and to establish a theory of their learning and knowledge-producing strategies. In order to identify the dynamics of the HDK, define its strategies and repertoires of actions, we analysed the self-organisation processes of the HDK and developed a ‘movement mapping’ exercise. In particular, we looked at how they cope with security challenges, how they use international solidarity networks, and how they raise awareness through different technological and pedagogical arrangements.

### **HDK-Based Case Study and Data Collection Process**

Having outlined and explained the broader ethical and political framework for the methodological aspects of the research, we now lay out how we implemented this framework for our research on the HDK. The research consisted of a three-stage process of systematization of experiences built around our main research questions. In order to carry out the research, we used multiple participatory research methods in our attempt to provide a ‘thick description’ of the realities of HDK struggle.

**Stage 1: Historical reconstruction of experiences and organising/classifying information**  
This first stage of systematization of the experiences took place in the period between July 2018 and January 2019 and refers to the process aiming to ‘restructure’ the experiences in accordance with the thematic issues identified by focusing on the research questions. This first stage involved semi-structured individual interviews, media screening, compiling archives of documents, photographs, and videos. This period of research, while not yet the basic analytical stage, constituted the initial analysis that fed into subsequent processes to identify emerging themes and points of interest. As external researchers, we tried to ensure that this stage was realised in a collective manner and that many members were involved in the process.

In this context, the first meetings were held with the people involved in the design and development of the historical process of HDK in order to organise and classify existing information on the basis of participation and cooperation, to analyse existing records and

materials, to create the first draft of the historical chronology of the organisation, and to outline the research process. These interviews helped us to understand the HDK's historical process and facilitated the design and content of the second stage. They helped to determine the thematic axes of the systematization process and facilitated the emergence of key principles and concepts.

#### Stage 2: Case Study

This stage was the key moment of the systematization process and aimed to '*discover the logic of what happened during the experience*' (Taberes Fernandes et al., 2002: 26). Based on the framework in the first stage, this stage encompassed a collective process of reasoning and analysis by those who experienced it. The goal here was to reach multiple voices in order to explore a deeper understanding of the experiences, rather than reaching a monolithic and unified perspective. This required a participatory and reflexive process, along with a wider group.

To this end, we conducted semi-structured individual interviews, thematic focus group meetings, and workshops based on ethnographic research in Istanbul and in cities where the HDK is heavily organised in order to capture the experiences of various actors in HDK, to deepen and compile a collective understanding of the historical evolution of the movement and the internal logic of the process. In addition to participant observation and observer participation based on taking part in the demonstrations and activities carried out by HDK, we also conducted a supporting archive study consisting of media screening related to HDK, published journals, brochures, and press statements of HDK along with a compilation of secondary sources.

In order to create a shared memory of the movement, we sought to conduct an inclusive study by reaching a large sample of representatives within the HDK. In this context, we conducted 55 semi-structured individual interviews, 2 focus group meetings, and 5 workshops. We then enriched these primary sources with secondary resources (Congress Magazine published by HDK, Independent Communication Network (BIA-NET) based media screening, social media screening, etc.).

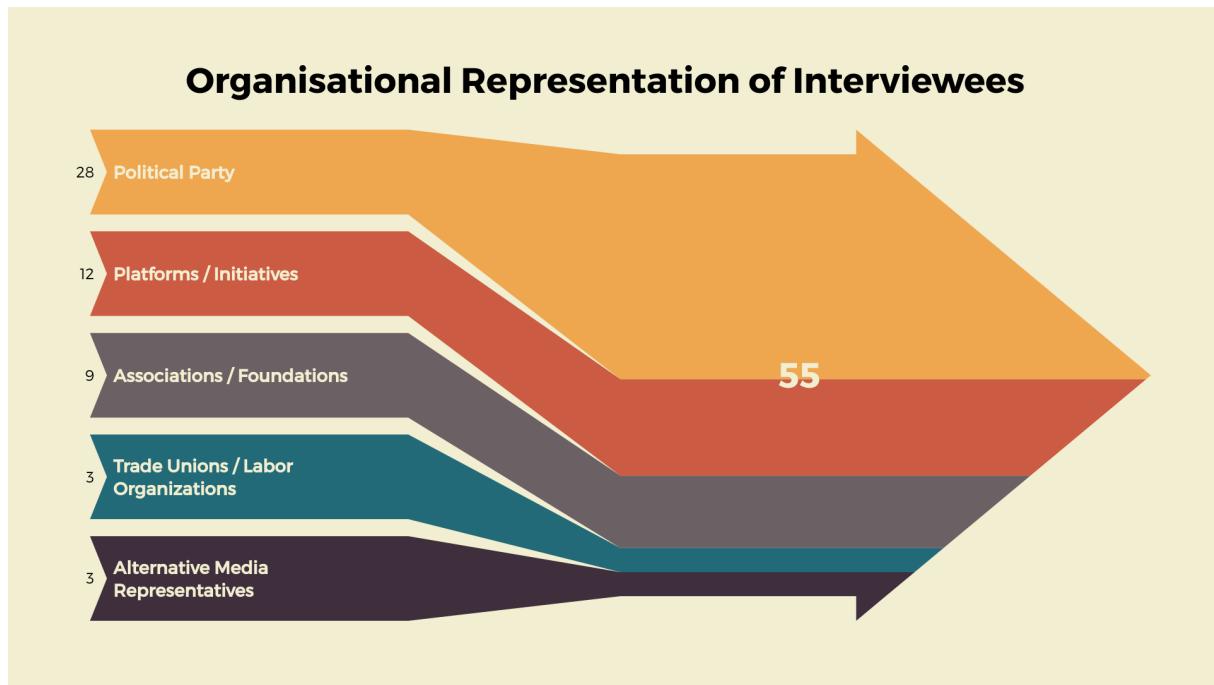
The semi-structured individual interviews were conducted by us (Adnan Çelik and Birgül Kutan). The interviews were based on the three basic questions mentioned above and they were planned with an approach that formed the main focus of the research. In this context,

the interviews took place around themes such as the interviewee's pre-HDK social struggle history and his/her motivation of involvement in HDK, what makes HDK special for him/her, key turning points in HDK history, his/her personal experiences within HDK and their impact on him/her and his/her organisation, his/her experiences in learning and knowledge-making processes in HDK, HDK's gender policies and their influence, and the impact of the conflict environment on the social struggle of the HDK.

The interviews were conducted with 34 men, 19 women, and 2 LBGTI+ individuals. Although we attach great importance to the gender balance, we also tried to reflect the diversity within HDK (such as interviewees' age, city, being individual or party member, taking part in different assemblies and commissions, involvement in the establishment phase of the HDK, those who were later involved in HDK, those who left HDK, those who first took part in HDK and then moved to HDP (Peoples Democratic Party - a political party that was formed by the HDK in 2012), and those who served in both HDK and HDP. For this reason, the number of female interviewees was rather small compared to their male counterparts, especially because a large proportion of the component representatives were male.

As part of the research, we carried out 55 in-depth interviews. Here is the gender of the distribution of interviewees: male (34), female (19), LGBTQ (2). Because the HDK headquarters were in Istanbul, the majority of the components of the movement were concentrated and largely centralised in this city especially in the post-2015 period. In all, 34 of the 55 individual meetings were held in Istanbul. Of the other interviews, 14 were carried out in Ankara, 4 in Kocaeli, 2 in Diyarbakir and 1 in Berlin with one of the founders of the HDK who lives in exile.

In total, 25 of the interviewees were with individuals/independents, and 30 were members of a component organisation. Whilst 20 interviewees were not actively participating in the movement at the time of the interviews, 35 of them were still active within the movement. Of the interviewees, 5 were aged 18-30 years, 23 were aged 31-50 years, and 27 were aged 50 years or more. This shows that despite the 25 % youth quota in the HDK regulations, the number of young people who were active in the representative mechanisms of the movement was very few. We will discuss the reasons in more detail in the following sections. The table for interviewees' organisational segments can be seen below.



**FIGURE 1: Organisational Representation of Interviewees**

According to this figure, the highest proportion of interviewees were from political parties. The main reason for this is that the majority of those included in HDK from the individual/independent quota, became members of the HDP party which was established later by HDK.

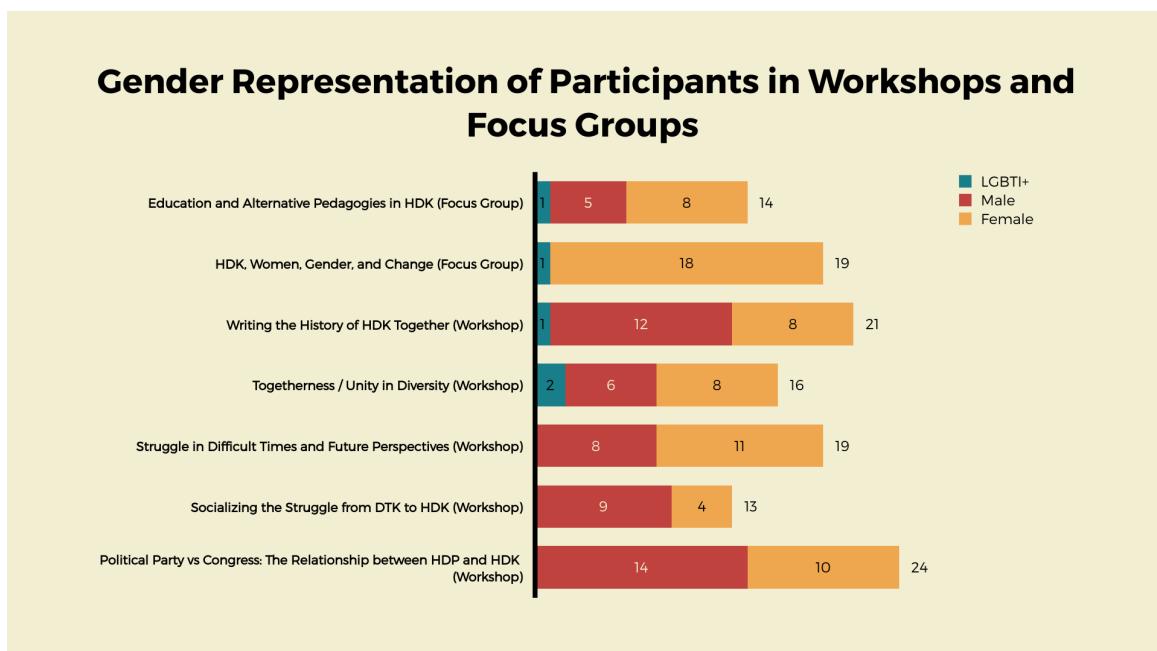
### Focus Groups and Workshops

Interviews, focus group meetings, and workshops were conducted between October 2018 and May 2019. We began with semi-structured interviews during the fall of 2018 and by January 2019 we reached a certain sampling strength. From then on, we started to organise focus groups and workshops around the specific themes that emerged out of the individual interviews. Thus, we held two focus group meetings; the first one was on 'Education and Alternative Pedagogies in HDK' in Ankara on 15 January, 2019 and the second was on 'Women, Gender and Social Change in HDK' in Istanbul on 1 March, 2019. In addition to these focus group meetings, we organised 5 workshops which included: 'Writing the history of HDK Together: Intellectual Resources, Historical Trajectories and Timeline' on 20 January 2019; 'Togetherness/Unity in Diversity' on 2 March, 2019; 'Struggle in Difficult Times and Future Perspectives' on 27 April 2019; 'Socializing the Struggle from DTK (Democratic Society Congress) to HDK: Opportunities, Challenges, Fractions' on 29 April, 2019 and 'Political Party Vs Congress: the relationship between the HDP and HDK' on 3 May 2019 and '(See figure 2).



**FIGURE 2: Focus Groups and Workshops**

In total 126 people participated in our focus group and workshops. Some of them were individuals we had previously interviewed. Some participated in focus group or workshops on different themes more than once. People from all areas including co-chairs, co-spokespersons, and deputies who were active both in previous periods and at that time within HDK, DTK, and HDP attended workshops and focus groups. Participants were selected by taking into account variables such as gender, age, individual-component, and central-local.



## **FIGURE 2: Gender Representation of Participants in Workshops and Focus Groups**

Since the 1980s, the ‘focus group’ as a means of qualitative data collection has gained increasing prevalence in various disciplines within the social sciences. The distinctive feature of focus group interviews is that they allow group interaction to be used as a tool to explore some ideas that cannot be revealed through individual interviews. In this qualitative method, usually small groups (the number of participants can range from 4 to 12) come together to express their views and perceptions about a particular topic of study in a relaxed environment. The group interaction is based on a pre-planned discussion which is moderated by the researcher. Furthermore, participants are encouraged to talk with and ask questions of each other, exchange ideas, and comment on each other's experiences and perspectives. Focus group meetings can reveal a variety of ideas and feelings that individuals have about specific issues, as well as uncover differences in the perspectives of individuals in these groups (Frey & Fontana, 1991; Ho, 2006; Kitzinger, 1995; Krueger & Casey, 2015; Lederman, 1990; Litosseliti, 2003; Rabiee, 2004).

Our first focus group, ‘**Education and Alternative Pedagogies in HDK**’ was held in Ankara where we brought social movement members from the HDK Education Commission, The New Life Association women's reading group, Ata Soyer Health Policy School and the HDK Health Council together to talk about and share their experiences on education and alternative pedagogies in HDK.

Our second focus group, ‘**Women, Gender and Social Change in HDK**’ was held in Istanbul with participation of women and LGBTQ movement members to talk about their different experiences at the HDK and discuss the HDK’s gender politics/practice. We discussed the impact of this political strategy on themselves in particular and on society in a wider sense, based on the experiences of women who have taken part in the HDK at different times.

Our first workshop entitled ‘**Writing the history of HDK together: Intellectual Resources, Historical Trajectories and Timeline**’ was organised in Istanbul with the aim of revealing the historical processes of the HDK, and establishing the conditions and the timeline that brought about the creation of the HDK. These were carried out using plural participatory research methods. Through the collective discussions held at the workshop, we created the historical chronology and intellectual mapping of the movement by focusing on the historical and intellectual resources that have shaped the HDK and inspired the activists and the main

turning points/milestones in the HDK's history that have positively or negatively affected the direction of the movement from the date of its establishment to the present.

The aim of our second workshop of '**Togetherness/Unity in Diversity**', held in Istanbul, was to bring different activists (both those individual members as well as those members that are affiliated to organisations/party etc) together to talk about one of the main strategies of HDK, **togetherness/unity in diversity**, and to scrutinise how this strategy has worked in practice. At the workshop activists collectively discussed the strengths and challenges of this main strategy, its gains and obstacles and how this has affected them through reflecting on their diverse experiences.

The aim of our third workshop, '**Struggle in Difficult Times and Future Perspectives**' was to talk with activists about how the environment of increased violence and conflict since 2015 has affected the HDK's struggle. Particularly, we focussed on what new strategies the movement has developed in its struggle, to what extent these new strategies differ from the previous period (2011-2014), and with what consequences. There was also a debate on what future perspective HDK will have in the next four years when the intensive election process in Turkey- unless an extraordinary situation develops – seems to be off the agenda. At our workshop entitled 'Political Party vs Congress: The relationship between HDP and HDK' in Istanbul with participations of social movements actors operating at the HDK and HDP (and some work at both at the same time) we discussed the relationship between the HDK and its political party, HDP with a particular focus on opportunities and challenges of struggling in two political spaces and the tensions between these two different political forms: congress vs political party.

Our '**Socializing the Struggle from DTK to HDK: Opportunities, Challenges, Fractions**' workshop was held in Diyarbakir as we wanted to focus on the DTK (one of the important components of the HDK that was formed as a congress type political organisation in 2007 representing a range of political and social organisations across the Kurdish region of Turkey). With the activists at the DTK, we talked about the historical and intellectual resources that had inspired the movement and its members, how conflict and violence have affected their struggle as well as the relationship between DTK-HDK (what possibilities and challenges exists between these two movements).

### *Stage 3: Data Analysis, Final Outputs and Dissemination*

The present report is the final case study project document of the systematization of experience process. The research was based on a range of qualitative research methods from the very beginning. Qualitative research methods explore the perspectives and meaning of experiences. They also identify social structures or processes that explain the behavioural meaning of humans. Unlike quantitative research which utilises statistical methods; qualitative research focuses on the investigation of the characteristics, values, meaning, beliefs, thoughts, experiences, and emotions of the case being investigated. Most importantly, qualitative research is based on direct contact with the individuals being examined, and often helps researchers to discover unexpected knowledge or details that cannot be obtained using quantitative methods (Wong, 2008: 14).

But data analysis of qualitative research based on archival data, media screening, individual interviews, focus groups, and workshops requires a detailed reading of multi-volume size data, then sorting it into themes and categories. This process involved understanding large amounts of data by reducing the volume of raw information, then identifying key themes. It also included extracting meaning from the data, and finally creating a logical chain of evidence. Coding or classification of data is the most important stage in the qualitative data analysis. Coding involves subdividing large amounts of raw information or data and categorizing them (Wong, 2008: 14).

Traditionally, researchers conduct this coding process by preparing thematic information cards, classifying the data via ‘cut and paste’ in a computer environment, or using coloured pencils to categorize the data. However, in recent years, the use of software specifically designed for qualitative data management has greatly reduced the technical complexity of this process and made it relatively easier. We used NVivo 12 software for data analysis, which was extremely helpful in managing and analyzing our qualitative data in this third and final stages of the systematization of experiences process. NVivo, a computer-aided qualitative data analysis software, is designed by QSR International, the largest developer of qualitative research software in the world. It helps to integrate the coding process with qualitative linking, shaping, and modelling, and enables qualitative research beyond coding, sorting, and data retrieval (Wong, 2008: 14).

NVivo is ideal for team-based researchers because the software has a merging tool that allows researchers working in spatially different locations to piece together their work in one project (Wiltshier, 2011: 3; Wong, 2008: 15). NVivo has a number of features that support collaboration, such as identifying team members' work, comparing their coding, finding items created or recently changed by each team member. These features allowed us to work systematically on all the data we had on the same programme, as well as identifying and uncovering emerging themes using queries (Wiltshier, 2011: 3). In addition, NVivo's significant advantages in facilitating the laborious task of manual data analysis greatly improved the quality of the research. The software reduced the labour-intensive workload in the process of coding data, allowing us more time to explore general trends, identify themes, and draw conclusions.

## **Methodological Advantages**

When we reflect on the overall distribution of interviewees and participants, we believe that we have achieved a significant representation of gender, age, individual-organisation affiliated, local-central balance. We were also able to conduct in-depth individual interviews with key actors such as Ertuğrul Kürkçü, Onur Hamzaoğlu, Fatma Gök, Sırri Süreyya Önder, Levent Tüzel, who have all had key leadership roles since the foundation of the HDK. We also engaged with people in prison such as Gültan Kışanak and Sabahat Tuncel, who had active roles in the history of HDK, through their letters. In addition, we had a meeting with a person who was in exile in Berlin and played a crucial role in the establishment of HDK. We also reached out to individuals within the affiliated organisations such as EMEP, who were among the founders of HDK but later left, and people who joined from the independent/individual quota and later left.

In our interviews, focus groups and workshops we engaged with people who have been directly affected by being detained, expelled with decree-laws (KKH), subjected to police violence or bombings during protests or demonstrations in an environment of violence and conflict that intensified after 2015. This provided us with the opportunity to listen to the experiences of activists regarding oppression and violence in conflictual geographies. We also gained information about how they struggled against it.

The fact that the people we interviewed (those who were expelled with the decree-laws (KKH), detained, exiled, such as peace signatories, civil society members, etc.) had taken part in the

wider context of the social struggle in Turkey has given us the opportunity to more effectively portray and analyse the social context in which HDK is involved.

The ethical and engaged approach of our research, which focuses on the perspective of 'participatory action research' and organises the systematization of experiences in a transparent, participatory, and collective manner with HDK's activists in different fields, enabled us to continue our field research amidst the conflict. The individual commitment of the researchers to the political horizon of the movement and their given individual relationships within the wider social movement, including that of the Congress, were effective in building confidence. Turkish and Kurdish language proficiency, having comprehensive knowledge of the social context, and gender diversity of the researchers also strengthened the implementation of the research. Finally, the fact that the two researchers shared their project output with a wider HDK group from the very beginning and provided it with constant feedback, has given the research a significant advantage. This modality was also instrumental in the formation of a dialogue between the project researchers and the HDK actors, based not on one-way communication but rather on mutual learning.

We would also like to reflect on the international character of the research. The research was carried out in four separate countries on four separate continents, and this has introduced a multi-layered and comparative approach to the co-production of knowledge about learning processes within social movements. The four social movements involved in the research were able to interact strongly with each other through a web-based information sharing platform, which made it possible for all inter-movement team workshops and learning. Similarly, through meetings held in Nepal, Turkey, Colombia and the UK, the project researchers and social movement representatives gained the opportunity to both be aware of the general context of social struggle in the other countries where the research was conducted and to observe the learning and knowledge-making processes in different social movements.

Interactions between activists involved in these movements made it easier for them to learn about each other's struggles and helped create synergy and shared learning spaces. The country meetings, which brought social movement activists from four countries together, enabled them to participate in cross-movement dialogues, and enhanced the activists' knowledge of different struggles. It also enabled them to build international solidarity for social justice struggles.

The concurrence of the research period and with a serious organisational crisis within HDK, as well as internal discussions about to overcome the crisis, meant that HDK viewed this research as an opportunity to rethink itself. This created a favourable disposition towards the process of systematization of experiences.

Many social scientists state that individual interviews, focus group interviews, or workshops are not sufficient as independent methods in their own rights. They should be supported by participatory observation or other ethnographic methods (Cf. Agar & MacDonald, 1995). We, as project researchers, had the opportunity to participate in a series of activities of HDK such as HDK General Women and Mixed Congress (2019) in particular, HDK General Assembly meetings, HDK Schools Initiative meetings, health and labor congresses, Peoples and Beliefs Commission activities (International Mother Tongue Day, Cegerxwîn commemoration), hunger strikes and isolation-related activities, democracy conferences (Istanbul and Diyarbakır) to carry out ‘observer participation’ or ‘participant observation.’

### **Methodological Challenges**

While the project began in January 2018, the Turkey team was only able to begin the research in July 2018, when we hosted the first international team meeting. This gave rise to the necessity of speeding up the systematization of experiences process. Although the difference between central and local activities of HDK was very sharp, speeding up the process caused us not to visit relatively organised places such as Mersin, Adana, Muğla, and İzmir, where HDK carried out activities outside of Ankara, Diyarbakir, and Kocaeli. When we consider the relationship between HDK and HDP, which is a very important area of tension, interviews with some people who have never been in contact with HDK and who are only in HDP could have been useful, but unfortunately, we were unable to interview anyone with this profile. Finally, although remaining as a HDK component, it would have been useful to interview some members that were not active in HDK, especially after 2015, in order to better understand this.

Because we conducted the present research in a violent and often tense environment, we had difficulty accessing some individuals. Some of the people who had important roles in HDK were either in prison or had to go abroad either temporarily or permanently. For example, we could not reach some of the key activists of the Youth Assembly despite our best efforts.

Another methodological challenge was the processing of a large amount of data with highly political content and interpreting it in a process that is still ongoing and risky. Also, although our research focuses on HDK, the fact that the corpus we are dealing with is not only related to HDK, but also a wider environment such as HDP, DBP, DTK, created difficulty in determining the scale during the systematization of experiences.

## Ethics

The ethical dimension of this research has been addressed around three key foci. The first concerns the safety of all researchers and participants in the project. We worked hard with our research partners at the HDK to assess the risk of carrying out the research in the climate of repression and violence against HDK; we also worked with them to plan the process of systematisation of experiences in order to ensure an ethical approach. Throughout the research process, HDK members were detained and arrested, forced into exile and faced the threat or fear of attack. We discussed these dangers with key members and asked whether it was appropriate for us to continue researching in this environment. We received a resounding yes from members and leaders that the research was important and useful and worthwhile, despite the risks.

The second important ethical dimension involved protecting the identity of the interviewees and participants and ensuring that their opinions were precisely reflected in any written or visual output. In this regard, we have assured all interviewees and participants that no published material will reveal the identity of the person being interviewed or observed in any way<sup>1</sup>. We discussed this with participants before each interview, focus group, or workshop. We also asked the interviewees' permission for recording interviews, and assured them that recordings would remain with the researchers and not be shared with third parties. Furthermore, when requested, we shared interviewees' transcripts and stated that they could add or remove whatever they want (one interviewee, after reading his/her transcript, did not want to include their interview in our research, so we removed the entire interview from our research corpus). We also asked the relevant people for approval to use sensitive excerpts the

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<sup>1</sup> Across the document, we have anonymised and coded all direct quotations. They are expressed either as an Individual Interview (T1, T2 etc) or as a Focus Group or Workshop, identified on the basis of the topic of focus: e.g Women, Gender and Change Focus Group 2, etc. As much as possible, whilst seeking to protect the identity of informants, we have sought to give a sense of their subject position, to assist the reader.

interview or focus group/workshop transcripts while writing the report. At this stage and throughout the process, we always emphasised that participants have the right to remove themselves and their data from the research whenever they choose.

Third, given that we were researching conflict-affected communities, we paid particular attention to the principle of ‘do no harm’, and were sensitive to the specific experiences of interviewees. Having one researcher from the local context and one from the international helped with data collection sensitivity. We also developed feedback strategies to ensure that participants had access to research findings in ways that suit them, and to avoid creating false expectations from the research results.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter we have laid out the overall theoretical and methodological framework that guided our research. We have also highlighted the specific adaptations and processes for the HDK case study. We laid out the geography and types of informants that we drew upon during the research, and gave the reader an insight into the types of research events and workshops that we designed. Furthermore, we have explained the process of data collection and analysis. Finally, we reflected on the particular ethical challenges and decisions made as we developed the HDK cases study in a context of increased repression.

## **2: A Critical Historical Analysis of the HDK**

In this chapter, we seek to provide a broad, contextualised analysis of the political economy of the HDK. The rise of the HDK can be located within the emergence of an increased number of ‘new’ social movements around the world in the neoliberal era in response to increased inequalities, social polarisation and the effects of austerity measures. In the wake of increased inequalities and social polarisation and the effects of austerity measures, a shift has taken place in the organisational culture of many new social movements, pushing them towards new forms of politics, discourses, and alliances. Much of this is based on particular issues and intersectional challenges emerging from groups that feel left out of top-down economic, social, cultural and political systems (Della Porta, 2006). In that sense, Turkey is no exception, and the HDK is a reflection of a global need to unite a range of marginalised forces in the face of an on-going neoliberal onslaught. However, it also has its own particularities and unique characteristics which need to be understood. This chapter lays the basis for such an understanding by locating the HDK in the spatial temporality of the political, social cultural and economic environment within which it emerged and operates.

First, we will focus briefly on the establishment of the Turkish Republic and the nation-building process which continues to set the contours and parameters for contemporary state, society and power relations. We then provide a brief historical analysis of the rich social movement struggle that paved the way for the emergence of the HDK, before we move on to the particularities of the HDK. We hope this chapter will lay the foundations and provide insights into the strategic knowledge production and learning processes within the HDK, which are the central focus of the research process, and which have important implications for the transformation of Turkey’s society, politics and culture.

### **Re-Birth of a New Nation: Top-Down Modernity Project**

It is widely acknowledged that the foundation of modern Turkey emerged out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War. This nation-building project was underpinned by a projected homogeneity based on Turkishness and Sunni Islam, and secured and maintained by the Armenian genocide in 1915; the forced displacement of the Greeks in 1923; and the expulsion of the Kurdish population in the most despotic manner during the first fifteen years of the republic (Akçam, 2008; Bozarslan, 2013; Üngör, 2011). Aiming to form a unified national identity distinct from the Empire’s past, the Turkish elite imposed a top-down

modernity project upon the previously diverse, multi-cultural, ethnic, pluri-religious territory of Anatolia (Mardin, 2006). The Turk-Sunni Islam synthesis was used as a mechanism to produce a new ethno-cultural and territorial homogeneity (Navaro-Yasin, 2002; Çınar 2008; Bilgin, 2008) which led to profound socio-political and cultural transformations. Despite opposition and challenge, the transformation of society and social relations under this newly imposed western modernity was carried out in all aspects of social, political and cultural life, and has remained dominant.

This mode of modernity was realised through highly centralised state power (Etatism-Devletçilik) and delivered under the close tutelage of the Turkish army, whereby the state was seen as a '*privileged and sovereign subject operating almost completely independently from society and assuming the capacity to transform society from above*' (Keyman and İçduygu, 2005: 5). While the state became '*the primary context of politics*' (Heper, 1985: 101) and a key symbol of '*fulfilling the highest moral aspirations of collectivity*' (Turan, 1988: 96), individual freedoms and liberties were subordinated to the security, safety and unity of the Republic, and citizens' rights were defined in relation to their 'duties and services' to the state (Keyman and İçduygu, 2005: 6). Since national unity and integrity was made a common societal goal, the task of defending and safeguarding it was given to the Turkish military, which gave it a permanent position within politics and society and led to numerous military interventions (1960, 1971, 1980) under the justification of defending the nation state. This has been a legacy of this top-down modernity project, which is manifested in Kemalism<sup>2</sup> (the dominant state ideology), and has been used as a mechanism to discipline and control society in the name of defending the nation state (its unity and integrity) from real or imagined, internal or external threats (Sevr Sendrome) (Atasoy, 2009).

Since nation and society were (re)imagined at the expense of the denial of others, in seeking to construct a new homogenous and singular society, *the continuum of violence* (Cockburn, 2001: 37) which initiated with the Armenian Genocide in 1915 has remained the key mechanism and form of sovereign power to control and discipline ethnic minorities and religious groups that rejected this form of top-down and mono-cultural modernity. In an attempt to construct the Turkish nation state as a sovereign power and secure control over

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<sup>2</sup> Kemalism is a term used to refer to the official ideology of the Turkish state, named after the founder of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk.

society, the ‘continuum of violence’ has been (re)standardised through legal and constitutional changes over time and space in order to oppress, deny and assimilate the non-Turkish and non-Muslim populations in Turkey (Günay, 2013). Over the years this top-down project has faced intensifying and increasing challenges and resistance from those sections of society that feel left out (i.e Kurdish and Alevis). The Sheikh Said Rebellion of 1925 (Sunni Kurdish uprising) and the Dersim Uprising of 1937-38 (Alevi uprising) were amongst the initial challenges. Whilst the motivations and reasons for these two events differ, they were ultimately both directed against the top-down Turkification and Sunni Islamisation of society (Atay, 2009: 470). Deemed as a threat to its newly ‘imagined community’, the new ruling Kemalist elite crushed and eliminated any collective resistance/action through massacres, mass displacement, exile and force assimilation (Üngör, 2011). While most opposition was crushed, those that survived had to withdraw underground to continue their organising activities at the level of infra-politics (e.g Kurds) (see Çelik, 2019).

As a central part of the modernity project, membership of Western European multilateral organisations and institutions were not only seen as mechanism for security but also conduits for contributing to Turkey’s ‘western’, ‘modern’, ‘secular’, and ‘developed’ outlook and aided the creation and reproduction of these newly imagined identities (Yılmaz and Bilgin, 2005; Kutal, 2013). Turkey became a member of the Council of Europe in 1949, joined NATO in 1952, signed an Association Agreement (the Ankara Agreement) with the European Economic Community in 1963, and applied to be a full member to the European Economic Community, the predecessor of the EU in 1987.

During the Cold War, Turkey used its unique geo-political position to play a special role as the ‘southern bastion of NATO’ against the threat of Communism and Soviet Expansionism towards the East and in Turkey. Externally, as a NATO member and partner to western countries, Turkey played a significant role in fighting against communist expansion and became the spearhead of western interest in the region. Internally, Turkey used three military coups, in 1960, 1970, 1980s to crush any emerging endogenous resistance and destroy the growth of left-wing social movements as part of this broader anti-communist cold war agenda. Indeed, the relationships that developed during this time not only helped Turkey to reproduce its projected western modernity and consolidate its power both internally and externally, but also redefined western institutions and governments’ relations with Turkey.

The three military coups (in the 1960s, 70s and 80s)<sup>3</sup> served as governing technologies to reshape and transform Turkey's economic, social and political landscape. They resulted in new power constellations, governing practices and identity formations. It was under the 1980s military rule that Turkey carried out its first 'neoliberal' structural adjustment programmes under the stewardship of the IMF and World Bank with the 24 January Decision (24 Ocak Kararlari) adopted by the military in 1980. The military introduced economic policies which transformed the Turkish economy in drastic ways, paving the way for liberalisation and resulting in a shift away from its earlier state-led, import-substitution industrialisation model to an export-oriented market economy. The constitution of 1982 was developed mainly to protect the state and its integrity, and thus gave secondary importance to citizens and their rights (Özbudun, 2007). The ever important role of the military was strengthened and institutionalised by the incorporation of the National Security Council into the new constitution. All these measures resulted in brutal human rights violations (killing, disappearances, torture and arbitrary detention) and grave restrictions on civil and political rights, including closing down all parties and labour unions, and restricting any political activities. Any alternative movements or ideas were seen as a threat to national unity and met with increasing military power and brutality (Yegen, 2009; Cizre, 2003).

The Helsinki decision of 1999, which granted Turkey the status of official candidate country for entry to the European Union, marked a new watershed in Turkey/EU relations, but it also triggered an enforced tempering of the authoritarian and anti-democratic practices of the state. In order to comply with the broader requirements of membership outlined by the EU, Turkey introduced its first democratisation processes and adopted its 'National Programme' in 2001 consisting of specific political, social and economic reforms (Çarkoğlu, 2004).<sup>4</sup> However, the real breakthrough in the Turkish Europeanisation process came with the electoral victory of the Islamic Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi-

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<sup>3</sup> The exact dates of the military coups are 27 May, 1960, 12 March, 1971 and 12 September 1980.

<sup>4</sup> The Coalition government was formed by the Democratic Leftist Party (Demokratik Sol Parti- DSP), the National Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi-MHP) and the Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi- ANAP) led by Bülent Ecevit. As part of its National Programme Turkey adopted reforms and made some changes especially in relation to fundamental human rights and freedoms and dealt with some of the most sensitive issues like the abolition of the death penalty during peacetime, the revision of Anti-Terror Laws and amendment to article 312 of the Turkish Penal Code, and the removal of a ban on legal provisions proscribing the use of language other than Turkish and the Cyprus issue (Çarkoğlu, 2004).

AKP)<sup>5</sup> in November 2002, which managed to form a single-party government by taking 34.28% of total votes. In its early years in power between 2002-2004 the AKP adopted 6 harmonisation packages in order to enact reforms and legislative changes, especially in the areas of minority rights, freedom of thought, and reducing the role of the military in society (Özbudun and Yazici, 2004; Denli 2007: 97, Scalbert- Yucel, 2018)<sup>6</sup>. Besides these political and social reforms, the AKP also passed a series of economic reforms with the aim of building a regulatory framework and management system for a functioning market economy, which led to the large scale privatization of highly profitable state-owned enterprises such as the TUPRAS oil refinery, the steel and iron producer ERDEMIR, and Turk Telekom (Angin and Bedirhanoglu, 2012).

More than 70 percent of all privatizations in Turkey since the mid-1980s took place during the AKP's period in government (Angin and Bedirhanoglu, 2012). This combination of democratic and neoliberal reforms, as we will see, provided both the opportunity (increased political openness) and the conditions (increased inequality and alienation) for a surge in social movement and political opposition organising during the AKP rule.

#### *Contemporary Turkey in Crisis: Reconstruction of Authoritarianism*

Initially, in the context of post 9/11 tensions between Islam and the West, Turkey was portrayed as a successful example and model of a country where Islam goes in hand with democracy and neoliberal capitalism. Since 2008, Turkey has increasingly become subject to scrutiny for its authoritarian and violent nature, a trend which has increased since 2015. With the AKP's move away from democratisation processes under its leader, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, (including a shift from a parliamentary system to a presidential one), these tensions escalated and deepened. They further escalated after the election of 2011, in which the AKP did not

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<sup>5</sup> The JDP was formed after a split from the Virtue Party (which took that name after closer of the Welfare Party in 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Landmark reforms included the abolition of death penalty under all circumstances, closure of the controversial State Security Courts, prevention of torture and ill-treatment, expansion of freedom of expression by repealing the notorious Article 8 of the Anti-Terror Act which was often used for harassing journalists and publishers, restructuring of the once-powerful NSC and removal of military personnel from civilian courts and the Higher Education Council. Besides this, the Turkish parliament also ratified several international and European conventions including the Protocol 6 of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR), and passed the new Penal Code in September 2004, which introduced major improvements in the area of human rights and legal status of women.

win sufficient seats to form the majority (367 of the 550 MPs) it required in order to amend or rewrite the constitution (even though it received 49.90% of votes).

The Gezi Park Protest in the summer of 2013 was perhaps the first visible and prominent expression of deep social unrest and dissatisfaction with the AKP and its politics since it came into power in 2002. The uprising started as a protest against the AKP government's plan to cut down trees in Gezi Park (Taksim / Istanbul) to make way for a commercial venture, and soon turned into the biggest urban political protest (drawing together diverse social actors) of Turkey's recent history, and the most severe challenge to the AKP's hegemony. The excessive level of violence utilised by the government to quell the protest led to the initiation of a new 'war regime' which has remained ever since (Somer, 2014).

Following national elections in June 2015, the result of which was seen as a further challenge to the AKP, violence spread across many cities in Turkey, particularly in Kurdish areas. These were in response to the cessation of peace talks carried out between 2013-2015 between Öcalan, the leader of the PKK, his appointed representatives, and government officials. The acceleration of internal tensions within the AKP (between Erdogan and Fethullah Gülen) which emerged from 2013, erupted as an attempted military coup on 15th July 2016. Considered as '*a gift sent from God*'<sup>7</sup>, the failed coup provided Erdogan with further justification to intensify and extend repression across Turkey and against all sectors of opposition. Particularly in the Kurdish cities, the coup legitimised the introduction of special laws and legislation which restructured a variety of state institutions (military, policy and judiciary) in order to overcome a range of emerging tensions and challenges both within and outside the state. Under this new war regime, strengthened by 'state of emergency' rule and curfews in many cities, Turkey witnessed its worst and most vicious violence in Kurdish cities, resulting in human rights atrocities, widespread destruction of homes and buildings, and over 200,000 people internally displaced (Human Rights Watch, 2016; Amnesty International 2016; United Nations 2016). Using its parliamentary majority, the AKP passed special decrees under the 'state of emergency', outside the control of the judiciary, that increased the censorship of the media and internet and introduced a new, broader definition of terrorism in order to crack down on

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<sup>7</sup> On the night of the coup Recep T. Erdogan, the President of Turkey made a speech on national television and called the coup 'a gift sent from God' to allow him to reshape and restructure state institutions and military in order to realise a 'new Turkey' promise that he made. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrSomYhjtyY>

dissident voices and criticism, which were deemed as a threat to the AKP's power and vision of a 'New Turkey'. Under these special decrees, 170,372<sup>8</sup> public service workers (including teachers, health professionals, state officials and academics) were dismissed from their jobs<sup>9</sup> (6,021 of whom were academics), 189 media outlets were closed, and 319 journalists were detained<sup>10</sup>.

During this period, Turkey experienced the largest academic purge in its history, when in 2016 more than 2000 academics (who subsequently became known as the 'Academics for Peace') lost their jobs for signing a letter calling for an end to Turkey's human rights violations in Kurdish cities and a return to peace negotiations (Academics for Peace, 2016). While providing immunity to those security officials involved responsible for human rights violations, an increased number of NGOs workers, leaders of social movements, activists, academics and political party leaders including members of the HDP and HDK were taken to court on false accusations of making terrorist propaganda (facilitated by the new, broad concept of terrorism that had been adopted by the AKP).

The elections of June 2018 further consolidated AKP power and resulted in a shift from the parliamentary system to a presidential one. This led to increased violence and intimidation by the Turkish state against all opposition movements. The current COVID-19 Global Pandemic has seen a further increase in repression and violence against the opposition, under the guise of public health and security. It is within this broader social, political, economic, cultural context that we can understand Turkey's rich and vibrant social movement struggle and locate the struggle, emergence and evolution of the HDK – a movement which despite all this repression, remains crucial in the current conjuncture. The next section explores the emergence of the HDK in greater detail.

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<sup>8</sup> This number includes all journalists who were arrested in the aftermath of the July 15, 2016 coup attempt. Some 170 of them are still kept under arrest with the remaining released pending trial or cleared of charges. For detailed information, please visit: <https://turkeypurge.com/journalism-in-jail>

<sup>9</sup> This number includes state officials, teachers, bureaucrats, and academics who were dismissed by the special decrees passed by the government between July 2016 – July 2018.

<sup>10</sup> This number includes all journalists who were arrested in the aftermath of the July 15, 2016 coup attempt. Some 170 of them are still kept under arrest with the remaining released pending trial or cleared of charges. For detailed information, please visit: <https://turkeypurge.com/journalism-in-jail>

## **Spatial Geographies of Social Movements: a historical analysis**

Contemporary social movement resistance has been fundamentally shaped by the top-down modernity project outlined above, as well as by the bottom-up opposition and challenges to it. As mentioned before, despite the ongoing structural '*continuum of violence*' utilised by the Turkish state to control, discipline and govern its populations, it has never managed a command full control or hegemony over the society. From its inception, this top-down nation-building project faced serious challenges, albeit diverse in nature, form and scope.

Due to the extreme and brutal '*continuum of violence*' projected upon any perceived threat to the Turkish state, scholars working on the historical development of leftist movement in Turkey note that between 1921-1960s leftist movements were infrequent, largely clandestine, and usually operating under the umbrella of Communist Party of Turkey (TKP), often with minimal interactions between different political movements (cf. Aydinoğlu, 2011; Ersan, 2014; Şener, 2015; Yurtsever, 2016). Both the socialist movement in Turkey and the Kurdish liberation movement re-emerged in the 1960s, albeit with different historical dynamics. However, despite the divergent social imaginaries and historical trajectories, Kurdish activists (intellectuals, youth etc) as well as members of other minority groups (such as Armenian) (rather than seeking their own path of struggle) organised principally under socialist and radical left movements and political parties<sup>11</sup> (Bozarslan, 2016: 364) inspired by Marxism and Marxist Ideology. They shared the belief that a radical transformation of power through revolution would be the panacea for all injustices including those of ethnicity, gender and religion. This can be better understood within the international context of the time, where Marxism and Marxist ideology was gaining popularity globally.

During the 1960s the international communist movement led by the Soviet Union inspired and influenced both the social imaginaries and organisational forms of social movement in Turkey.

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<sup>11</sup> Most Kurdish intellectual and student youth joined the Turkey Workers Party (Türkiye İşçi Partisi). Within the party, Kurdish youth and intellectuals formed a group called 'Easterners' (Dogular). Kurdish intellectuals, including Kemal Burkay, Tarik Ziya Ekinci, Mehmet Ali Aslan, Mahmut Baksi and Canip Yıldırım were among this group. The historian-sociologist Hamit Bozarslan states that there are at least three main reasons why the left movement is popular among the Kurds: first, the left's advocacy of social justice and equality, thereby becoming the main medium of demand for social and economic development in underdeveloped, marginalised Kurdish settlements ; second, the left has openly challenged the state and state-sponsored Turkish nationalism, although it did not deny Kemalism and even attempted to repair it to some extent; and third, the Marxist-Leninist left introduced the Kurds to new universal perspectives, which had been used as a synonym for the left Kurdish problem in Turkey, the 'national problem,' legitimacy and 'the right of oppressed peoples to self-determination'.

The alliance of the Soviet Union with national liberation movements taking place around the globe at the time (including the Kurds) was also amongst the reasons for most anti-colonial struggles joining with left political parties to develop their struggles for independence (Aydinoğlu, 2014: 22). It was through those interactions, encounters and mutual relations being formed that diverse activists (Kurdish, left, socialist, Turks and other minority groups) came together to learn from and share with each other, re-develop, re-organise, and rethink their own struggles as well as the relationship between them (Ekinci, 2010: 9; Güneş, 2017: 703).

Indeed, the Cold War political and social environment in the late 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, and the increased power of the Soviet Union, created a more favourable set of circumstances for left-wing politics, resulting in the radical left gaining broad popular support within wider society. However, it was also during this period that increased tensions emerged between and within the radical left and socialist parties over various issues including the role of the military (Ersan, 2014: 91), Kemalism (Ulus, 2010), the Kurdish issue (definition of issue, what form, with what aims etc).<sup>12</sup> These tensions created not only new cleavages, ruptures and separations - each seeking to develop their own struggle for their future imaginaries (Aydinoğlu, 2014: 23; Bozarslan, 2013; Ekinci, 2010: 118–119) - but also new perspectives about social transformation in Turkey and the possible solutions to the Kurdish issue therein.

As a result of the debates taking place during this period, the Kurds came to push for a new political approach which would recognise the Kurdish issue within '*the right of nations to freely determine their own destiny*' (Ekinci, 2010: 174–175). Increasingly talking about their identity-based politics and rights, the Kurdish youth, intellectuals and movements actors broke away from radical left movements and formed their own political organisation in the late 1970s, which came to be known as The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK, Partiya Karkerê Kurdistanê, *Kurdistan İşçi Partisi*) since 1978. Whilst still strongly committed to Marxist ideas (Güneş, 2017: 720; Yurtsever, 2016: 191), the Kurdish movement rupture was seen as a critique of the Turkish left's analysis of the Kurdish issue which was fundamentally defined

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<sup>12</sup> Beside the Kurdish issue there were a great deal of divergent opinions on the role of the military and Kemalism and while for some Kemalism was an imperialist movement, others strongly believed that both the military and Kemalism were anti-imperialist movements (see Ersan, 2014 and Ulus, 2016).

within the framework of class exploitation, and hence they argued that it was treated as a secondary concern (Aydın & Taşkın, 2016: 394).

As the left grew in strength, the Turkish state grew fearful of the expansion of communism in Turkey, and hence under the pretext of addressing political unrest, carried out three military Coups, in 1960, 1970, 1980s, in order to crush the emerging resistance and destroy the growth of left-wing social movements. Many supporters were murdered, disappeared, arrested, and tortured, during these coups, and this had significant detrimental effects on both left-wing social movements and Kurdish parties. Neither could sustain themselves against the wave of violence that followed each coup. Following military coup of the 1980<sup>13</sup> the state closed down all channels for democratic participation, and therefore once again most radical left and social parties had to become clandestine in order to survive. Despite this setback, both leftist parties and the Kurdish social movement regained their momentum in the late 1980s and 1990s, albeit in different political forms. At the same time, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War pushed many of them to rethink their political forms, modes of politics and rationales.

### **New Opportunities, New Challenges: Transformation of Spaces of Resistance in the Post-Cold War Environment**

Faced with these new Post-Cold War challenges and opportunities, many social movements transformed their organisations and politics in an attempt to capture the new dynamics presented by the changing political and social environment.

It was within this context that the political transformation of the PKK (**Kurdistan Workers' Party**/Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê), the Kurdish armed movement, took place in the late 1970s. The PKK was founded in November 1978 by a group of Kurdish university students led by Abdullah Öcalan. Since its inception in 1978, especially after 1984 the PKK has expanded its arm struggle and extended its resistance across multiple sites and spaces, and drastically changed the scale and landscape of Kurdish resistance in Turkey during the 1990s.<sup>14</sup> As a result

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<sup>13</sup> According to the Human Rights Association data, 171 of the 400 suspicious deaths that occurred in the post-12 September 1980 military rule have proven to be caused by torture. According to official statements, on September 12, 210,000 cases were opened in martial law military courts. Of these cases, 71,000 are from articles 141 and 142 of the Turkish penal code, and 14,000 are from article 163 (Aydın & Taşkın, 2016: 331).

<sup>14</sup> While the PKK has been involved in armed clashes with Turkish security forces since its foundation in 1978, but the full-scale [insurgency](#) did not begin until 15 August 1984, when the PKK announced a Kurdish uprising.

of this change, there was a rise in the emergence of legal political parties, cultural centres, new social, cultural and political institutions; solidarity networks operating in the public sphere, all of which have come to shape daily life and politics in Turkey in significant ways. However, following the capture of Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the PKK, in 1999, the Kurdish liberation movement made a significant change in the direction and aims of the PKK: moving away from the goal of establishing an independent Kurdistan, to instead call for a democratically autonomous, self-governed social entity that operates within the Democratic Republic (Güneş, 2015).

Inspired by the work of Murray Bookchin (Bookchin, 1995, 1996, 2005), Öcalan proposed a new paradigm of Radical Democracy, as an attempt to go beyond what Öcalan calls the '*classical Kurdish nationalist line*', but also '*a leftist interpretation of a similar tendency*' (Öcalan 1999: 10). Radical democracy has three fundamental projects that are interrelated and complementary to each other: Democratic Republic, Democratic Autonomy and Democratic Confederalism (Akkaya and Jongerden, 2013: 189). The notion of Democratic Republic refers to a new type of state/society relation based on the recognition of diversity (religious, cultural, ethnic) and the representation of plurality (identities and Cultures) materialised in the rearticulating of (equal) citizenship away from the notion of nationalism, in which the citizen's relationship with the state is protected by the necessary legal and constitutional reforms. Democratic Confederalism refers to 'democratic self-government' and direct rule of peoples, constituting their own institutions and a new socio-ecological-political system (Öcalan 2008: 32, 2015) beyond the nation state based on direct democracy, gender equality, ecological sustainability and participatory economics (Stanchev, 2016). Democratic autonomy refers to the right of people to determine their own economic, cultural, and social affairs within a newly created unitary structure that has its own administrative and power structure that can facilitate the diverse demands of people under the banner of the Democratic Republic. While the Democratic Republic is a project of state reform, the projects of Democratic Confederalism and Democratic Autonomy embody the idea of a politics beyond and without the state (Akkaya and Jongerden, 2013).

This new radical democracy is seen as a governance model that has the potential to work for Kurdish population spread across various countries. It is also argued that this new paradigm can be beneficial for all other minorities living in Turkey, including the Turkish, in freeing all

citizens from the constraints of top-down state structures. It was this political shift that led to the necessity for Kurds to build a relationship with other groups that might be willing to be part of this new paradigm. The necessity to reach out beyond the Kurdish areas can be seen as a result of this recognition and the need to work towards creating a new Turkey that could recognize diversity and difference. This was seen as a new and radical agenda and found a positive response from many social movements within Turkey.

Similarly, many left-wing parties began to revitalize their power and broaden their social base during the same period. While previously mobilizing as class based and anti-imperialist movements - mainly amongst youth, students and workers' trade unions - since the 1980s, left-wing parties and movements have come to work on a range of issues, including identity based politics, and have opened cultural centres often with their own magazines and newspapers.

#### *Counter Hegemony in Construction: New actors, ideas and practices*

Since the 1990s, Turkey has also witnessed the emergence of a range of new social actors and movements (women, environmentalist, LGBTQ groups, and minority groups – both ethnic and religious) to challenge the Turk-Islam Synthesis<sup>15</sup> within the context of Europeanization, regionalization and processes of globalization.<sup>16</sup> Inspired by the ongoing social, cultural and political struggles taking place around the world (such as the environmentalist movement, women's movement, LGBTQ movement, anti-globalization movement, anti-war movement) these new social actors and groups, together with other more established oppositional social movements and organisations, have begun to work on a range of different issues. Through diverse practices and strategies (seminars, workshops, conferences, big demonstrations, undertaking new research and producing different literature) these social actors have come to work on a range of areas including the neoliberal capitalist destruction of the environment, labour and culture; violence against women and honour killings, LGBTQ rights, equality, rights

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<sup>15</sup> The concept of 'Turk-Islam Synthesis' is used to refer to reconciling of the two main characteristic of state that is often used against all those marginalized people at different times.

<sup>16</sup> Social movements such as Saturdays' Mothers (1995-1999 2009-), the War Resisters' Association (Savaş Karşıtları Derneği, 1992), Bergama Environmental Movement (1996) as well as Initiative for Civic Constitution (2000), The Global peace and Justice Coalition (2003), No War On Iraq Coordination (2002-2003); the first pride walk and LGBT demonstration (2003); Mezopotamya Social Forum (2009- Diyarbakir), European Social Forum (2010, İstanbul), Mezopotamya Ecological movement (2011), the Conscientious Objection Association (COA- Vicdani Red Dernegi (2013) are amongst some new social movements in Turkey since mid-1990s.

of minorities (religion or ethnic), democracy and human rights, media and press freedoms. In doing so they have come to shape society and its relations as well as produce a reemergent and vibrant civil society.

These practices have often extended beyond the national scale, allowing solidarity and knowledge exchange (e.g. the European Social Forums, Global Social Forums). Women, LGBTQ, ecology and anti-nuclear, globalization, and anti-war movements have expanded and begun to produce activism through different structures (associations, foundations, networks, initiatives, etc.). In April 2002, the Istanbul Social Forum and the Peace against War Platform were established (Gümrükçü, 2010). In particular, the Coalition for Global Peace and Justice (2003) and the Anti-War Coalition in Iraq (2002-2003) constituted the main backbone of these protests (Önen, 2015). Furthermore, the Ecology Movement of Mesopotamia was an outcome of the Mesopotamian Social Forum in Diyarbakir in 2009 (Hunt, 2017; Tatort Kurdistan, 2013).

The destruction caused by the September 12 coup (1980) and its fallout in the field of human rights violations led to an increase in such civil society organisations. This was strengthened by the growing recognition and legitimacy of Human Rights globally during the 1990s. Similarly, the 1990s was a period for both institutionalization and diversification of feminist movement in Turkey. The country's two principle social actors, the Kurdish Liberation movement and the Islamic movement, who have together primarily determined politics in Turkey, have had profound effects on diversification of feminism in Turkey. The struggles of Kurdish and Islamic women not only changed their respective movements, but also the Turkish feminist movement. Through their struggle Kurdish women have not only questioned the patriarchal power and social relations within the Kurdish Liberation movement, but also Turkish feminism for its narrow nationalism based on Turkishness (Akkaya & Jongerden, 2013: 189). Indeed, increased relationships and alliances between the Turkish feminist movement and the Kurdish women's movement since the early 1990s - and a women-centred struggle perspective that emerged out of these interactions - can also be seen as an important factor in the establishment of the HDK. The important role played by Gültan Kışanak and Sebahat Tuncel, two prominent Kurdish women who played a crucial role in the establishment of the HDK, was emphasized by almost all interviewees during field work for this research.

Although not as strong as in the second half of the 1970s, there was also a revival in the field of trade union struggle in the 1990s. Founded in 1995, the Confederation of Public Workers'

Unions (KESK) (and other trade unions) became collective spaces where social actors from the Kurdish Liberation movement and Turkey's socialist-left movement came together and established new relationships. This space was extremely important as it brought together diverse sectors of society, including feminist and Kurdish activists, allowing them to interact, and learn from each other. It was, at least partly, due to these interactions and learning processes that many social actors and trade unions came to change their position on the Kurdish issue. For instance, the important struggle carried by Eğitim-Sen's, (the biggest trade union in the education sector) related to the resolution of the Kurdish issue can be seen as the product of encounters and learning that took place in these spaces as noted by those social movement actors who have been active at the trade union struggle. (Education & Alternative Pedagogies in HDK, Focus Group 1)

Similarly, an increased range of environmentalist social movements emerged during this period to struggle against the capitalist destruction of nature and natural resources. The persistent and long-standing resistance of the people of Bergama for about 15 years against multinational companies searching for gold is one of the examples of these environmental struggles. The Green Party was founded in 2008 on the back of this rising environmental struggle. The Green party merged with the Equality and Democracy Party (EDP) in 2009. They together formed the Greens and Left Future Party (YSGP), which joined the HDK in 2011 (and HDP) respectively. At the same time a political Islamic movement, including a range of political parties and organisations, which was supported by the state in the context of the Cold War as a bastion to prevent communism, also emerged and became popular.

This period also saw the emergence of counter hegemonic collective memory, as opposed to the state-centric top-down memory that has privileged the production of a homogenous society based on narratives of Turkishness and Sunni-Islam. Aiming to challenge these official collective memories, an increased number of activists and academic scholars (especially those academic works carried out in the diaspora) have focussed on bringing out those hidden, untold, marginalised or exterminated (oral) and undocumented histories, narratives and lived experiences of the past. This can be understood as an attempt to forge a new counter-hegemonic collective memory that in turn helps the affected communities to make sense of their identity and of the future.

With the opportunities provided by the democratisation process, diverse social actors came to analyse past historical events such as the Armenian Genocide of 1915 and the Dersim Genocide of 1938; the torture carried out in prisons under the dictatorship (especially Diyarbakir prison No:5), human rights violations and forced mass displacement in the Kurdish cities in the 1990s. These debates have developed a process of civic culture that seeks to confront the past, and bring untold histories and hidden narratives to public attention in the hope of making sense of what happened in the past in order to build a better future. This work was further expanded through personal memorabilia, literary productions, cinema and oral history studies. Through opportunities provided by public intellectuals (such as Hrant Dink, Mıgırdıç Margosyan, Fethiye Çetin etc), projects carried out by the civil society groups and organisations (such as Human Rights Associations, Göç-Der, Memory Center etc), cultural-artistic activities and political statements of institutions affiliated to the Kurdish Movement, and literature (Çelik, 2017), diverse social groups affected by similar past practices have come to meet and talk about the past and bring their own (counter) accounts about what happened in Dersim in 1938, in Diyarbakir prisons, in the 12 September military coup and the widespread Human rights violations of the 1990s.

This counter-memory which emerged in opposition to the official historical memory built on the notion of ‘national unity’ and ‘integrity’ can also be described as a counter-memorial (remembrance) regime. While the official historical memory based itself on the principles of national unity and prides itself on narratives of glorified victories, heroes and the victorious nation - under the official motto of ‘everything is for Turkey’, this new counter memorial regime emerged out of the counter hegemonic memory process (of which the Kurdish liberation movement played an important catalytic role)<sup>17</sup> builds its narratives on the recognition of a plural nation and embraces the narratives of events in the past that were silenced by mainstream accounts, emphasising resistance, victims and death ‘because of

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<sup>17</sup> This process of counter hegemonic memory has generated a counter hegemonic revolt in which the groups that are affected have come to reclaim their past. For instance, The Kurdish liberation movement under the new Democratic Autonomy and Self-governance paradigm, with the gaining of local municipalities in the most Kurdish cities, began to eliminate the material and symbolic colonial violence carried out by the Turkish state and transform the city and Kurdish geography in line with its past ethnic and religious diversity. For instance, the Diyarbakir Municipality adopted a series of policies and practices to restore and transform the city in line with its rich cultural diversity. Renaming streets, restoring the Church of Surp Giragos, opening Armenian language classes, erecting the Conscience Monuments and organising remembrance events have come to provide the basis for a multicultural structure and renewal for the city.

*Turkey*' (Michel, 2015: 14). Although the centuries of genocide, massacres, displacement and exclusion have produced an irreversible demographic effect, especially on minorities like Armenians, Syriacs, Chaldeans, Nestorians, Tsiganes and Jews, recognizing and commemorating this diversity and this symbolic confrontation with the past has aided the emergence of a counter hegemonic remembrance regime and counter hegemonic memory (Çelik, 2016).

The experience of working together in the same social sphere, albeit for different reasons, also brought together these diverse organisations to work on common issues and causes in pursuit of a better society. The collective struggle of these diverse social movements for a more inclusive, diverse and pluralist society and social relations wasn't just a bottom-up challenge to the top-down state centric modernity (Keyder, 2006; Keyman, 2005; Yilmaz, 2009; Gokalp, 2010), but also led to the formation of a vibrant civil society that has come to shape the future of social movement struggle.

Crucially, the struggles in the cultural domain have been central in providing a collective counter-historical memory that provided the metaphoric glue with which the HDK managed to draw together different sections of society that have suffered in a range of ways, historically and contemporaneously, and begin to build a sense of unity amidst this diversity.

### **Spaces of Engagement: Emerging Alliances**

In order to understand the nature of the unity formed within the common/collective spaces of the HDK, it is important to discuss previous alliances of varying size, form, duration and rationale which were formed by various social actors prior to the foundation of the HDK.

An examination of the history of social movements in Turkey shows how forming new alliances and coalitions between highly fragmented social movements has always been an important strategy for expanding spheres of power and influence. However, this strategy became more important from the 1990s due to the broad recognition of the importance of forming a collective response to ongoing societal issues and problems.

In the 1960s and 1970s there were several attempts to unite a highly fragmented left-wing movement, and the Turkish left and Kurdish movements, with the aim of mobilising against resurgent right-wing political parties (Ersan, 2014: 128) which had gained a considerable amount of power following the 1971 military coup. Unfortunately, these attempts were

largely unsuccessful. However, after the 1980s, and within the context of the heavy defeat by the military coup, forming some sort of unity between/within the Kurdish movement and the fragmented socialist left became a necessity. Hence, from the 1980s onwards we see increased interest and discussion taking place, seeking to unite diverse and fragmented movements. The Unity of Left (Left Union) (Tezel, 2011) and ‘democracy against fascism’ (Sargin, 2006: 81) platforms were two alliances formed in 1985 (Ekinci, 2010: 171–172; Tezel, 2011) between the socialist left and Kurdish liberation movement. While these unity attempts were short lived and did not produce the intended outcome, they nonetheless created a space of engagement and dialogue which were crucial for activists to come together after the military coup of the 1980s. As noted by Ergun Aydinoğlu (2011: 472–473) these ‘unity discussions’, despite being short lived, temporal or conjectural, created an opportunity for a range of left parties to come together to talk, share and reflect on their future practices and vision. This indeed had profound impacts on the left and their future trajectories.

The heated discussions and debates on unity during the 1980s came into fruition in the 1990s. Social movements showed a strong commitment to not only *‘discuss but also to act together’* and put those ideas into practice. The establishment of the ‘Freedom and Solidarity Party’ (Özgürlik ve Dayanışma Partisi, ÖDP) (Aydinoğlu, 2011: 472–473) in 1996 was seen as an important ‘breakthrough’ for in the history of the Turkish socialist left and social movement struggle.

It was the first time in Turkey’s history that a political party was created to bring together such diverse political parties and groupings within and beyond the organised left. Beside this, the ÖDP programme aimed at creating a participatory democracy that would recognise different political views as legitimate. As Vehbi Ersan pointed out, *‘this alone was a radical break with the monolithic understanding of the communist parties, which did not allow any intellectual opposition to exist.’* (Ersan, 2014: 320). While there were some organisational difficulties (due to the inter-social balance, quota controls and ideological discussions), the left alliances under the ÖDP, created excitement within the urban-educated middle classes and were frequently covered in the mainstream media, with an expectation that these new alliances would create a similar environment to the 1960s. However, the ÖDP suffered a great disappointment, when it gained only 0.8% of votes in the 1999 general elections. This failure revived the old animosities between various left parties, the existing left approach to the Kurdish issue, which

turned into a challenge in which radicalism was severely tested and caused division between the parties resulting in the exodus of some individuals and parties (Ersan, 2014: 320, 340). Whilst the ODP created a milestone for all the above stated reasons, not being able to materialise its aims and visions in practice meant that the party would remain small group and isolated (Ersan, 2014: 340).

#### *Alliances between the Turkish left and the Kurdish Liberation movement*

The armed struggle carried out by the PKK since 1984 not only turned the Kurdish issue into a burning one (not just for Kurds but also for all sectors), but it also has had profound impacts on the relationship between the Kurds and the Turkish left, transforming the Turkish left's attitude towards the Kurdish issue whereby most left political parties and organisations 'recognised' the Kurdish issue, incorporated 'the right to self-determination' into their political programme and actively came to support the Kurdish liberation movement from the early 2000s onwards. This was reflected in the number of new alliances formed in multiple spaces (legal and democratic space, clandestine spaces, mountains and prisons) both between various Kurdish groupings and parties, but also between the Kurdish movement and Socialist/Left Parties and groupings<sup>18</sup>. Talking about these alliances, Akkaya ve Jongerden defines three forms of alliances between the Kurdish liberation movement and Turkish left: (1) cooperation through the formal agreement between the illegal parties; (2) operational cooperation in practice; and (3) cooperation in the legal political sphere (Akkaya & Jongerden, 2011: 133).

With the intensification of the Kurdish struggle in democratic spaces, various alliances were formed between left political parties and Kurdish political parties. The People's Labor Party (HEP- Halkın Emek Partisi), the first Pro-Kurdish Party that focussed on 'Kurdish Identity', entered the Turkish political scene in 1990 and formed an electoral coalition in 1991 with the Social Democratic Populist Party (Sosyal Demokrat Halkçı Parti, SHP). This electoral coalition took 20.8% of the vote, becoming the 3rd party after ANAP and DYP and the securing a total of 88 deputies, 22 of which were HEP members (Coşkun, 2015: 8). This electoral coalition was short-lived as the HEP was closed in July 1993 by the state. However, it was a crucial moment

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<sup>18</sup> The establishment of 'the Peoples' United Revolutionary Movement' in 2016 by 10 political parties (TKP/ML, PKK, THKP-C/MLSPB, MKP, TKEP-LENİNİST, TİKB, DKP, DEVRİMÇİ KARARGAH and MLKP) is one of the latest examples of forging an alliance between these various political actors in illegal spaces with an aim to provide a joint response to the repression and violence of the state.

in the relationship between the Kurds and the Turkish left, as it was the first time in Turkey's history that Kurds entered the elections and were selected on the basis of their Kurdish identity.

Since the creation of the HEP in 1990, we have witnessed the creation of nine other pro-Kurdish parties, due to the government banning and closure of previous entities. These political parties have been the vehicle through which the Democratic Kurdish movement has been able to express itself in the public arena (Şimşek & Jongerden, 2015; Watts, 2010), with the aim of promoting Kurdish rights and identity, and seeking to find a democratic solution to the ongoing Kurdish issue. The HEP and other pro-Kurdish parties that followed participated in 5 general elections (1995, 1999, 2002, 2007 and 2011) and 4 local elections (1999, 2004, 2009 and 2014) (Coşkun, 2015: 9). The main aims and demands of these parties were to call for legal and constitutional changes that would secure equal rights for Kurdish people (and other minorities) and recognise their identities (such as the right to education in mother tongue), to end the state of emergency rule under which the most repressive human rights violations were justified and carried out - including extra judicial killing, disappearances, and mass internal displacement due to forced evacuation of villages<sup>19</sup>. However, due to the particularity of the voting system, most of these parties were unable to get beyond the 10 percent national threshold and could not therefore have representation in the parliament - despite often having the highest votes in their respective cities. For instance, The People's Democracy Party (HADEP) in 1995 and 1999, and the Democratic People's Party (DEHAP) in 2002, could not pass the 10 percent national threshold.

In addition to the general elections, pro-Kurdish political parties have played an active role and gained important successes in local elections since 1999, including winning many Mayoral positions. Whilst the national parliamentary representation of these Kurdish political parties was denied due to the electoral system, they managed to mobilise their social base in Kurdish areas for local elections and won control of most municipalities in Kurdish cities and towns. Gaining control of these municipalities became crucial for the Kurdish movement, especially

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<sup>19</sup> Almost all of these parties were closed on the grounds that their political activities and demands outlined in their programmes were violating the provisions of Article 68 (4) of the Turkish Constitution, and therefore threatening the national unity and integrity of the state (Grigoriadis, 2016: 40). Many of their leaders and members were imprisoned and faced several court cases, with heavy fines and punishment, under the charge of making terrorist propaganda.

in the context of the Kurdish liberation movement's transformation after 2000. In their new positions, these local mayors have not only become interested in the '*delivery of services to local people but have also had the obligation to represent general politics*' in their localities (Coşkun, 2015: 10-11). Thus, the acquisition of the municipalities, and the opportunities that this provided for self-governance, became an important milestone in the reconstruction of Kurdish identity.

However, the struggle of these political parties affected the Kurdish and Turkish social movement in dramatic ways. Talking about Kurdish issues and the rights and demands of Kurdish people openly in a public space and calling for a peaceful and democratic solution to the Kurdish issue at a time when violence and conflict was at its apex served to normalise the Kurdish issue.

It was during this period throughout the 2000s, as a result of this political environment, that Turkey witnessed the emergence of a number of new alliances and coalitions between the Kurdish liberation movement and left and socialist political parties on various issues such as democracy, human rights and peace. Various electoral alliances were also formed in order to overcome the 10% national threshold that was set up primarily to prevent small and minority parties from entering national politics. In order to overcome this, the parties began entering the elections either as independent candidates and/or under joint platforms and electoral alliances. ***The Thousand Hope Candidate Coalition***, an electoral alliance between a pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) and the socialist libertarian Freedom and Solidarity Party (ÖDP), the Labour Party (EMEP) and the Socialist Democracy Party (SDP) was formed on the basis of this change in strategy for participation in the 2007 general election, in which they collectively gained 22 independent members of parliament (MPs).

This was followed by ***the Labour, Democracy and Freedom Bloc (Emek, Demokrasi ve Özgürlik Bloğu, henceforth referred to as the Bloc)***, which was formed by the Pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) and 20 socialist parties and movements, including Peace and Democracy Party, Labor Party, Socialist Workers Party, Rights and Freedoms Party, Participating Democracy Party and Socialist Democracy Party and political movements in Turkey. In the election of 2011 the Bloc won 6.4% of votes standing as independent

candidates<sup>20</sup> in 41 provinces across Turkey, which secured them 36 members of parliament, who later played an important role in the creation of the HDK and HDP (Şimşek & Jongerden, 2015: 18).

The successful electoral victory of these two alliances, which generated great hope in wider society, paved the way to the creation of the HDK. Following the 2011 electoral success of the Bloc, two commissions were formed to carry out work on two key areas. The first commission worked on the organisational aspect of the HDK, to meet with representatives of the people, faith organisations, environmental organisations, political parties, institutions, women's organisations, individuals and LGBTQ groups across Turkey. The second commission was responsible for drafting the programme and the statute (Tuncel, 2012). The HDK was created out of the work carried by these two commissions. We will focus on this work in the next section.

### **The Democratic Congress of the Peoples (HDK) as a Common Social Movement Space**

The HDK was established in Ankara on October 15-16, 2011 by 820 delegates from 81 cities across Turkey. The delegates represented a broad range of diverse social actors, groups and organisations including the Kurdish liberation movement, left-wing political parties and trade unions, women's movements, LGBTQ movement, environmentalist, labour and rights-based civil society organisations, representatives of various religious minorities. Inspired by the previous relationships between the Kurdish liberation movement and socialist left; the dynamic social struggle of women, minorities groups, LGBTQs and individuals; and the lessons learned from rich histories of social struggle; the HDK was formed as a new political form with an aim of capturing the dynamic momentum of the 2000s and organising a broader opposition

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<sup>20</sup> The Block chose to participate in the election as independent candidates rather than a party (block) candidate in order to overcome the *10 percent national threshold* set by the Turkish electoral system. The national threshold was increased to 10 percent in the 1980s under the Military dictatorship to fundamentally prevent the political representation of those marginalised communities such as Kurdish. While Political parties are subject to an electoral threshold of 10%, the parliamentary threshold does not apply to independents candidate. Hence participating in national elections as independent candidates has been used as a tactic for Kurdish political parties up until the electoral success of the HDP.

under one umbrella on a long-term basis. This required developing new practices and politics which could facilitate working collectively with diverse social groups, organisations and individuals on a common and shared idea, linking the struggle for peace with the struggle for democracy, in order to struggle for a new alternative, a peaceful and democratic Turkey.

#### *HDK and a new political form: the Congress*

The HDK represented a break with social movement organising which had gone before in the country in that it was formed as a Congress, an idea that was not so familiar within Turkish history.<sup>21</sup> Throughout Turkish history the main form of organisation has been the political party. Despite some political groupings preferring to be called a ‘movement’ rather than a party (Bora, 2016: 704), their organisational form has invariably been ‘party’-like, with top down and hierachal organisational structures whereby decisions are made by the upper echelons and feed into the rest of organisation. Hence, the idea of forming a congress-type organisation was the most contested aspect of the talks between the social actors forming the HDK. Reflecting on those debates, Sebahat Tuncel, the first Co-spokesperson of the HDK, says that *‘when the initial work started, the tendency was to form a new bloc party, however the idea of Congress was accepted by everyone after long discussions’* (Tuncel, 2012: 10). The most important factor that determined their membership to the HDK, according to most of the individual member we interviewed, was its organisational structure and form. Beyond the organisation in classic parties or unions, the congress model rejects hierarchy and emphasises equal participation.

While inspired by previous alliances, drawing on the lessons learned from and knowledge produced by the collective struggle, the HDK’s prime aim was to form a long-term broad alliance of diverse oppositional groups, based on a set of common ideas. As the above brief historical analysis of the relationship between various social movements shows, previous alliances tended to be formed on a short term basis, often temporal and conjunctural in the form of an oppositional ‘block’, ‘front’ or ‘platform’. Crucially, HDKs prime intention was not

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<sup>21</sup> The etymologically the meaning of Congress, which originated from the Latin word ‘congressus’ (which was translated in French as Congrès and from there as ‘Kongre in Turkish) is ‘the action of coming together, meeting, gathering and encounter’. The congress is a meeting place where participants from different parties, unions, associations or the same professional area come together and exchange their ideas or discuss a given problem. One notable exception dates back to the initial stages of the Turkish independence war following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, where Ataturk formed a congress type of organisation in different region of Turkey in order to build unity within highly diverse populations lived under the Ottoman Empire, such as Erzurum and Sivas Congresses in 1919.

to create a short-term solution or opposition to emerging tensions and problems, but rather to build for a long-term alliance that could transform society and bring an alternative Turkey into being.

### *An alternative radical Pedagogy*

In its programme, the HDK recognises the importance of common struggle and unity between all marginalised communities and individuals that have long been left out or excluded from mainstream Kemalist hegemony and its Turkish-Islam synthesis. For this reason, the HDK sees '*all struggle of the democratic opposition as a common struggle*' and defines the HDK as a common ground/space for all '*workers, laborers, immigrants, women, peasants, young people, retirees, disabled people, LGBTQ individuals who are excluded and ignored and all faith communities and for those whom living spaces are destroyed*'. (HDKa, 2012: 3)

The HDK was established with the aim of providing a social/political space where an alternative politics and culture could be developed, an alternative to the repressive and exploitative social order being manufactured by the two dominant existing socio-political movements (conservative-Islamist and nationalist-Kemalist).

HDK also hoped:

To spread the notion of democratic autonomy as a peaceful programme to solve the Kurdish issue for the entire society, to provide wider participation of people locally in decision making processes, which can help to facilitate peoples' free and voluntary unity; form a social and administrative system where all differences can be expressed freely, and which can reduce the centralised power of the top-down state over local governance (HDKa, 2012: 6).

Building on the successes of previous blocs, the HDK describes itself as a new united front of Turkey's social opposition:

against the capitalist exploitation of workers, against the male dominated oppression of women, against the domination of Sunni Islam over Alevis and Non-Muslims, against the domination of macho culture and homophobic mentality towards LGBTQ community, and against the chauvinist mentality based on Turkishness towards Kurdish people and other minorities' (HDK, 2012b: 7).

The HDK has an internationalist and global perspective in its vision of struggle. Its founding declaration shows that it does not limit its struggle only to the national scale, and declares solidarity with social movements struggling for emancipation across the globe:

Against the global domination of the capitalist system and its exploitative and oppressive mechanisms that destroys social life, isolates humans, alienates the individual from his/her own labour, society, identity and nature; to stand shoulder to shoulder with all those struggles going on around the world: on Wall Street, in Santiago, Chile; Cairo, Tunisia, Caracas and Gaza. For those different struggles to face each other and learn from each other's' experiences and nurture the spirit of joint struggle and solidarity in our land we take a new important step forward aiming to form a strong mass movement against the system (HDK Kuruluş Bildirgesi, 2012: 5).

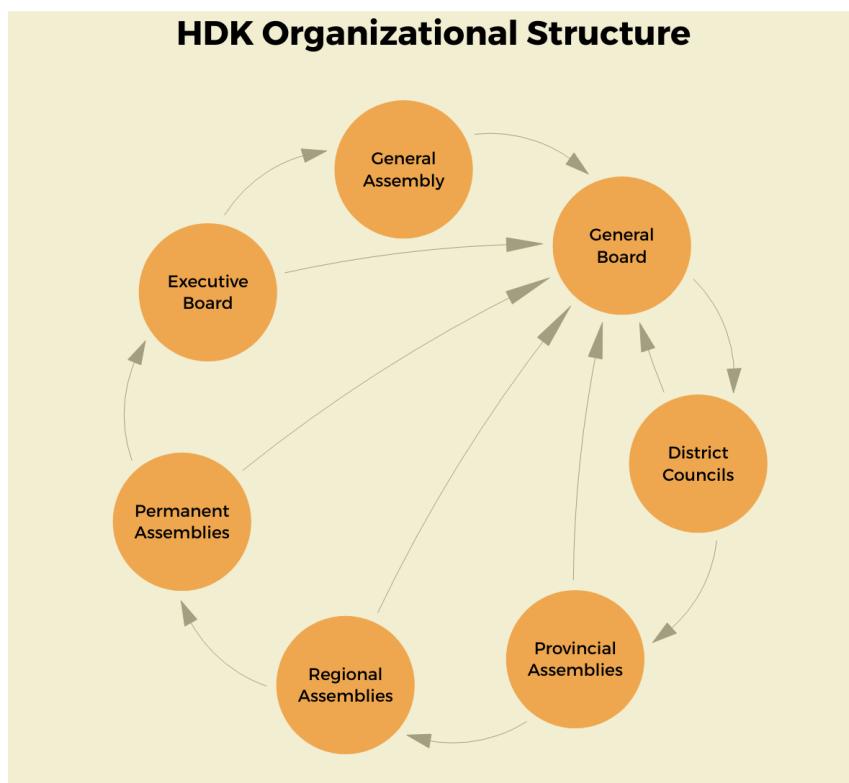
The programme and the statutes of the HDK relies on an alternative radical pedagogy which is developed as a fundamental critique of the dominant capitalist system; the monolithic state structure and national discourse; the hegemonic norms of gender culture; anthropocentrism in the human-nature relationship; and the exploitation of labour and income distribution. However, this radical pedagogy does not remain only at the level of opposition, but also seeks to propose an alternative new social life for the future, whilst it struggles in the present. The HDK programme is composed of a range of themes: 'Achieving democracy', 'the Kurdish issue', 'peace and democratic solutions', 'Local and Bottom-up governance, democratic autonomy', 'labor struggle', 'peoples and beliefs', 'women's freedom struggle' and 'LGBTQ struggle', 'ecology and life' and 'youth'. Each outlines a set of pre-figurative politics and practices necessary for the transformation of society and social relations. This new prefigurative politics seeks to change subjects and spaces through struggle, and create a new, alternative, free subject in a plural society that lives in peace with dignity.

HDK is hence conceived as a space for the organisation of a new type of life, with political and ethical frameworks, which respect diversity and difference, and emphasise equality. The diverse political organisations and parties, religious and minority groups were able to join HDK without renouncing their own identities (visions), while simultaneously not imposing theirs onto others (HDK Brochure, 2012: 8). The aim was that this could lead to the emergence of a new subjectivity and way of being and acting (HDK, 2012b: 8). Following this logic, the HDK adopted an equal representational structure. A quota system (50% women, 10% youth and 60% institutions and 40% individual) was accepted, with the hope that this could promote/encourage representation of women, youth and LGBTQ communities and individual members, and create an egalitarian organisational structure. This new organisational style has been utilized not only within the HDK structure but also in other localities and units;

neighbourhood, town and city assemblies; with the aim of spreading this new politics into broader society. One of the strengths of the HDK is to allow each institution its own autonomy - while at the same time working towards common aims and goals under the HDK umbrella. This was a crucial factor in the formation of the HDK.

#### *Organisational Structure of the HDK*

HDK's understanding of democracy is substantially broader than Representative Democracy. It aims to remove all obstacles preventing public participation in debate and organisation, facilitate participation in decision making processes, and strengthen the role and control of people at all levels of public life. HDK see the assemblies as the main organisational form for establishing and developing democracy and turning social actors into the main subjects taking control of politics. HDK adopted District/Provincial and Regional Peoples' Assemblies (see figure below) to '*create and develop various forms of autonomous governance models that can serve the diverse demands and needs of the people*' (HDK, 2014b: 16).



**FIGURE 4: HDK Organisational Structure**

Based on a congress-based organisational format, the HDK has a horizontal network structure extending from the General Assembly to district, city and neighbourhood assemblies. The

HDK's founding statute defines the functioning of the congress structure (The HDK Statute, Online access).<sup>22</sup>

The HDK is led by a General Board<sup>23</sup> made up of delegates which are elected to represent their constituencies. Within the General Board, sits a general assembly with 121 members elected from the General Board, and 25 members on the Executive Board which coordinates the work and decisions of the General Assembly. The structure includes Permanent Assemblies (women, youth, education, ecology, health, labour, LGBTQ) and Commissions (Peoples' and Faith Commission) set up to work on various issues. The HDK also has a *Resolution and Settlement Board* that exists to resolve emerging problems and tensions both within the HDK and its commissions as well as at the local and regional level through face-to-face discussions and negotiations. The HDK has elected spokespersons who can talk about issues in public and at in the Parliament and in the District, Provincial and Regional Assemblies made up of local representatives from 20 geographical provinces. In sum, the concept of Congress refers to a common struggle and resistance space, where the diverse social actors (individually and collectively) come together to work towards identified common goals at multiple scales through various practices and strategies (temporary commissions, publications, bulletins, internet support, participation in events, etc.), and with measures taken to redress inequities in mainstream modes of political participation through a quota system.

The General Board is the highest decision-making body of the Congress and meets twice a year (October and March of each year). The General Board consists of delegates and national delegates that are elected for one year. The board is responsible for taking all the decisions required for the future, taking into consideration the political and social developments of the time. It selects two co-spokespersons (one male, one female) for 6-month periods (until the next board meeting) to carry on the work and promote the principles of the congress. In the formation of the General Assembly, an equal representation principle is exercised in favour of women, where at least half of the delegates are women. If the quota cannot be met, posts

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<sup>22</sup> HDK Statute, 'Tüzük,' *Halkların Demokratik Kongresi* (blog), available at, <http://www.halklarindemokratikkongresi.net/temelmetinler/tuzuk/61> (last accessed June 24, 2018).

<sup>23</sup> The number of the general assembly has changed since the HDK first established in 2011. While the first congress in 2011, General Assembly had more than 800 delegates representing 81 cities across Turkey, the numbers gone up and down according to the political and social context of the time. In the light of the increased repression since the 2015, the number of the delegations have been reduced and currently the General assembly has 400 delegations.

remain unfilled rather than replacing them with another man. Similarly, at least 20% represent youth - to ensure that those under 27 years of age are represented on the General Board (*Ibid*).

The General Assembly is responsible for carrying out all necessary work according to the aims and objectives of the Congress as outlined in the programmes and statutes, and executes the decisions taken at the General Board meetings. It forms temporary commissions to work on specific issues, and works together with the Permanent Assemblies and other Commissions established by the General Board. In order to carry out the work of the General Assembly, the Executive Board is elected with 25-members amongst the members of the General Assembly. The Executive Board is responsible for making all the arrangements and coordination within and between the Permanent Assemblies and other Assemblies and Commissions.

In line with the programme of council and the decisions of the General board, the HDK forms various assemblies. The district, city and regional Assemblies can also form temporary commissions in their locality according to the needs and demands of their members. When a General Board meeting is convened, Permanent Assemblies and Commissions are established on various issues, including: Law, Economy, Anti-imperialism and International Solidarity, Labour, Education, Health, Disabilities, Human Rights, Children's Rights, Culture and Art, Kurdish Question and Peace, Local Governments, Ecology, LGBTQ Rights, ANIMAL Rights, Organisation, Peoples and Beliefs (faith), Conscientious Objection and Anti-militarism, Research for Truth and Reconciliation and Agriculture and Animal Husbandry.

The HDK's regional assemblies are made up of members of city assemblies that are selected by the General Board. City (provincial) assemblies are made up of representatives of district assemblies, and district assemblies are made up by those members of the district general assembly and local assemblies as well as local people that live and work there. The Regional, Provincial and District assemblies carry on necessary work to implement those decisions and programmes of the Congress in their places within the specific contexts and needs of their localities.

#### *HDK Affiliates*

The Peoples' Democratic Congress (*Halkların Demokratik Kongresi*, HDK) was formed as an umbrella organisation to provide a space for all oppressed, marginalised, exploited sectors of society. Coming together around the fundamental principles of peace, democracy and an

equal society that recognises diversity and difference, equal citizenship and representation of the different minorities and faith groups. HDK seeks to ensure the rights of all constituencies are protected; to end patriarchal exploitation; and to stop the exploitation of labour and the destruction of the environment.

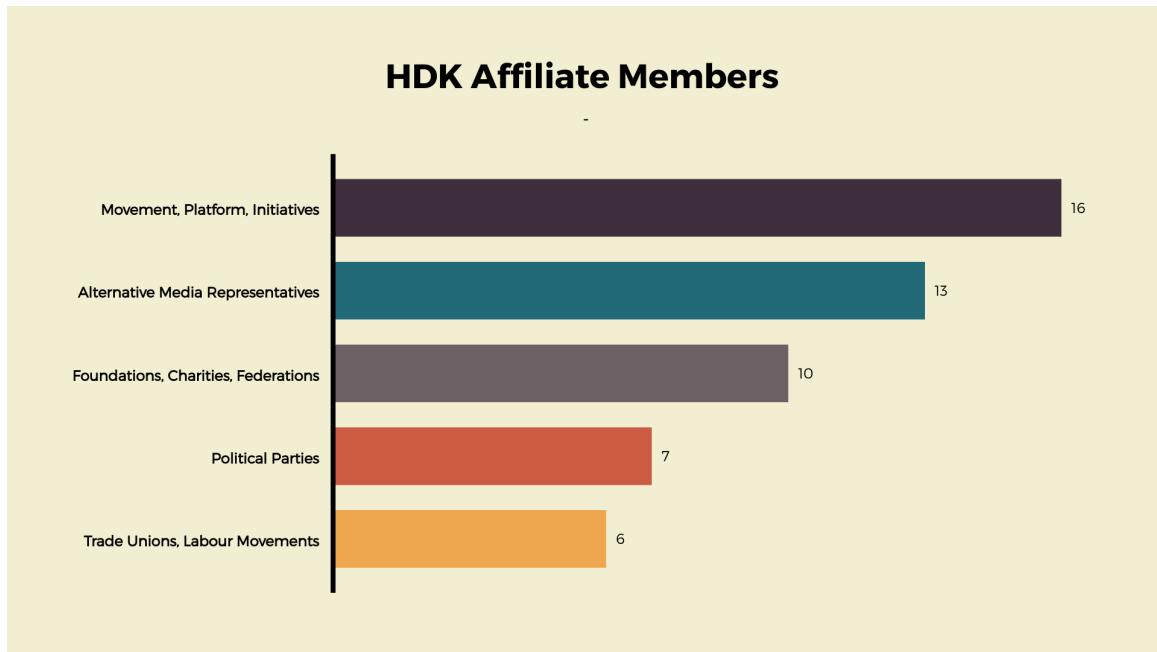
The HDK's intention is to engender a new form of relationality, solidarity and sociability between varied social actors who come from very different backgrounds, and create a broad social movement struggle that goes beyond the narrow framing of 'party' politics (Bora, 2016: 899). Such a form of politics would respect the plurality of the political alliance, and strive for unity in diversity and autonomy for diverse subjects. According to the HDK's statutes, 60 percent of the membership are from organisations and 40 percent are independent members. The HDK has 52 affiliated organisations that work on different areas and issues across Turkey. These include numerous left wing political movements, organisations and parties, Kurdish liberation movements and political parties, women's groups, minority groups (ethnic and religion), trade unions, LGBTQ groups, newspapers and magazines and those independent members who are not affiliated to any of the above.

While some of those affiliates have been in the political arena for a long time - such as the left-wing organisations and political parties, others are newly emerging social actors organise around specific issues such as women's rights, LGBTQ rights, minority rights, human rights and environmental issues. Similarly, within the affiliated members, there are small groups such as 'Nor Zartonk' (New Awakening) a leftwing Armenian youth association, as well as very large organisations such as the Democratic Society Congress. However, despite the size and age differentials of these movements, they decided to organise a common struggle together with the aim of fundamentally transforming Turkish society under the umbrella of the HDK.

Despite the above, it is important to note that the HDK was formed at a particular political conjuncture, when peace negotiations were taking place between the Turkish government and the PKK, and there appeared to be a much stronger tolerance for democratic and civic participation on the part of the state. As we have shown in the earlier sections, this is no longer the case, and it has become increasingly difficult for HDK to operate openly and publicly, due to the massive repression dealt out to its members and supporters.

The figure below shows the relevant proportions of the HDK's various constituencies including political parties, foundations, associations, trade unions, movements, platforms, initiatives,

congresses, magazines and newspapers<sup>24</sup>. These numbers reflect the 60% of members that are made up by organisations, whilst the individual member percentage remains 40%.



**FIGURE 5: HDK Affiliate Members**

Looking at HDK's short history it would not be wrong to define the first two years (2011-2013) of HDK as its '*golden years*', a time when it generated huge amounts of political excitement and optimism. Both the HDK members we interviewed and the data we obtained during our field work showed that the HDK gained significant visibility in these first years, largely due to the context of the time, when a peace agreement was still an option, there was relatively little conflict, and the HDK was able to attract the interest of the media in its activities. Its early success reflected the wider societal desire for a new, alternative socio-ecological contract for Turkey. It was in this climate that the HDK decided to form a new political party in order to further its broad and ambitious goals. This led to the creation of the HDP – the Peoples' Democratic Party, explored below.

#### *HDP: a result of the quest for common struggle*

The experience of working together collectively both before and after the HDK formed, led to discussions about the possibility of forming a political party in order to provide a common

<sup>24</sup> It is important to note that while these affiliates are there as magazine or newspapers, they represent a political group – vision that around them.

political platform for the representation of the HDK's broad constituencies and promote their demands. Initially the discussions were on forming an umbrella party as a collective representative of the HDK constituencies in the parliamentary sphere. At this initial stage, the HDK was seen as the main reference point for struggle, while the party was seen as a continuation of the synergy created by the previous blocks and was conceived only as a 'political tool' for the materialisation of the radical social imagination proposed by the HDK.

However, rapid social and political changes and a looming election, forced a very quick decision on the HDK, and on the 15-16 of October 2011, after only one year of existence, and before finishing the development of its own organisation through the creation of local assemblies, the HDK created its own party under the name of Peoples' Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi* (HDP) in order to provide a '*stronger voice in the political arena*' (Önen, 2012). Describing the HDP's emergence as a 'historical necessity' and 'common ground of hope', its first co-president Fatma Gök (2012) argued '*the HDK wants to participate in the real politics of Turkey and to be an organised power there. HDP was established as a tool to achieve that. HDP is a difficult structure and a political tool that has never been experienced before, but we have no other choice*' (Gök, 2012). Another founding Co-Chairman Yavuz Önen argued that the '*HDP was created in order to reconstruct the rule of law based on human rights, the functioning of true democracy and creating a peaceful environment that is necessary for the realisation of these two basic objectives*' ('*Başarmaktan Başka Çaremiz Yok*', 2012). There was also a strong belief that the establishment of the political party would help to strengthen and form a new type of relationality between the diverse affiliates of the HDK (Bora, 2016: 900). Describing the party as a political necessity and with a strong belief that it would create an alternative space for struggle, most founding and active members of the HDK were directly involved in the establishment of the party.

Despite being a newly established party, both in terms of its visions and aims and the diversity of its social base, the HDP, as we highlighted above, represented both the deep-rooted traditions of the previous pro-Kurdish political Parties, left-wing socialist groups and political parties, as well as in the dynamics of the new social movements we noted earlier (Tekdemir, 2016). The party aimed at providing common ground for the representation of these diverse groups as well as their demands.

However, there were different expectations and visions of what the party should and could do, expressed by different members of the HDK. For the Kurds, this was crucial, as all their previous efforts at democratisation had been blocked by harsh practices. They hoped that the HDP could facilitate the Turkification of Kurdish issues and demands, building support across Turkey. The decision to dissolve the pro-Kurdish BDP - which joined the HDP in April 2014 - can also be read as the manifestation of a new electoral strategy going beyond a solely Kurdish party. Recognising this, Abdullah Öcalan, sent a message to the HDP's Second Extraordinary Congress on 22 June 2014, saying:

Dear comrades, we never thought that our movement that emerged in the 1970s was separate from the Turkish revolutionary, democratic and socialist movement in any period. We have always regarded ourselves as an integral part of this outcome. We always aimed to be inclusive. We made a call; we took a step. We separated from one to another for unknown or less known reasons. (...) We have always considered the working class and all oppressed classes and those basic cultural values across the whole geography as strategically important first-class friends and comrades. Thus, we have provided the ground for a true internationalism, we led this, and we carry on walking on this principle. We are now running to reunite our primary friends, comrades and act together with them. We have recently tried to contribute to the formation of the HDK and HDP with all our power. Despite all the counter-efforts of the hegemonic power, we have not stepped back. Those hegemonic, oligarchic forces that imposed separatism and divisiveness, in the name of "nation, nation state and unity of the state", were forced to drop their masks (Öcalan, 2014).

According to Tekdemir (2016) the HDP provided a new political configuration based on notions of a pluralist and radical democracy that recognises diversity and difference and proposes a 'new life' and 'new vision' for 'Another Turkey'. This new vision and new life proposed under 'Another Turkey' has come to challenge the existing socio-political configurations of what he calls the 'old Turkey' (Kemalist modern and secular viewpoint) and the 'new Turkey' (neoliberal and political Islamic tradition with AKP) (Tekdemir, 2016: 1236). Providing an alternative to both the societal visions of the 'new Turkey' and the Old Turkey', the HDP's 'another Turkey' is based on the Kurdish political/national movement and its organic affiliation to other marginalised and oppressed groups (Tekdemir, 2016: 1215). Inspired by Mouffe's concept of Radical Democracy, Tekdemir (2016: 1215) argues that with its political project (the new life), the HDP provided a new political ground '*for proposing a radical identity and radical citizenship' and for calling on the system to 'confront' its past and show its willingness to*

*participate in this ‘transformation’ with the aim of radically transforming the hegemonic power that can transform the society and its relations in the agonistic democratic public sphere’.*

The HDP participated in the 2014 presidential election with its co-leader, Selahattin Demirtaş, who won 9.77% of the vote. The HDP then entered the June 7, 2015 election, and with a sweeping victory, won 6,058,489 votes and 13.12% of the vote, thereby securing 80 seats. This made the HDP a very important political party (the third largest) with the power to block AKP policies and indeed Erdogan’s own political ambitions in the national assembly. This was the first major success of the collective social groups under the HDK umbrella, and created hope within the wider society, but it also meant that HDP had become a serious threat to the government.

#### *Emerging Challenges and Tensions*

In their struggle to transform existing power relations and bring about an alternative future, the HDK has faced opportunities, challenges and tensions emerging out of various political processes operating on the local, national, regional and global scales. Whilst subsequent sections will explore the impact of the increased violence and authoritarian context of later years, and the AKP’s brutal crackdown on the HDK, HDP (and other social movements), this section explores some of the other tensions and challenges that the HDK faced and which emerged from our research process.

#### *Gezi Protests*

The Gezi Protest of 2013 was a significant moment in Turkey’s history, whereby a broad ‘political spectrum’ of social movements came together to oppose the AKP’s authoritarian power and neo-liberal proposal to destroy a historic public space. However, despite recognising its significance, the lack of a common decision on participation in the Gezi protests by the HDK executive committee, and the ‘cautious’ approach that was taken by the Kurdish Liberation movement due to ongoing peace negations with the AKP, created a great deal of tension within the HDK, generating a loss of confidence and trust and causing some members to distance themselves from the HDK.

On the one hand, ‘the repertoires of collective action’ and ‘common imaginaries’ and ‘claims’ for an alternative Turkey at the Gezi protests were shared by the HDK, and in many ways represented what an ‘alternative Turkey’ could look like, in terms of multiculturality, plurality

and diversity of identities, and bottom-up organisational forms of democracy and inclusion. However, '*the difficulty in taking the right attitude in the right place*' created new dilemmas and challenges within the HDK. The Gezi protests also revealed the great turmoil and indecisiveness of the HDK, when faced for the first time in its history with an emerging revolutionary moment. As highlighted by some movement activists, '*not being able to handle Gezi in a revolutionary way*', '*different interpretations/conceptualisations of Gezi*' and '*different approaches and plans of actions*' within the HDK caused further challenges (Political Party vs Congress, Workshop 5).

In fact, the repertoire of collective struggle (forums, assemblies, bottom-up decision making etc) that emerged during the Gezi Protest was similar to the 'repertoire of collective action' of the HDK; and the demands of the Gezi protestors directly corresponded to HDK's. However, despite being present at Gezi from the start, the HDK's inability to come up with a concrete plan and decision on Gezi prevented the HDK members from fully participating and benefitting from the Gezi process.

#### *The dissolving of Peace and Democracy Party (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi'nin, BDP)*

The dissolution of the Peace and Democracy Party (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi, BDP) in April 2014 (which constituted the main body of the Kurdish liberation movement within the electoral domain) and its decision to join the HDP across Turkey, and beyond the Kurdish region, was another important turning point which created a great deal of tension within the HDK (and HDP). The tension emerged firstly due to some HDK members' concerns over what the possible implications the BDP's closure might be on the HDP/HDK. Some members argued that the process inevitably changed the meaning attributed to the HDP (and HDK) as it would have significant effects on the HDP/HDK priorities and cadres in favour of the Kurdish Liberation movement, which could subsequently affect the public perception of the HDP by labelling it as 'the Kurdish Party' (as happened to all previous Kurdish parties since the early 1990s). Secondly, the fact that this decision was taken 'from above' and implemented without any prior consultations/discussions within the HDK increased the existing concerns and tensions within the HDK as it was seen as contrary to the democratic decision-making mechanisms of the HDK and HDP.

It was due to these concerns that EMEP (Labour Party), one of the biggest affiliates of the HDK, which had played a crucial role in its establishment, left the HDK in 2014. EMEP argued that

the dissolution of the BDP would change the balance of powers drastically and turn the HDP into a “*mass party with a certain ideological approach*”, allowing the Kurdish Movement to dominate it politically. Instead, EMEP argued that the HDP should remain a common component party. They argued that ‘the unity of struggle between labor and democratic forces cannot be achieved by coming together in the form of an ideological mass party’. According to EMEP, the ‘problem of the programme’ would come to the fore and that ‘ideological, political differences by nature would be the main obstacle to the unification’ of social forces. (Emek Partisi Genel Yönetim Kurulu, 2014), EMEP left the HDP first and then the HDK and become observer’ rather than active member.

#### *7 June 2015 General Elections: ‘Dual Challenge’: Victory and Violence*

The electoral success of the HDP in the June 2015 election made the HDP the third biggest party in the National Parliament. This was another important milestone and turning point in the history of the HDK. While the HDP’s victory can be seen as representing broad societal acceptance of the HDK’s future imaginaries and aspirations, it also brought to the fore real institutional challenges for the HDK. Firstly, it changed the power dynamics between the HDK and HDP, in which the HDP was becoming more popular and came to ‘overshadow’ the HDK. Secondly, the electoral victory created difficulties and ruptures, as it led to a new wave of violent repression and arbitrary detentions, initiated by the authoritarian state led by the AKP, in order to erode the newly acquired political position won by the HDK/HDP.

After 2015, elections became the most important political means (instrument) for the HDK/HDP rather than assemblies, and the focus shifted to producing an election-based policy platform and social opposition, rather than grassroots social transformation of society. Incorporating and transferring in 2016 both the women and youth assemblies to the HDP - the two main social actors/assemblies for social organisation and societal transformation for the HDK - significantly reduced the organisational base of the HDK, increased the power imbalances between the two, and heightened tensions between the HDK and HDP.

However, with the electoral success of 2015, the HDP not only became an alternative political platform for wider social opposition, but also became the principle target of the AKP. HDP’s electoral victory was seen as the biggest blow for the AKP in its history, preventing it from implementing its controversial policies. Suddenly, HDP appeared as a significant obstacle to the realisation of the AKP’s ‘New Turkey vision’, and challenged the maintenance of status

quo. The AKP response was a new wave of violence targeting the HDP (and HDK) including detention, arrest, attacks on party offices and members. This wave of violence was also extended to other social oppositional groupings, organisations and individuals which either shared similar political imaginaries and aspirations to the HDK, or openly supported their struggle and quest for creating an alternative Turkey. This radical shift in the politics of the AKP ran in parallel with two ISIS led bomb attacks in Suruc (a Kurdish city) in July 2015 and then in Ankara in October 2015, during a peace march, which targeted HDP supporters and killed 102 people.

These brutal and violent actions aimed to ‘criminalise’ and ‘discredit’ the HDP/HDK struggle and vision, and prevent them from carrying on their struggles in public spaces. The government’s fear that the HDP/HDK alternative model for Turkey was rapidly resonating in wider society unleashed unimaginable violence on both the HDK/HDP, in particular, and the democratic social opposition in general.

Whilst the historical practice of state violence and repressive politics against all opposition movements had continued during the peace talks (2013-2015), it had been significantly less intense. From 2015 onwards, the Turkish government engaged in a full-scale war, aimed at impeding and hindering gains/advances made by the Kurds in Syria and eliminating all organised spaces of struggle for the Kurds and political opposition on national and local scales. The HDK/HDP has been greatly affected by this new wave of violence.

During this process of criminalisation of the HDK and HDP by the state and mainstream media, many HDK/HDP members /activists were arrested and detained, and many more forced to go into exile due to the threat of long prison sentences. Indeed, this process has not only interrupted the HDK’s ongoing learning and knowledge production process, but also prevented the embodied knowledge and experiences from being shared within the movement and its partners. The violence and attacks carried out against Academics for Peace<sup>25</sup> and public sector union workers affected the HDK, narrowing its political practices and policies, as there were strong synergies and relationships between those autonomous spaces of struggle.

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<sup>25</sup> The Academics for Peace were a group of Academics who signed a declaration condemning the Turkish military bombardments and attacks on Kurdish regions in 2015. See <https://barisicinakademisyenler.net/English>

To give some important examples of the nature of this ongoing repression, the co-spokesperson of the HDK Onur Hamzaoğlu together with Musa Piroğlu (the Secretary General of the Revolutionary Party), Deputy Chairperson of the Socialist Party of the Oppressed (ESP) Fadime Çelebi, Kezban Konukcu, the spokesperson for the Platform for Socialist Solidarity (SODAP), Naci Sönmez, the Green Left Party co-chairs, and Eylem Tuncaeli were all arrested for issuing a joint press statement made by the HDK condemning Turkey's invasion of Afrin, Syria, just before the HDK's 3rd Ordinary Congress in February 2018. Similarly, the two former co-leaders of the HDP, Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ and seven other former Parliamentarians have all been detained since November 2018. Furthermore, 94 out of 102 elected local municipality mayors in Kurdish cities have been unilaterally removed and replaced with government appointed trustees – not dissimilar to colonial governors.

While all of these extremely violent and anti-democratic practices have deeply affected the HDK (and the HDP), it continues its struggle for the transformation of society through grassroots organising and political action.

## Conclusion

We hope that the present chapter, in setting out the historical context, has shown the vibrant and dynamic nature of social struggle within which the HDK emerged, its evolution and its current situation. Rather than seeing the HDK as an empty vessel, our analysis shows the HDK emerged out of lessons, experiences and knowledge produced by the collective historical struggle of many diverse social actors. Hence, we argue that the HDK's emergence was a 'historical necessity', rooted in a recognition by diverse social actors of the need to form a new political organisation with a new radical politics that could capture the temporal and spatial momentum of the historical moment, and bring together those sections of society that have long been marginalised and excluded from the *Turkishness Contract* (Ünlü, 2018).

Looking at the HDK's short history and historical timeline, the movement in a very short time created an exciting alternative and offered a future horizon of Turkey that was unique in its scope, ambition and inclusivity of marginalised sectors of society. Both the HDK members we interviewed and the data we obtained during our field work show that the HDK gained significant visibility in those first years, largely due to socio-spatial temporality of the conjuncture, whereby peace was still an option, conflict was relatively low, and the media was interested in the HDK's activities. It was in this climate that the HDK sought to form a new

political organisation, a new party, in order to capitalise on this momentum and expand and extend its influence and capacity to represent those excluded groups in the parliament. That decision, and its subsequent electoral success, brought with it a number of challenges and problems internally, in terms of the relationship between HDK and HDP, but more importantly also unleashed the full anti-democratic and authoritarian wrath of the Turkish state.

While the future direction of HDK remains an open question, this chapter has clearly suggested that the processes, practices and strategies of the HDK, aimed at uniting a wide range of social forces left out of the benefits of Turkish ‘development’, and the subsequent creation of the HDP and its immediate electoral successes, has been nothing short of historic. In the next section of this research, we will dig deeper into this short history and analyse what kind of learning and knowledge production has taken during this period, drawing on the historical memory and experiences of the activists that made it happen.

### **3. How Do Knowledge-making and Learning Happen in the HDK?**

Aziz Choudry (2019: 4), an expert on learning and knowledge-making in social movements, argues that whilst state repression against social struggle has been substantially explored within academia, what lessons social movements have gained or missed from such experiences does not garner the same attention. This is further evidence that the dynamics, politics and wealth of knowledge-making that takes place within social movement and activist contexts is often neglected and/or overlooked by academia and even by the social movements themselves (Choudry & Kapoor, 2010). As a result, the voices, ideas, perspectives and theories produced by social movements during the course of their struggles often get ignored, rendered invisible or made irrelevant to processes seeking broader social change (Kapoor, 2009; Choudry, 2007).

Attempting to overcome this reality, increased numbers of critical scholars have drawn attention to how social movement spaces are inherently ‘pedagogical learning spaces’ where various forms of learning, theorising and intellectual work take place. They argue that some of the most powerful criticism and understanding of the existing dominant hegemonic ideas/power structures and visions of social change emerge in spaces of struggles (Choudry & Kapoor, 2010; Foley, 1999; Melucci, 1989, Novelli, 2010, Novelli and Ferus-Comelo, 2010). However, despite the proliferation of useful conceptual and theoretical discussions on the learning experiences of social movements in recent years, there seem to be few empirical studies (Walter, 2007: 251). In addition to this, most studies on learning seem to be carried out within a Western European-focused epistemological framing (Mamdani, 1995, 1996; Kapoor, 2007; Choudry, 2007).

In his work on theorising learning in social movements, Foley (1999) argues that our theorisation of social movements should pay special attention to the rich learning processes taking place in the context of activism. It is this that we would like to pay attention to in this chapter, where we will explore the different forms of learning and learning experiences of HDK activists as they undertake their struggles for social transformation.

Based on our data analysis, we can identify three main areas/forms through which learning takes place and activists gain new learning experiences: learning through unstructured

experience; learning through structured programmes; and spontaneous/latent/hidden learning. By focusing on learning experiences and knowledge-making at the HDK, we seek to contribute towards filling the present empirical gap and develop a modest objection to 'First World/western' epistemological and geographical dominance. Moreover, Kapoor (2007) and Mamdani (1995) argue that learning and knowledge-making are closely related to history, structural conditions, culture and belief, material and discursive practices of the specific place where learning and knowledge-making takes place. To this extent, our research can be seen as a reflexive effort as we seek to explore the specific context and conditions within which learning takes place, and how these conditions that affect learning can be better conceptualised and understood.

Before we move on to analyse the learning experiences and practices which take place in the HDK, we want to call attention to a few important points about learning, and learning processes which we developed during the course of our research. Firstly, locating learning processes within the broader sociological and historical discussions on social movements, we argue that learning is closely related to the historical, political, cultural and economic processes and contexts within which social movements operate as well as the political/social '*wish and desire of social movements*' to develop new temporal, spatial tools, forms and politics in order to change/transform/influence the existing configurations of power. Secondly, learning is a relational phenomenon that occurs as a result of complex/dynamic webs of relations and interactions between/within human/non-human beings. Thirdly, learning is a dialectical process where social movements develop their 'repertoires of actions' for present time issues/problems in a dialectical relationship with previous praxis and knowledge, whereby activists assimilate their new experiences into already existing concepts whilst at the same time adapting existing concepts to new experiences. Fourthly, learning should be seen as a multi-dimensional process rather than an outcome, which involves processes of 'unlearning' and 'relearning' through which social actors (re)develop a new way of thinking, being, acting. Thus, learning processes signify a holistic process of change/transformation (through unlearning and learning) that involves multiple forms of transformation (cognitive, emotional, cultural and behavioural). Fifthly, the practice of researching learning processes and experiences should be done in a dialogical manner, whereby both individual and collective (institutions) learning processes and the role of each

one regardless of their positions/status are equally valued, while recognizing differences within and between them. Sixthly, through their own learning processes, social movements produce new knowledges (frameworks, concepts etc) rather than simply acting upon pre-existing Ideas. Seventhly, transformation and socialization of these individual learning experiences- which are often embodied - is not an inevitable or spontaneous process, but rather one that is closely related to the methods of learning and organisation/management of learning spaces. As such, the unleashing of the transformational potential of these embodied learning experiences often requires a carefully thought through, active and radical pedagogy, as well as the necessary social conditions (material/non material- discursive and non-discursive) so that these new learning experiences can give rise to the new culture that is required for a sustainable future society. Finally, learning is a contradictory, complex and disjointed process that produces different experiences (both positive and negative) depending on particular circumstances. While social movement struggles generate a range of positive learning experiences, in some cases when movements fail to achieve their desired goals (for whatever reasons) it can also produce negative experiences. For example, when activists armed with newly learned knowledge/practices see their own political institutions are not acting in line with its visions and imaginaries, learning may lose its potential to strengthen the struggle for social freedom and instead undermine it. That is to say that learning might undermine the social freedom struggle rather than strengthening it.

As we demonstrate in this chapter, activists learn profoundly during the course of their struggles, and most learning process and knowledge-making at the HDK generally takes place in struggle and/or through struggle, often spontaneously. Considering the fact that a significant number of activists are not only involved in the HDK but also in different political parties, trade unions, political organisation, civil society groups and women organisations, the place where all these different knowledge and experiences come into contact with each other is mostly through struggle and in struggle. However, through initiatives to create structured learning environments in recent years, the spaces and tools for learning have been increasing.

Inspired by the conceptual framework put forward by Foley's work (1999) on social movement learning (formal, non-formal, informal and incidental learning), we identify and analyse the learning and knowledge-making processes at the HDK in three main forms of learning: *Learning in Struggle*, *Learning Through / from Struggle* and *Learning to Struggle*. However, it

is important to note that these three processes are interrelated, intertwined, reciprocal whereby each mutually constitutes the other. Thus, our classification of these three forms of learning processes emerges out of our aim to draw attention to the *forms* (structured, unstructured, latent), *temporal* (short-, medium- and long-term) and *spatial* (inside-outside, central-local) and *situational* (instant, under difficult conditions, need-based) dimensions of learning processes.

### **Learning in Struggle**

Of course, you learn a lot of things. For example, you learn how to write a press release. You learn how to read a press release, how to negotiate with the police, how to treat the police when your friend is being detained, which actions will cause you to be beaten or what you need to do to avoid being beaten etc... You learn all of these and more by experience and from the environment in which experience takes place. Of course, there are always people who are more experienced than you and there are others who are less so.... It is through coming in contact with these diverse experiences and sharing them that learning takes place (Individual Interview, T4, HDK Youth Assembly Activist).

Our analysis shows that the vast majority of activists were involved in social struggle before the HDK, and in some cases even alongside the HDK. Only for a few of the activists we interviewed was the HDK their first social movement. In this sense, the movement activists participating in the HDK arrived with their bags full of learning experiences from their previous struggles and at the HDK they continued to add new learning experiences. Thus, these prior learning experiences spanning a longer period of time form an important background for learning process in the current struggle.

According to our research, the most effective learning areas for HDK activists were unstructured learning environments such as meetings, marches, demonstrations, campaigns i.e. – processes of learning *in the struggle*. These unstructured learning environments significantly increase knowledge-making opportunities as individuals from different political movements meet, engage and learn from each other's experiences. While structured knowledge-making and learning interventions, some of which we will review in the next section, can only reach a limited number of individuals, unstructured environments can be much more effective due to the broad participation of a wide range of people. Knowledge-making in these unstructured learning environments related to a wide range of activities of struggle such as press releases, public demonstrations with police conflict, occupations,

election campaigns, assembly activities, street theatre, commemorations, street-park forums – all of which enable activists to build their own subjectivity and experience through this collective action capacity development process.

From the perspective of HDK activists, both the struggle repertoires of the HDK and the struggle repertoires of broader oppositional social movements since 2011 have been crucial spaces for the generation of new learning processes. Aside from regular organising activities such as press releases, demonstrations and meetings, assembly meetings, commemorations, forums, events and conferences, a number of significant events in the course of the struggle were identified as having been inherently educative/pedagogical spaces in which activists gained new perspectives, new subjectivities, new knowledges etc. These included:

- hunger strikes launched in 2012 by thousands of Kurdish political prisoners for the right to be educated in mother tongue and the end of the solitary confinement of the leader of the Kurdish Liberation movement Abdullah Öcalan;
- the June Resistance in 2013 that started in İstanbul Gezi Park and spread to various cities in Turkey (known as Gezi Park Resistance);
- solidarity actions to protest ISIS attacks in Rojava in 2014;
- protests against environmental massacres, killing of women and work-related murders across Turkey
- various election campaigns

The organisational form of the HDK, its repertoire of struggle, and the diversity of its members affect both the means and forms of learning in the HDK. In contrast to the central and hierarchical structure of the classical party-type organisation, taking part in a horizontal, pluralist and consensus-based Congress type organisation generates a different type of learning experience. Eyerman and Jamison (1991), with their concept of 'cognitive praxis' draw attention to the 'cosmological', 'technological' and 'organisational' effects of organisation in social movements on movement activists (and society). 'Cognitive praxis', refers to a process whereby activists as movement intellectuals collectively transform the historical trajectory and collective memory /identity and 'rewrite' the cognitive understandings of the social environment in which they operate through engaging in various form of 'knowledge practices' ('cosmological', 'technological' and 'organisational') (Eyerman

and Jamison, 1991; see also Taylor, 2013). Thus, the institutional form/structure of social movements, the form/style of work within the movement, the nature of internal communications and decision-making processes are all integral parts of this process of rewriting cognitive praxis. To this extent, the HDK's new strategy of social transformation as outlined in its programme, the innovative political form that brings together the rich diversity of peoples in Turkey on the basis of equality and recognition, its organisational structure, participation / decision making process and its radical libertarian pedagogy are fundamentally geared towards constituting a new 'cognitive praxis' that can bring about the desired societal transformation through the practices and articulation of its activists.

The highly dynamic nature of the intergenerational learning experience and knowledge transfer within the HDK has become an important advantage point for the process of reconstituting this collective 'cognitive praxis'. Indeed, by bringing those activists who have been part of the struggle since the 1960s together with those young activists whose first experience of political organising was joining the struggle of the HDK, the movement creates an 'intergenerational pedagogical space' where rich knowledge sharing takes place. No doubt, the co-existence of various activists coming from different generations at the HDK commissions, governing bodies and assemblies, and their participation and engagement in everyday struggle, increases the interactions and encounters between these diverse generations and provides an opportunity for them to learn from each other. Taking part in the struggle alongside each other enables the transfer of knowledge/practice about history, culture and daily life within/between different generations. The diversity between and within these generations in terms of class, education, culture and sexual orientation further enriches the content and nature of this learning process. For this reason, the HDK can be understood as a means as well as a space for rich processes of intergenerational learning and knowledge transfer.

Similarly, the experience of being together and engaging in the struggle with a range of political parties, political groups organized around radical magazines and newspapers,<sup>26</sup> foundations, platforms and individuals from different political traditions provides an important learning experience in terms of creating a '*common sense of belonging*' and

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<sup>26</sup> It is very common in Turkey some radical groups organising around magazines and newspapers.

'*collective movement (the HDK) identity*' without subsuming one identity to the other (Writing the History of the HDK Together, Workshop 1). HDK, as an organisation of 'commoning' based on the idea of a 'new life' that is imagined as classless, non-exploitative, gender egalitarian and sensitive to social ecology, builds a new emotional and discursive *cognitive praxis* amongst its activists. As we will see in the following chapters, this new *cognitive praxis* is being weaved not only through *material labour* but also by *non-material affective labour*.

We will now move on to analyse some fundamental mechanisms through which learning and knowledge production take place in HDK's struggle.

### *Assemblies*

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri describe the concept of the assembly as an important political tool that allows participants '*to grasp the power of coming together and acting politically in concert*' and '*a lens through which to recognise new democratic political possibilities*' (Negri & Hardt, 2019: 23). In a similar vein, in article 16 of its founding statutes, the HDK defines assembly as '*a fundamental means for building democracy and reconstituting all oppressed people as important political subjects*'.<sup>27</sup>

As stated by Onur Hamzaoğlu, assembly both as meaning (concept) and practice (form of organisation) entered into the political scene in Turkey at the beginning of the 2000s for 'different purposes' and in 'different forms' (Hamzaoğlu, 2019b: 88). While there is a lack of theoretical discussion about the concept of assembly in Turkey, in recent years thanks to the praxis of the HDK, the 'assembly' form has become a hotly discussed topic both within the HDK and beyond.<sup>28</sup> Our data shows that assemblies are both described as a 'possibility' that makes HDK unique, and also as the most prominent issue that yet to be realised due to the HDK's inability to turn them into a permanent and sustainable working organisations in practice given the fundamental role of assemblies in for building direct democracy and participation of communities at local level required for a radical societal change. As stated by most movement activists, while at the initial years, the HDK established various assemblies under its roof (especially youth, women, education, ecology and labour), with the

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<sup>27</sup> HDK Program (20114) available on HDK <https://www.halklarindemokratikkongresi.net/hdk/program/1746>

<sup>28</sup> For example, file title for *Express Magazine* September-November 2019, n° 170 was 'Assemblies in Theory and Practice'.

establishment of the HDP some of these assemblies were transferred to the HDP and while others lost their momentum in the later years, especially after 2015 with an increasingly conflictual context which also affected the HDK's ability to form assemblies in local areas rather than just at the centre. Today, apart from the Women, Health, Labor and Ecology Council, which are built at the centre level rather than at the local level there are almost no active assemblies operating.

According to most movement activists, one of the main obstacles for the proper functioning of the assemblies was the distinct nature of the existing organisational culture in Turkey (top-down, centralised party like) to this assembly type of organisation, and the unfamiliarity of activists with this form. While there is some experience of political partnerships within dominant organisational culture, the idea of organisation in the assembly form was novel for the activists involved. According to many movement activists, this novelty factor proved to be a hindrance for the movement in terms of overcoming internal resistance/hesitation towards to the idea of assemblies, as well as the reluctance of some of HDK's members organisations which are affiliated to other political organisations to form assemblies in their own localities. However, despite the hesitation and reluctance, most activists emphasised that since the HDK's formation almost all progressive political organisations across Turkey have come to conceive the assembly format as the best possible way of organising society.

The obstacles to forming assemblies was also a factor which proved a negative influence upon the motivation of some members, especially individual members, in some cases leading some to leave the movement. Another factor that has also affected both the functioning of the existing assemblies (for instance the Education assembly) and the HDK's ability to create new assemblies, is the increased state violence and upsurge in conflict since 2015. Indeed, this shift also dramatically affected the learning processes. Reflecting upon their experience in the Education Assembly, which was one of the most active learning spaces between 2011 and 2015, movement activists explained how their engagement in the Education Assembly enhanced their personal learning capacities, multiplied their learning experiences and raised their awareness of a libertarian pedagogy. One founding member of the Education Assembly describes their experience as follows:

Our Education Assembly activities were so different. First of all, we were almost close to creating the sort of organisation and togetherness as we imagined with the HDK. We had a number of progressive academics from

different universities across Turkey (from Boğaziçi University Education Science, Ankara University Education Faculty, EĞİTİM-SEN). Everyone was there as they were, without any of titles or hierarchies. We also had people wanting to join the HDK, people that did not want to take part in existing political organisations (political parties) as they have seen a different potential at the HDK. Even my friends who worked in private schools, high schools and elementary schools participated in our work. Representatives from Armenian schools, Rum Schools also took part in our work... I remember, for example a forum that we organised in 2012... We had speakers from different communities, such as Foti [Benlisoy], Garo [Paylan], Şerif Derince and Ronahi [Önen]. Some I knew before, while others I met there for the first time... We had such a bright and creative group of people. We were working and designing each of our events collectively and collaboratively, asking ourselves how our events could facilitate the kind of life that we all imagine. We wanted to make sure that we all enjoyed working together, that our work did not turn into banal work so none of us gets bored or felt uncreative. Thus, lots of talking and consideration had been out in each of our events. Our intention was to create another way of working and being together and organising life where everyone's opinion is valued, and people engaged and participated equally without any hierarchies and protocols. We made sure whoever attended our meetings (a party leader or member of parliament) she/he would have equal time to speak as anyone else. (...) I think we did extremely valuable work both in terms of mass participation and diversity of participation (Individual interview, T5).

Most activists argued that, whilst in the first two years of its existence the HDK invested a great deal of its energy in forming its assemblies with some important successes, with the formation of the HDP most of these newly established assemblies were transformed and became focussed towards the party, turning them into 'local constituencies' for its newly established party. In the following years, the intense election campaigns greatly hindered these assemblies. With the HDP gaining more power, most of the HDK's components began to focus on the party rather than the HDK, with many leaving the HDK to join the HDP instead. (See Hamzaoglu, 2019a)

The HDK's experiences of assemblies during its early years, and the consequent lack of sustainability and continuity of local assemblies brought the need for looking for new solutions and strategies, especially in the post 2015 period. For instance, in Ankara the HDK in some local areas started to develop new methods and strategies which could facilitate the establishment of assemblies. Talking about this, one activist notes:

As building local assemblies with local people was the desire of all HDK components, we began to think and act differently about how to create these local assemblies. Rather than saying 'we are going to organise an HDK assembly in such and such localities', we looked at each of the different localities to see what they already had in place, what is required...In some places we began to engage in existing local organisations (solidarity groups, cooperatives etc), in others we began to form new organisations that were not necessarily named as HDK assemblies. In order to speak about and take action regarding particular problems, needs and demands of these localities we have had to do something and engage in these localities rather than imposing our ideas upon them. For me there is no difference between saying the HDK Eryaman assembly and the Eryaman cooperation. Linking with and connecting to these already existing struggles adds strength to their movement. We did not impose our own ways and understanding upon these local spaces (in a dominant approach) in order to exist. It is because of this approach we have gained Eryaman, Mamak and Batikent. We won in Elyaman, Batikent and Mamak by eliminating the term domination, talking about that local rather than settling with the small things and by convincing our friends and people there. We created the assemblies like that, and they continue to exist.... we changed our culture. Previously, our senses were not that open, they were closed. We made decisions in ourselves, but we were experiencing a lack of implementation among locals. But now it is different. We can move together; we can reason on common ground and we can be on the same plane. This is why Ankara started to develop (Individual Interview, T26).

Today, the Health Assembly, which is the HDK's most active assembly, seeks to apply the knowledge acquired from previous experiences to a new assembly formation:

In the past, we thought that creating local assemblies would be an easy task and all we needed to do was to establish the same assemblies we had in the centre at these different local areas. But the practice has shown us that it was not so simple, and that these local assemblies could not be established simply from above! This indeed made us so tense! (...) But we need to rethink our approach. The thing is that the HDK cannot work as a rigid and ignorant organisation while created as a more dynamic and fluid form that embodies diversity. Thus, we need to go back and reflect on our previous experiences and think about where we made mistakes, and just let go of them! (...) We are now creating local health assemblies, but rather than saying to people what they have to do, we are expecting people to form their own local assemblies... (Individual Interview, T29).

Both the local assembly experiences in Ankara and the thematic assembly efforts such as the Health Assembly, are considered as new types of local initiatives that were created on the basis of lesson learned from previous experiences and process of creating assemblies. Thus, the notion of local assemblies, that first emerged as an idea, has turned into a real possibility

through activist learning from their previous experiences. Furthermore, due to the increasingly authoritarian AKP-MHP regime in Turkey, instead of calling these assemblies only under the HDK's name, the idea emerged to give them different names, in order to solve problems at the local level and as a general problem-solving tool. For example, Onur Hamzaoğlu's interview in *Express Magazine* indicates the drawbacks of naming rather than talking about the content as follows: '*In my experience, I have found that giving a name or putting an adjective is exclusionary. It is more valuable to talk about the content.*' (Hamzaoğlu, 2019a: 29). Assemblies in HDK are now constituted as participative and decision-making tools where everyone living in those localities and anyone facing problems can be included, rather than HDK activists alone.

While the structure and form of the assembly was alien to classical leftist movements that tended to operate in a more hierarchical manner, the more inclusive structure of the assembly, when functioning properly, allowed for social movement activists to develop their skills and knowledge. While only a partial success, the experience of creating and working in assemblies is seen by the majority of informants as having been a useful experience which provided significant learning experiences not just for the activists but also those outsiders.

#### *Rights and Beliefs Commission*

One of the most exciting dimensions of the formation of the People's Democratic Congress is the wide range of struggles encompassed within it. These include struggles relating to identity, class, gender and ecology. The HDK formed commissions such as the Rights and Beliefs and LGBTQ commissions to execute these pluralist and egalitarian perspectives within the movement. The official state perspective, summarised as 'one state, one nation, one flag' was associated with the denial of ethnic and religious diversity in Turkey, along with 'discipline and expulsion' policies based on this denial. These policies ranged from massacres to pogroms, mandatory resettlement to cultural and language assimilation, from racism to discrimination, from structural bureaucratic discrimination to physical violence. This range of policies have often led different ethnic and cultural groups in Turkey to absolute obedience/submission, silently stepping back, or limiting open political struggle on these issues. The establishment of the HDK, and especially its pluralist programme, defied this monistic state, and encouraged various oppressed groups to align themselves with the HDK.

The HDK's respect towards difference and diversity was expressed in the Rights and Beliefs Commission.

The Rights and Beliefs Commission made two extremely important contributions to the HDK. Firstly, it provided a shared space for different identities/communities that have had little opportunity to engage with each other previously. This allowed for the sharing of knowledge around these diverse histories, religions, cultures and languages. Interactions with different beliefs and ethnic identities between Kurds, Alevi, Arab, Cherkes, Pomak, Armenian, Georgian, Laz, Muslims, Rum, and Assyrians generated a transformative experience for activists in many ways as we will see in the following sections. One important element which activists flagged in this regard was the 'Peoples and Beliefs Talk about themselves' panel series. These panels, where representatives from a particular group had the chance to present about themselves, their cultures and struggles, enabled activists in the HDK to learn about the cultural diversity in Turkey. For example, in 2019 alone, eight panels were organised, and these panels included presentations from Alevi, Arabian Alevi, Assyrians, Armenians, Cherkes (Abkhaz, Oset, Ubih), Hemşin and Laz people. Events were also organised for the International Mother Language Day. In these events, diversity is considered as a resource, and valued as a fundamental part of the common struggle of marginalised, oppressed, and subjugated minorities: and this approach generated important learning processes for the activists involved.

Secondly, the Rights and Beliefs Commission made a central contribution to challenging dominant public memory that had been constructed on the basis of the official historical narrative in Turkey. In doing so it drew together alternative historical narratives, exchanged them between different groups and through inter-generational exchange, and created a powerful counter-collective memory. These *counter-memories*, which were entirely excluded in the public domain, were included in the HDK and presented as a new form of collective memory. The violence, resistance and mourning within the history of each group was introduced to other groups within the HDK, and progressively evolved into a common memory. For example, the accumulated learnings of the Rights and Beliefs Commission concerning the commemoration and celebrations of each group were gathered together and included in a Peoples and Beliefs Calendar. Memorial practices and events were organised in order to commemorate events such as the Armenian and Asuri (Seyfo) genocide, Pontus genocide, 6-7 September pogrom, Maraş, Çorum, Sivas and Gazi massacres, Senegal genocide;

various commemorations and celebrations such as Easter, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, the Armenian grape celebration, Arabian Alevi Gadir Hum celebration, Alevi Muharrem fasting, and Yezidi celebrations. These activities collectively formed a challenge against the dominant historical narratives. This collective memory process shows the determination and wisdom of the current struggle. This Peoples and Beliefs commission provides a unique space for exchanging hitherto silenced cultures and traditions, vindicating their existence and celebrating the rituals and practices of the diverse groups of the HDK. As activists engaged in these spaces, they at once taught and learned from the rich diversity that exists in Turkey, and in doing so laid the foundations for a distinct future reality.

#### *Street theatre*

The increasing oppression and witch hunts that followed 2015 in Turkey significantly affected the cultural and artistic activities undertaken by the HDK, but the role of artistic and cultural activities remains an important aspect of the HDK's struggle for hegemony. In an environment where the country's Ottoman heritage, Islam and Turkishness are the basis of historical tension with the West, cultural policies an important component of the AKP's hegemony. For example, demolishing the Atatürk Cultural Centre in Taksim square after the Gezi resistance movement and building a mosque right across from the demolished centre was a symbolic statement by the AKP of the cultural struggle between Kemalists and Islamists.

The work of the of HDK Culture and Art Commission was strongly influenced by the AKP's increasingly oppressive cultural policies. Most of the artistic members of the commission were impeded, detained, arrested, or jailed due to their artistic or political activism, and some were forced into exile. However, local commission members managed to resist the oppressive and prohibitive hegemonic cultural practices of the AKP with counter-cultural and artistic initiatives and performances. For example, a theatre artist who is a member of the HDK Culture and Art Council developed a process of street theatre activism in Ankara. The process demonstrated how new strategies of resistance can be developed during difficult times:

We, the people of Ankara have been experiencing an increased level of repression and violence under the State of Emergence Rule since 2015. We live in a city where the street performers or artists cannot perform on the streets. People who took part in Yüksel street resistance against the state's repressive policies have experienced systematic police violence every day. We decided to do something against this, and we began to talk to other friends and organisations about how to organise and develop

street theatres and festivals. In partnership and collaboration with other streets theatre groups (3 in Istanbul and 1 in Ankara) we started to perform on the streets of Ankara. We created a 3-4-minute-long performance, and would move on to the next street before the police would arrive. When the police attacked the people during Yüksel Resistance, we put on a play called 'Prohibitions and Plays' on Yüksel street. More than 600-700 people participated in this play and it was beautiful. We were performing exactly at the same time as the police was intervening in the Yüksel resistance - both to show police brutality and our support and solidarity at the same time. (...) In a city where even street musicians could not perform and where oppression and fear were increasing everyday, our taking the streets with form of theatre was quite something...Imagine a colourful scene where people are performing loudly on the streets with no chance of police intervening as we move rapidly after each short performance... Thus, street theatre allows us to reach and touch people on the street. When we perform on the street, we feel the same as those people who are experiencing those pressures. (Pedagogy focus group)

### **Learning from Experiences**

The new knowledge gained by activists through implicit and explicit learning processes generated through social movement praxis is accumulated, formulated and modified over time and space through the course of the struggle. These processes of filtering and modifying learning experiences and knowledge-making processes allow social movements and activists to critically evaluate and reflect upon their own past experiences. For example, by reflecting on the 'peace and negotiation' process carried out between the Kurdish liberation movement and the Turkish state during the 2013-2014 period (and the failure of this process), many HDK activists arrived at self-critical observations:

We should have treated the issue of 'socializing' the demand for peace more seriously. Rather than treating peace as merely a discursive demand, we should have made it a vital priority at the forefront of our struggle. Because we know that hegemonic rulers never willingly and spontaneously end conflicts unless they are forced to do. Two things are needed for this to happen. Either there is a big objection and opposition to the existing hegemonic paradigm, or the sovereign power is no longer capable of managing the conflict situation within the existing political/militarist framework. No doubt, we had both of these situations where we had a bottom-up societal demand for peace and the state was no longer managing the conflictual process (...) What we needed to do at this point, instead of simply applauding, blessing and consolidating the peace process, we should have taken an active role in creating a massive bottom up societal refusal against the conflict and demanded for society to be involved in this process. This is what I mean by talking about our

failure to socialise the demand for peace. We could have done more creative work on this issue... (Individual Interview, T28).

There is one thing clear; we clearly wasted the peace period. This is true for Turkish politics, Turkish leftists and Kurds. Because during peace meetings, Öcalan said the following specifically from İmralı; peace can be earned with the society. Something earned with social struggle. This is what we call the socialisation of peace. The public should demand peace. Of course, there will be negotiation tables and everything; but this should have power behind it. This power should be civil society power. In this sense, we need to openly and clearly see that we should be self-critical for the peace period because we were unable to create a mass movement for peace. I mean, we did not have millions of children, women, elderly on the streets demanding peace. We needed to do that during peace negotiations. For example, millions or hundreds of thousands of women should have marched to support this peace. Children should have walked and said they no longer wanted war. We should have transformed it into a social demand. It should have turned into a demand beyond PKK, Öcalan or the Kurds being tired of war, into a demand for the whole of Turkey. There should have been civil peace negotiations. We only had few major peace conferences and though they were valuable, they were unable to protect us from further war. In fact, we were unable to create a social process to prevent the war. Our greatest self-criticism and my biggest regret and problem are this. I mean, why did not we march as trade unionists? Why haven't we marched for a 'permanent and honourable peace', I ask myself and I complain about it? We were unable to use the peace process in this sense; maybe we were unable to organise peace and the idea of peace, but we were unable to organise society as well. If we were able to even do that, this would have made us stronger. If it is the correct phrasing, we had a passive position where we just let things run their own course and watched..But we know this for sure, various interview notes actually had predicted of the risks. There were declarations that if there was to be another war, this will not be the same as before and it will be a devastating war for both parties. PKK said this as well. They are talking about peace, but they still build dams, the state is still employing village guards, builds police stations; actually, we had all the signs of war. But I think we longed for peace for so long, we completely shut ourselves off from the idea of war and we never saw the signs. We never thought that the war would start again. We were at a different stage. In this sense, our inability to organise society is our biggest deficiency. I think the greatest weakness of HDK was the incorrect evaluation of that period, inability to turn its own assemblies into reality, assemblies becoming dysfunctional i.e. having these assemblies on the paper. Because you cannot create during war what you did not create during peace. Also, peace period was where people had the highest organisation at the social level, and their suppressed demands become visible. In the war climate, you cannot say anything about art but in peace climate, you can defend your art right and cultural rights. We were unable

to do that in the peace climate. We were unable to form our assemblies and we were unable to make functional what we had created. I think this is our biggest weakness and, in this sense, we can express the 2013-2015 period as a period of loss. This is open and clear (Individual Interview, T53).

Similarly, upon collectively reflecting over the historical context of learning processes in the HDK, activists were able to gain new insights which would inform future praxis. Some activists from the Freedom and Solidarity Party (Özgürlik ve Dayanışma Partisi, ÖDP) tradition drew upon their own ÖDP experiences in order to understand some of the HDK's structural problems, as well as the possible risks for their movement. Activists who participated in the Gezi resistance drew upon that experience to think about the possibilities of the prefigurative praxis and policies developed by the HDK with the Congress model, seeking out commonalities between the experiences. The June 7 elections in 2015, when the HDP managed to enter the parliament, revealed both the opportunities and limitations of representative democracy. Activists who witnessed stripping away of the right to democratic participation and protest under the oppressive authoritarian regime sought to discover new methods and tools for struggle, including by drawing upon global experiences. People in urban settings suffering under neo-liberal policies also searched for new economic cooperation on the basis of collectives.

Experiences such as the Assemblies, the Rights and Beliefs Commission, the street theatre initiative, the peace and negotiation process, demonstrate how semi-structured learning environments can generate effective and creative knowledge-making and learning experiences. Environments with significantly decreased hierarch, horizontal power dynamics and increased interactions between participants promote open and democratic participation can generate important knowledge-producing processes where individuals are strengthened their self-reflection processes become deeper. Such environments made a significant difference to HDK activists, particularly for women and members of historically marginalised communities', for whom the process facilitates empowerment and emancipation.

## **Learning Through Struggle**

Learning *in* struggle and knowledge production generally happens within the predictable and semi-structured repertoire of struggle conducted by movement activists in line with the

strategy for social change of the social movement in question. However, unexpected events which occur outside of the usual routine of struggle, especially during particularly intense historical periods, generate new learning experiences *through* struggle. Our data analysis during this research shows that intense struggle, carried out in relation to these unpredicted external events, produced permanent learning and collective memory. However, the increased state violence, oppression and criminalisation processes against social movement activists during these periods also led to the withdrawal of some activists from the struggle for various reasons (individual security concerns, intense oppression, threats and suppression) or affect the size, and capacity to organise of movements (arrest, exile, going underground, etc). This dual dynamic, on the one hand, served to expand the movement's repertoires of struggle and further strengthen the activists' political subjectivity, and on the other hand, it decreased the street-based mass mobilizations/organisation of HDK and other movements and, in within the HDK, weakened the collective unity between its components that come together under the roof of Congress. However, both situations offer social movements and their activists a wealth of new learning experience *through* the course of their struggles. These 'events' that emerge at a moment beyond the social movement's control, and the movement's reactions to these events, constitute important turning points. In the case of HDK, there have been rapid and unpredictable political changes in Turkey since 2011 and HDK faced these new situations in different ways. In this sub-section, we will focus on what learning processes *through* struggle took place during various political events such as negotiation process, Gezi Resistance, self-defence in Kurdish cities following the election victory of 2015, increasing authoritarianism of AKP -MHP collation, the war in Syria and Rojava Revolution, the global rise of nationalist populism and social resistance movements.

### ***Gezi Resistance***

The Gezi Resistance started in June 2013 in Taksim, İstanbul, and spread to different cities across Turkey. This resistance became a watershed moment in the contemporary history of Turkish social movements. Identified as part of the plethora of 'square movements' which emerged across the world following the Arab Spring (Negri & Hardt, 2019, p. 358), the Gezi Resistance emerged as an expression of bottom-up discontent against rising political authoritarianism in Turkey, and the neo-liberal plunder both of solidarity networks under the guise of urban transformation and of nature through mega projects and constructions of

hydroelectric plants (HES) and dams (Altinörs, 2019; Can, 2016; Erhart, 2014; Gürcan & Peker, 2014; Kaya, 2017). For the western part of Turkey, Gezi resistance was the first social uprising to take place after a long period of silence following the 68 and 78 generations (Bozarslan, 2018), and provided a holistic narrative to bring together the diffuse/scatterer nature of new social movements.

As expressed by most social movement activists during our research, the Gezi resistance was an important experience that generated new learning and knowledge on movements and struggle. What made Gezi particularly valuable and transformed it into an important collective memory space from the perspective of activists was not only their subjective experiences gained through their participation, but also the fact that Gezi became a *prefigurative testing ground* for the HDK's radical prefigurative ideas. The horizontal forum-style organisation, diverse nature of resistance (ideas, people, institutions, knowledges) and consensus decision making process during the resistance all resembled to prefigurative politics/practices of the HDK. One activists interpreted the park forums, which started during Gezi and continued in different cities in the following months, as exactly the same type of assemblies as the main organisational form of HDK. In this sense, what happened in Gezi was actually the self-realisation of the HDK. A woman movement actor emphasised how Gezi was a testing ground for the HDK ideas:

In fact, Gezi was a way of ensuring and testing the HDK ideas. We saw its ideas getting tested and we saw their relevance in real life. Through this experience, we saw that it is possible to intersect with other groups and organisations and create new forms of relationships between and within different sections of society. What we tested in Gezi is still existing and breathing. It will start to sprout when we open spaces for it to do so. (Gender workshop)

The Gezi experience also shows how all activists that took part in the struggle shared a new political ethos, collectively built in the process of coming together and struggling in the square. These activists were not only recipients of new learning and knowledge, but also active subjects contributing to the collective production of new knowledge during and after the Gezi resistance:

We established various solidarity networks after Gezi. I was actively taking part in a solidarity network with students. We all took an active role and organised various workshops, for example workshop on reconciliation which were incredibly successful! These workshop spaces allowed us to

touch each other's lives, learn from each other. It affected us greatly and it continues to do so to this day (Individual Interview, T46).

A young woman movement actor who participated in the Gezi resistance and joined HDK later explains how the Gezi resistance she experienced with her mother transformed her:

Gezi was amazing and we have this memory with my mother, my mother is a daughter of a policeman and is a MHP supporter (racist and fascist party) and she would tell me 'there is a terrorist at home', 'goddammit, I gave birth to a terrorist', 'go to hell, I should have given birth to a stone rather than you' every day when she learned that I was involved in left politics. I was experiencing these huge insults. During the Gezi resistance, I told my mother, 'I am going'. She asked me 'Where are you going?'. I said, 'this is what is happening, people are hurt, people are getting attacked and I cannot stand here'. My mother said, 'then I am coming with you as well.' I said, 'You cannot come, you have asthma, they are attacking people and I cannot deal with you'. And she said, 'no, I am coming. If we die, we die together.' Despite seeing what was happening on the television, she came with me anyway... but as imagined, in that situation she became unwell and could not breathe. I am bringing lemon and other things, nothing works, she has asthma, and she is having a crisis. She experienced an amazing confrontation moment. When two police were passing right next to us, they broke the ATMs with their batons, they were hitting the stores, some of the glass was shattered. My mother forgot about her asthma and looked at them. She is looking at them hitting people and she sees how they are torturing people. We sheltered in a store. People were flowing in front of us and it was an amazing confrontation for her to see their faces. When the news said protestors broke the ATMs, my mother experienced an amazing confrontation with her beliefs. She saw with her own eyes at a moment where she believed police would never do that, as her father was in the police, and she witnessed how the news distorted what she had seen with her own eyes. It was an incredible moment for her, one that made her confront herself and all that she believed in up to then... (Individual Interview, T17).

Despite these amazing experiences, the Gezi Resistance is at the same time identified by most HDK activists as a missed opportunity, and an 'event' that was not grasped with sufficient revolutionary reflex, even though the space embodied HDK's ideas and visions (e.g., horizontal form of organisation and decision making process, diversity of its subjects and co-existence with the Others), and the HDK was itself part of the resistance against the AKP's proposed new planning of the Gezi Park space. The HDK's initial indecisiveness prevented it from making a collective decision in participating in the Gezi resistance, and especially the cautious approach of the Kurdish liberation movement which did not want to negatively affect the ongoing negotiation process. This created an environment whereby some HDK activists/components

began to raise questions within the movement and chose to distant themselves, their trust in the HDK diminished. At the same time, Gezi revealed the confusion and indecision of diverse social forces within the HDK which rendered them unable to come up with a common position against a real time revolutionary moment. ‘The *difficulty in taking the right decision in the right place*’, the ‘*inability to consider Gezi as revolutionary enough*’, the ‘*different interpretations/reading of Gezi within its components*’ ‘*having components with soft politics/practices (such as Greens) alongside those radical ones who see revolutions as barricade building*’ were identified amongst the reasons that prevented the HDK from taking a common position quickly enough (Writing the History of HDK Together, Workshop 1). But on the other hand, what was embodied and enacted upon in Gezi was considered as a rehearsal of the HDK’s ideas. Reflecting upon Gezi, one HDK activist notes:

In fact, what came to be known as the Gezi resistance started because of the HDK...but the irony is that the HDK (and its components) were unaware of this and of how to sustain it. All those people that were identified as environmental volunteers who put their tents at the square protesting the AKP’s plan to destroy the Gezi park before the Gezi turned into a big urban event were in fact mobilised by the HDK. Because they were not known activists their political identities were overlooked. Somehow people only began to think that the HDK got involved when Sırrı [Süreyya Önder] got involved. But as it happens, the HDK spokesperson and its ecology assembly initiated the first objection/opposition against the government, but the HDK did not seem to have any idea about how to evaluate and materialise the fruits of this objection. The HDK components argued for almost three days about what they needed to do. I remember that day very clearly and I am glad Sabahat [Tuncel] was there and took a courageous stance when she said to everyone ‘either we all gather now and go to the Gezi with our HDK flags or we immediately leave the HDK’. It was at that point we took our flags and said ‘we are coming and walking right behind you’... I believe that the dynamics that gave emergence to Gezi, to some extent, were created by the HDK (Individual Interview, T45)

Gezi was in fact a moment where the HDK (both in terms of its collective power and its vision/ideas) was tested. The HDK’s late decision to join prevented it laying the political groundwork at Gezi and producing positive synergies. This indeed was a gap and while efforts were made to reduce this gap, in reality we can say that Gezi had passed by before the HDK (as collective power) could engage with the dynamics on the ground. Hence, the Gezi dynamism remains in Turkish society as deep potential opposition to the status quo, but still remains to be organised. However, we can say that this Gezi dynamics (of opposition to the

sttu quo) across Turkey came to manifest itself with the HDK (HDP) through the subsequent elections, in which HDP votes in those places where Gezi resistance had flourished increased by two to three times. For example, in Abbasaga, Kadikoy in Istanbul; Kavaklıdere, Kuğulupark in Ankara and Bornova, Konak in Izmir the HDP votes were two-three times higher than the city average. Indeed, these cities were Gezi spaces. Whilst clearly there is a relationship between the Gezi and HDK/HDP, this relationship was not formed in the dynamism of the resistance during the Gezi moment, but rather one that formed in its aftermath as the HDK/HDP were the only political spaces that were representing the visions and demands of those political subjects that emerged out of Gezi (Individual Interview, T45).

According to Ergun Aydinoğlu's (2014) work on the history of Kurdish liberation movement, there were two main reasons that made it 'impossible' for the Kurdish movement to join the Gezi resistance right from the start and to engage in the popular education of the people who had just entered the world of politics for the first time. The first was related to the peace negotiations being conducted with the AKP government at that time. The Gezi resistance broke out almost two months after Öcalan announced that the peace negotiations were producing some important results. The second reason was the lack of experience of the Kurdish freedom movement in establishing relations with other democratic movements other than its own. According to Aydinoğlu:

All [previous] experience of alliances between for the Kurdish movement and leftist political organisations were almost entirely bureaucratic alliances that required no tactical flexibility and/or exchange of political culture. In these various attempts, there was not an experience of health exchange between Kurdish Liberation movement and the left movement that would eliminate/overcome the political/cultural shortcomings of both sides. In almost all of these experiences, Kurdish movement, conscious of their small scale and insignificant political power, approached the left political parties essentially with paternalistic tolerance and hence managed to carry on such alliances without any problems. On the other hand, left movements in their relations with Kurdish movement, aware of their political weaknesses and insignificance, restrained themselves from criticising the Kurdish movement, somehow even cowardly. As a result of this, the political and intellectual relationship between the two sides continued almost entirely in a diplomatic manner. Consequently, all these alliance experiences took place over and over throughout decades, did not educated and/or positively transformed neither the Kurdish nor the left Movement. (Aydinoğlu, 2014: 191)

According to HDK activists, another important factor that prevented the HDK from taking advantage of the Gezi opportunity was the institutional nature of the movement's decision making process, whereby the representatives of each component had to go back to their own organisations for approval. Whilst individual members with no political affiliations participated in the Gezi resistance (as individuals) right from the beginning, for affiliated components the process took longer as they needed to relay what was discussed at the HDK back to their political institutions and vice versa before they were able to come a decision.

It seems clear from the above narratives of HDK activists that the Gezi resistance created extremely rich learning experiences. Described as a '*missed historical opportunity*', Gezi indeed revealed the crucial importance of acting quickly and making the right move at the right time in determining the outcome of such resistance. It also revealed the difficulty of decision-making within horizontal organisation in situations where decisions are taken by consensus and rely on dialogue with the political groupings affiliated to HDK. The Gezi moment also revealed the inability of the different social movements and individuals of the HDK to make a common and organised breakthrough in a momentous political event. The cautious attitude and failure of the Kurdish Movement in not mobilizing its social base in the first days of Gezi caused a 'scar' on the short history of the HDK, the effect of which no doubt will remain for many years to come. However, the Gezi resistance at the same time created the hope and knowledge that the prefigurative social transformation policies expressed/adopted by HDK can be possible with an effective 'square movement'. From the perspective of the HDK activists engaged in the Gezi resistance, the assembly-based political organisation was no longer an abstract future goal, but a possibility that could be built in the 'here' and 'now'. HDK activists seem to agree collectively on the idea that the movement managed to put the idea of assembly as a form of societal organisation onto Turkey's political agenda and that those forums (*Hayır Meclisleri*) that emerged across Turkey after Gezi were in fact manifestations and variations of this idea.

### *Election Campaigns*

Another important space where knowledge-production and learning took place *through* struggle is within electoral campaigns. This became even more crucial when we consider both the amount of election campaigns which have place since the HDK was founded in 2011 (more than 10 general, local and presidential elections), and the active mobilisation/organising

taking place in these spaces. Hence, these electoral campaigns constitute important spaces of learning and knowledge-production as activists mobilise collectively together and with other social oppositional groups and individuals in wider social and political configurations. Because of their occurrence in a highly dynamic structure/context due to their direct links with political conjunctures and agendas, these campaign spaces can generate powerful learning experiences for those activists involved in the process. While some of these learning experiences are indeed expected and desired, there are others that are clearly unexpected and undesired.

Most research participants pointed out the importance of these electoral campaigns for increased mobilisation of the HDK within wider society as they become a tool to transfer and circulate the movement's radical ideas and practices. They also argued that elections provided an opportunity for them to meet new people and form new relationships beyond the movement, whilst also allowing them to strengthen already existing ones. Talking about some of these experiences one HDK activist notes:

the elections gave us the experience of going and being in the field. During that period, we gained new experiences, especially in areas where we lacked experience or were insufficient. We had the opportunity to touch people beyond the HDK. In the process of these campaigns, we created a form of action where the HDK and HDP had worked collectively and closely, especially in those particularly problematic areas. Eryaman solidarity is in fact a product of this joint effort formed after the June 2015 elections where people got together and decided to act in an organised manner. I see this formation as one of the advantages of election campaigns, while I also recognise the disadvantages of the 2015 election. It has transformed us into something different and allowed us to meet people on the ground where we came to create new institutions for ourselves. Therefore, despite all the oppression, persecution, troubles, we had a lot of gains during the election period in Ankara (Individual Interview, T26).

Some activists talked about how in fact election campaigns provided them with an opportunity to form their local assemblies. Talking about how election campaigns in Ankara paved the way to creating their own local political groupings, one activist in Ankara notes:

Election campaigns have a politicising and mobilising characteristic. During the last elections, we asked ourselves whether we could turn the election into an opportunity to create our own HDK local organisation? We discussed collectively about how we can work towards strengthening the HDP, making sure it gets elected but also at the same time use the

space to create our own HDK group. Of course, we were aware of the fact that strengthening the party may affect the HDK negatively, causing its regression. However, we put an important strategy in place making sure this would happen and the election would not damage HDK, can we turn elections into a communication and contact tool with individuals and institutions to organise HDK or can we create this collectivism. It had positive effects in some places like Ankara (Individual Interview, T25).

However, from a different perspective some activists point out how the election campaigns also provided some negative learning experiences, affecting the HDK's radical politics and practices dramatically. Most social movements argued that the elections and election campaigns were the principle reason behind HDK's inability to create its local assemblies and deliver on its main agendas as the HDK's energy (human and non-human resources) and focus went into establishing its institutional power through elections, instead of focusing on establishing its organisational power and delivering its radical politics/practices:

Naturally, election work has caused the HDK to face some problems both in terms of staff and work areas. Election work is different from movement work. Going to the neighbourhoods, forming assemblies, direct contact with the people, direct contact with their problems, carrying them to awareness requires a completely different type of work. We generally conceptualise this as working in social space and working in political space. This distinction has been one of the most problematic issues within the HDK and between the HDK and HDP. The repeated elections, one after the other (general election, Presidency elections, municipality elections), forced the HDK to enter and work in the political spaces of the HDP, which meant that the HDK moved away from its main task working in social spaces (Individual Interview, T21).

Similarly, some activists argued that whilst the electoral victory of 2015 allowed the representation of the HDK's ideas and vision within the political space (through gaining seats in the national parliament), the increased numbers of elections during a short period of time caused a shift in the focus of the HDK towards establishing the HDP which had a negative impact upon the motivation of some HDK activists.

The activities of the HDK during these campaigns are interpreted in two ways by activists. According to the first interpretation, elections were the only symbolic mechanism available to the oppositional forces within the context of increased bomb attacks carried out by ISIS specifically targeting oppositional forces, and the AKP-MHP led government's policies aimed at destroying the opposition under the rubric of the 'fight against terrorism'. Hence the HDK had no choice but to get involved in the elections, as the election-oriented struggle aimed at

increasing the power of the HDP was seen as an indispensable weapon to dismantle the hegemonic power of the AKP-MHP government. According to the second interpretation, the elections made the HDK stray from its main aim of creating a new life that would be produced in the everyday lives and long-term struggles. As a result of this, elections became highly unfavourable spaces of struggle, pushing the HDK to focus on parliamentary democracy, and transforming it into a caricaturized version of representative democracy rather than focusing on creating the tools for building direct democracy locally (such as assemblies).

#### *'The No Assemblies'<sup>29</sup>*

Following the AKP government's announcement of its intent to amend 18 articles of the Constitution of Turkey in order to enact radical changes in the governance system, a decision was made to hold a national referendum on April 16, 2017. Various political parties, trade unions, and NGOs organised a campaign to vote 'No' in the referendum. The People's Democratic Congress (HDK), People's Democratic Party (HDP), Democratic Regions Party (DBP), Free Women Movement (TJA), Democratic Societies Congress (DTK) were gathered under one umbrella and started their campaign with slogans such as 'No for a New Life!', 'No for Democracy', 'No for Democratic Republic Common Homeland'.

The preamble for this campaign declared that the centralisation and concentration of power in the figure of the president would create new sets of problems which meant a tilt towards dictatorship, and further aggravate existing problems rather than resolving them. This campaign rejected all of the changes and demanded a new, genuinely democratic constitution in line with the expectations of the peoples and society.

The HDK supported this campaign with very high levels of participation. In comparison to the election campaigns, the campaign of 'the No Assemblies' had a strong impact on many HDK members. In particular, the 'Women's No Assemblies' played an active role in this campaign, and it was strong female activism that managed to reopen streets for protests, which had been closed and forbidden due to the oppressive character of the period:

During this campaign, I was active in women's movement and joined one of the HDK campaigns representing the Women's Movement. I think this

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<sup>29</sup> The 'No Assemblies' (*Hayır Meclisleri*) are local initiatives that were created by grassroot activists across Turkey during assemblies against the constitutional changes which allowed the shift from the parliamentary system to the presidential system.

was the most important/effective campaign initiated by the HDK where women played an important role both materially and immaterially. During this election period (2015) and the referendum period, HDK women played crucial roles in bringing lots of women (and others) together (...) With the participation of 400-500 women from all walks of life (even women from CHP, the Social Democratic Party, the main opposition party) women at the HDK announced 'Women Say No Campaign' in Taksim, Istanbul. The idea here was to bring all those different women from diverse walks of life who wanted to organise their own 'no campaign', in their own languages and ways. It was such an amazing campaign where women did amazing jobs from organising meetings, seminars to closing entire streets with our own banners stating our demands and visions, our own ways of stating why we women say 'no'. Beside the politically active women, ordinary women on the street also joined our 'no' campaign. The main vision here was that despite our differences (in ideas) we can get together and do something and that our differences are not obstacles in standing together and being successful... (Individual Interview, T7).

In his article on assemblies, Onur Hamzaoglu states that some of the 'No Assemblies' did not dissolve and disintegrate after the campaign ended. Rather, they shifted to a 'dormant state' whereby they were reactivated periodically, especially during local and general elections (Hamzaoglu, 2019b: 96). These 'No Assemblies' became extremely effective learning experiences and mechanisms as they managed to unite various struggles through bringing together diverse social forces who do not have a place in political representation on the basis. They did so on the basis of common shared problems and solutions. The idea of assemblies as forms of political organisation/politics which flourished with the Gezi resistance gained wider acceptance in society. This experience also showed the compatibility and suitability of the Congress political organisational forms. As stated by Hamzaoglu, '*while party type organisation necessitates the relationship of belonging to the target community, Congress type organisation can be achieved by 'non-belonging' organising around common problems and their solutions*' (Hamzaoglu, 2019b: 100).

#### *Learning at the Difficult times: Oppression, criminalisation and violence*

Each social movement aiming to create a new future beyond the existing hegemonic system of power is aware of a long and difficult struggle ahead of them. We know from the historical experiences of social movements that specific 'conjunctures' embody both opportunities and challenges, and can sometimes move struggles forward in a short period of time while at other

times seriously push it back. Indeed, these conjunctural moments when experienced produce significant learning processes for social movement activists.

Our analysis shows a particular political/social conjuncture with an increased societal demand for peace and democracy, and a favourable political/social/cultural environment for alternative visions such as those of the HDK that lead to its rapid acceptance and power in its earlier years. Factors such as an expansion of bottom-up mobilisation after the 2000s; legal and legislative changes in line with the EU membership; a rise in identity politics; emerging societal challenge to hegemonic Sunni-Turkishness; deepening of inter class conflicts; expansion of Kurdish freedom movement beyond Kurdish geography; and the effects of new social movements emerging around the world; together generated a significant level excitement and expectation for the establishment of HDK. During this period, we experienced an increased visibility of the HDK/HDP in both public space and in the mainstream media, which positively affected social movements by ‘legitimizing’ their struggles and demands in local spaces and beyond.

However, internal and domestic dynamics and processes following the electoral success of HDK’s political party, the HDP in 2015, which challenged the absolute domination/power of the AKP since 2001 along with the end of the peace negotiations in Turkey together with regional dynamics and processes such as the Rojava revolution, chipped at the ‘red lines’ of the Turkish status quo, and led to an all-out attack on the broader social opposition across Turkey. Factors including the bomb attacks that took place across Turkey targeting the HDK/HDP (and its political constituencies) in Diyarbakir, Suruç, Ankara and Istanbul following the popular ‘uprising’ that took place across Kurdish cities to support the Kobane resistance in 2014; the suppression of the self-governing entities in Kurdish cities and the resultant urban slaughter/massacre; the spread and normalization of ‘exception becoming the rule’ across Turkey after the 15 July 2016 coup attempt; the wave of detentions, arrests and mass dismissals from public institutions, have all seriously affected the HDK. However, all of these processes also generated rich experiences for social movements and their activists in terms of learning through struggle.

### *New spaces of Solidarity and Learning*

Within the context of increasing state violence and oppression after 2015, the HDK and other social movements sought to create new forms of solidarity networks and learning spaces. The

most fundamental feature of these solidarity networks/spaces is that they emerged through struggle in an authoritarian context. These new spaces/mechanisms of solidarity appeared as a means of survival and resistance in a fragile context of violence, and are crucial in demonstrating the ability/power of social movements to adapt to difficult times.

The New Life Associations and co-operative initiatives created in Ankara, İstanbul and Mersin in line with the HDK's vision/politics; as a means of survival and struggle in a fragile context of violence, are also important in demonstrating the capacity of social movements to adapt themselves to difficult times. The HDK-based New Life Associations and cooperative initiatives which emerged in Ankara, İstanbul and Mersin, as well as the Solidarity Academies (see Erdem & Akın, 2019; Hamzaoğlu, 2019b), and Street Academies (see Aktas et al., 2019)<sup>30</sup> created as alternative educational spaces by members of Academics for Peace Initiative who were subjected various forms of injustices and dismissed unlawfully from their academic duties after signing a peace declaration, '*We Will Not Be a Party for this Crime*' condemning unlawful state violence and violation taking place in Kurdish cities (see Baser et al., 2017; *Akademisyen İhraçları Hak İhlalleri, Kayıplar ve Güçlenme Süreçleri*, 2019; Tekin, 2019) are examples of these newly emerged solidarity spaces/networks.

Our conversations with activists demonstrated the need to search for and create new forms of solidarity spaces/networks and new common spaces of production and distribution. The creation of such spaces has intensified within the HDK in recent years. Talking about the HDK's intention to create new forms of struggle spaces within the emerging context in Turkey, one activist notes:

Right now, HDK is looking for new strategies and means for its struggle. Particularly, we are trying to form new spatial spaces/tools and think about how best to utilise these new spatial spaces/tools of struggle. We are thinking about how to communicate with different localities and revive our struggles in those localities. These discussions are taking place in local spaces/cities led by activists themselves as we know that friends

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<sup>30</sup> Solidarity Academies and Street academies were amongst those alternative educational initiatives created across various cities in Turkey by those Academics and students that were dismissed from their jobs following their demand for peace and justice. While creating these alternative spaces of education can be seen as one specific challenge to the ongoing repression of the state, they were also spaces of alternative education, critical learning and knowledge production, solidarity and emotions. These alternative educational spaces offered workshops, seminars to different communities, engaged in various community projects (including research, monitoring etc), and created and developed new engagements/network relations with other social movement groups and institutions (trade unions, civil society organisations).

in Mersin may have an entirely different approach/needs to those friends in Adana. (...) The idea here is that each locality is to form their own spaces/tools according to their own demographic structure and needs. For example, our friends in Mersin visited various villages to meet locals there, it is a kind of meeting where Urban/city and rural/village... At these meetings, they talked about how to eliminate the intermediaries at the point selling these locally produced products. The aim here is to form a kind of 'Association of Cooperatives' like the one in Antalya. (...) Similar discussions and attempts are being held in order to come up with locally sensitive solutions/strategies to deal with their own problems and issues. While some are thinking how to solve the drug issues in their cities and others have a totally different focus...the roundtable and collective discussions taking place around this table is the best way for people to take control in determining their own lives rather than a direct intervention and centralised mechanism of control from the HDK. We have a clear organisational programme and status and we really encourage locals to create their own practices/politics. We will be part of that process through solidarity and cooperation where each of us would somehow find our own ways ... (Individual Interview, T17).

The neo-liberal domination that extends to the remotest corners of society, together with the despotic violence of nationalist sectarian forces, led 'the multitude' to build their own autonomous and alternative living spaces on the basis of what Hardt and Negri (2015) call an 'exit strategy'.

This oppression and despotism somehow generated a need to create an alternative life/culture in society and pushed us to rethink our ways of living and creating different forms of 'being'. For example, cooperative initiatives in Mamak, Batikent... Even those discussions in Eryaman Solidarity led to the creation of an alternative space beyond the state... It seems in recent years communities have come to set alternative ways of living and walking as targets for themselves. Forming cooperative-like institutions is one form of these emerging alternative ways of being, walking and living. Through these cooperatives, communities engage in taking about production, consumption and distribution of their own economies. In that sense, through these collective practices, they come to create their form of economy, an economy away from the consumerist capitalist economy (Individual Interview, T26).

However, it is important to note that these new pursuits were based on the knowledge produced through distillation of long-term experiences of struggle. Knowledge-making *in and though struggle* at the same time directs activists to develop new survival and coping strategies in the face of contemporary political and economic problems in order to take forward and expand their struggle.

### *New Life Associations*

The HDK's new life associations in Ankara emerged in the context of increased state authoritarianism and violence towards the political/social opposition following the HDP's electoral victory in June 2015 and the July 2016 coup attempt. They emerged as an attempt to create new solidarity spaces for all social movement activists. Whilst these new life associations were formally created in 2016, their seeds were sown during/after the June election campaigns in 2015 by activists who sought to work collectively on concrete needs/issues of their own. Having difficulty in finding a physical space to carry out their activities and meet others was also an important consideration that emphasised the need for creating such spaces. This was because as the authoritarian nature of the regime increased, the oppositional forces' opportunities to find new venues for their events and activities became even more restricted. Fearing the terror of the state, businesses and event hall owners began to abstain from renting their spaces/venues for such alternative activities.

Another reason for activists to create such local initiatives (in the form of associations or cooperatives) in line with the HDKs' politics/vision (but without directly using the HDK name), was to overcome the delegitimization and terrorisation of the HDK.

Seeing the failed coup attempt of 2016 as 'a gift of God' the AKP state launched a full-on attack against the Gülen Community, who were considered responsible for the coup attempt. However, the wave of repression was also aimed at all sources social resistance and political opposition in Turkey. One of the most important pillars of this attack was the large wave of dismissals of unionized public workers in the field of health and education. Tens of thousands of healthcare professionals, teachers, and lecturers were dismissed from their jobs and subjected to a 'civilian death' by special statutory *decrees* (known as *KHK*) passed by the state during the two-year state of emergency rule put in place after the July 2016 coup attempt. The New Life Association established in Ankara and the Women's Reading Group initiated by women within the association are important demonstrations of new forms resistance developed in the face of the state's intimidation and repression towards the opposition forces. They also demonstrate the creativity of the learning processes which occurred within this resistance.

One activist who was a founding members of a new life association explains how the group brought together by the June election campaigns in 2015 turned into an HDK assembly over time:

Once the election campaign ended and the excitement died down, we asked ourselves what to do next and how/where can we channel the positive synergies we created here. The idea of creating a local assembly was borne out of these discussions and we began to name ourselves as 'HDK Batıkkent Assembly'. At the time as we did not have our own space, we were meeting with 50-70 people at other institutions' spaces. As our numbers and activities increased, we realised that we needed to have our own space and we decided to work towards establishing it (Individual Interview, T32).

Although the majority of individuals who participated in the formation of the new life associations come from different organisational experiences, they got involved in this process largely based on their personal preferences (as non-affiliated individual member):

Those involved in struggle here in Batıkkent have this characteristic; we all have had experience of working at different organisations in the past but now we are here as individuals with no organisational affiliation. This has become an advantage I believe. While in some cases it was, of course, a disadvantage where what we say may have not found a response especially in the field of high politics. But locally we have seen lots of benefits. We are now in a position of holding our assembly meetings with seventy to eighty people (Individual Interview, T32).

The new life associations which were initially created to overcome the lack of physical space in which to meet evolved into something else in a short period of time. The increased number of dismissals following the coup in 2016 rapidly (re)directed the priorities of the association towards creating new solidarity processes that could support those who were dismissed from their jobs:

This space was born out of need. After the 2015 elections, we needed a new space for ourselves. The political atmosphere at the time was different, we had incredible self-confidence. We had an amazing wind blowing in our favour. Batıkkent is a place populated by a high number of Left-Socialist and democratic people. This is why we wanted to do and create something here. While we were in the middle of discussions about what do to, the coup happened and soon after that the dismissal process began. Everyone we knew around us one by one lost their jobs. So, we had to create these new solidarity spaces/networks at that point in order support all those who lost their jobs. When I say we had to it, I did not mean we did it by force but rather we did it knowingly and willingly.

Because we had to share our bit with all those dismissed friends who were thrown out of their jobs for us. They were thrown out because they were in this struggle. We, too, could have been thrown out (Individual Interview, T33).

Whilst we were in a workshop to discuss what we needed to do, we heard about the July coup. (..) In that sense, the coup blocked our journey, prevented it from being completed... I remember that night very well...Naturally, we all panicked at first. We did not yet know what was going on, but we all sensed that whatever happened was going to affect us! (...) The dismissal of our people had not started yet considering most of us were teachers in Batıkkent working in public sectors. First, they started dismissing those people linked to Feto (Gulen Movement) and then came the dismissals of academic for peace. We asked each other 'this process is approaching us, what can we do?' and began to talk about how to address this new wave of repression. In October 2016, with a mass dismissal process we all lost our jobs, all those who were members of Eğitim-Sen, the union of teachers...Wasting no time, we soon began to identify all those people dismissed from their jobs in Batıkkent including our activist friends. We knew that this was a different period that required a careful analysis, and we came to an agreement that this period indeed is the period of building new cooperation and solidarity both within and between (Individual Interview, T32).

This increased need to build solidarity spaces in order to support and reach out to all those who were affected by these processes of violence (economically, politically and socially) led to a rapid (re)organisation by HDK activists, and to the development of new strategies to meet the temporal needs and demands of the time. To this extent, the New Life Association is one example of how learning takes place *through struggle*, and how this new learning was put in practice with new forms of organisations(mobilisations) and new solidarity spaces/networks. They also represent an important learning experience within the HDK both in terms of being a form of struggle and survival strategy developed by movement activists themselves based on their own experiences; and in being a different form of solidarity space developed by movement activists on the basis of the conjunctural requirements.

### **Learning to Struggle**

Our analysis shows that beside *learning in struggle* and *learning through struggle*, social movement activists also learn through processes of *learning to struggle*. Learning to struggle involves a process where activists learn new skills to empower themselves and their movement.

Based on data collected throughout our research, we argue that **learning to struggle** is in fact an integral part of the HDK's struggle, which has been incorporated into its politics and policies and put into practice in various forms and activities. The activities and practices that were initially carried out to empower activists within the movement have gradually evolved into the idea of creating HDK Schools with the aim of conveying the 'new life' perspective to a much broader section of society through a new libertarian and critical pedagogy.

Various pedagogical initiatives have been created by the HDK with the aim of radically questioning neo-liberal global capitalist modernity, the nation-state paradigm, the patriarchal gender regime and inequality-based human-centric society-nature relationships. These include a day-long education module set up by the HDK Education Commission at the local level; annual summer camps and thematic conferences and seminars; the Ata Soyer Health Policy School that works closely with HDK's Health Assembly; and ongoing works to create the HDK Schools. These programmes draw on a libertarian pedagogy that sought to cultivate critical consciousness and the realisation of an alternative 'new life' ideal. The central aim of all of these activities and events was to increase the consciousness of HDK activists, allow them to develop their political awareness and empower them on a personal and institutional level in order that they be better equipped to determine their lives. We now go on to briefly discuss some of these activities and spaces of **learning to struggle** which paved the way to create structured learning spaces in the HDK.

#### *HDK Education Commission*

While the HDK established its education commissions in 2011, it was not until 2018 that they started to organise a more structured educational process, with a one-day intensive education module in various local contexts across Turkey. According to one activist, the need for such a shift emerged due to the realisation of '*a gap in knowledge amongst activists over the central ideas of the HDK, lack of internalisation of the radical values and culture of the HDK, and the inability to form a collective common HDK identity*'. (Education and alternatives pedagogies, Focus Group 1). Thus, the Education Commission's workshops were carried out with an aim to fill these identified gaps by providing a general introductory framework about the history of the HDK, its purposes, goals, targets, visions, as well as its operational structure, which in fact became even more crucial in the context of the HDK's decline in power within the shift in

context to a more authoritarian environment, as discussed above. One activist at our education focus group notes:

(..) It was clear that diverse people/organisations joined because of the HDK's radical visions and identity. The idea was to create a new common identity for the movement. However, there were different ideas of the HDK within the movements, where the HDK meant different things to different people. Even in some cases (especially at local level) people did not even know what the HDK vision was. This differing interpretation of the HDK was preventing us from transforming into a common movement and creating a common identity. Thus, our aim was to think and ask ourselves how we turn all these different understandings into a common movement identity and common struggle? These educational activities give us an opportunity to think about and reflect critically on ourselves, on our institutions and on the HDK, which we don't do frequently enough (...) We need to go beyond complaining about our own failures and successes (what we did do, we did not do, what we had to do etc) and/or bragging about and exaggerating what we did and instead focus on reflecting upon ourselves/our activities and creating spaces and opportunities for these reflexive talks to take place. To this extent, these education modules and activities are an important step towards starting this process. We cannot think of things as something that had to happen. But rather to think why it happened the way it did, what were our roles, what we can draw from these past events etc. If we see democracy as a process that requires a constant struggle, then instead of considering the HDK as something that has happened and gone, we need to focus on how we transform the HDK (ourselves) so that it (we) can contribute to this long journey of our struggle. I am not just saying this from the perspective of political power. What I am saying here is that we shouldn't define the HDK as a finished, outdated or irrelevant organisation when it comes to its role of building a democracy and a new alternative social life from every angle...The activities of the education commission can perhaps help us to address and overcome some of these issues (Education and Alternatives Pedagogies, Focus Group 1).

The content of the HDK's education commission was developed after the General Assembly in 2018 through collective discussions and meetings, where activists engaged in defining what the aims were, what their work should involve and how to carry it out. At the end of these discussions, the commission adopted and developed interactive content for the pedagogical activities that included the following thematic areas:

- How was HDK established?
- What was the Historical process and antecedents?
- What is HDK?

- HDK components and component law
- HDK theoretical resources and horizons
- The ‘Assembly’ as an organisation style / HDK assemblies
- HDK operation
- What HDK is not
- HDP-HDK relationship
- HDP-DTK relationship
- HDP-HDK operation
- Historical account
- Legal position of the Congress

The educational programme is carried out in an interactive and dialogical style aiming to increase the participation of local activists. While the content of the modules was broadly defined, they are tailored according to the needs, issues and specific context of each city/ local organisations. So far, the commission has carried out various workshops in Ankara, Mersin, Izmir and Bursa.

Generally, two educators (utilising the gender quota) facilitate these one-day events in local areas. On occasions when the gender quota was not followed, local activists were the first ones to criticise this. One male activist, a member of the Education Commission reflects upon his experience when he found himself in a situation where he had to deliver a workshop on gender and came under heavy criticism from local activists:

Of course, in undertaking our activities, we also encounter certain issues regarding the ways we conduct our workshops and methods. For instance, we had an education training session on gender in Adana where our female comrade could not make it. We were all men talking about gender. Our local activists were mad at us as they criticised us for coming only as men and ‘daring to present about gender issues’. We knew they were right, and we had nothing to say, and we just stood there (Education and Alternatives pedagogies, Focus Group 1).

One activist from the Education Commission reflects upon learning processes taking place in the praxis of the Education commission’s work:

(...) I see the HDK itself as a learning process where we all learn something from each other. This place embodies a different kind of language...We are learning a lot of new things as we interact and negotiate with each other. Beside this, the HDK represents a different type of body where

diverse bodies meet and face each other every day; political bodies, social bodies, cultural bodies... This, I think is very valuable. Let me reflect on my experience...For example, the language and concepts of LGBTQ for the first time found a relevance in a political organisation (HDK). Yes, there were some positive experiences before, where political parties/organisations were making some statement regarding the LGBTQ communities. But what we have here in the HDK is different...I think, for the first time, an organisation is not making a statement about the Other (LGBTQ) but rather recognise everyone as equal before their diversity and show their eagerness to learn and meet the others. Previous experiences have always been in the form of some kind of samples. This approach did not consider the other voices and narratives as equal to theirs and in some cases even suppressed these other voices and threw the needs and demands of the other right to the back of the struggle. Yes of course we have huge problems in practising this principle of equality of diverse subjects. But at least, there is a crucial effort here that pushes for an equality of diversity to be actualised in the practices of the movement. As a member of the LGBTQ movement, looking at it from where I am standing, I can clearly see this important effort. There is no doubt that our struggle has its own history which has flowed from a different kind of experience, but for the first time our struggle has found a response here at the HDK (Education and Alternatives pedagogies, Focus Group 1).

The HDK Education Commission has reached hundreds of people in tens of different localities. Through these activities, it provided a better understanding of the HDK but also brought forward the demands, expectations and perceptions of these localities to the HDK's agenda. Throughout the process, the educational content of these modules is constantly updated in line with local participants' feedback. By also taking part in the other spaces of the HDK (assemblies, the Executive Board or Commission), the HDK activists who work as educators in the commission have the opportunity to share learning experiences gained in these modules. The Commission members also actively seek new ways of making the education content more participatory, gender sensitive and diverse.

#### *Annual Education Seminars*

Described as an annual 'renewal of faith' by one of participant, these annual educational seminars are organised to bring together all those HDK members working at different offices across Turkey (around 50-80 people). These seminars provide a space for activists to reflect collectively on the current work of the HDK, engage in in-depth discussions on issues/processes taking place in the country, region and world, and plan for the upcoming

period. This three-day seminar event was first organised in the fall of 2017 and now takes place on an annual basis.

As highlighted by activists, this three-day seminar event provides them with an opportunity temporally to '*remove themselves from the everyday mechanical life of struggle*'. Thus, rather than seeing each other in the everyday routine of struggle (in meetings etc), this event creates a '*common space for a different sort of engagement and encounter*' as the activists share and learn through various social activities such as playing charades and singing songs. The event also represents a space where the activists gain new knowledge and expand their understanding on various current issues of concerns, as they participate in various presentations by external visitors, scholars and intellectuals and engage in workshops (Individual Interview, T53).

On the first day of the three-day education programme, the aim is to strengthen participants' understanding of key thematic topics linked to theoretical and current political matters. Expert scholars/activists/civil society representatives on the subjects being discussed are invited to give presentations, and these experts conduct discussions with the participants. For example, presentation themes for the past three seminar programmes were as follows:

- Ideology and Turkey
- Post-2017 Political Developments in Turkey and Around the World
- What Is Happening in the Middle East, Possible Developments?
- Developments and Possibilities in Islamic Geography
- Equality and Inequality: Problems of Biological Evolution and Cultural Evolution
- Current Situation of Capitalism
- Radical Democracy and Local Management Experiences
- Political Crises, Riots, Uprising, and Resistance (Turkey, Middle East, Europe).

The second and third day of the seminar are mainly related to the HDK's internal agenda, and future planning and projections of the HDK, with workshops and forum-style informal learning methods:

- What is HDK, historical social roots
- HDK's legislation and programme organisation model

- Women, youth, ecologic, labour perspective in the light of HDK legislation and programme
- What are the problems experienced in the organisation and their causes?
- HDK law: institution and individual/quotes
- Local HDK organising experience and tools
- General board process and local works: forum
- Hegemonic struggle and HDK's (ideologic - political - organisational) mission
- What should HDK organisation and struggle tools, and methods be in the new period?
- Presentation/forum: gender and women, ecology, rights and beliefs, economic crisis

As mentioned by those activists who took part in this annual event, these annual activist seminars a (such as Ankara and Istanbul) provide the opportunity for activists to talk about the issues that concern them in their local areas, and at the same time get informed about broader general issues related to the HDK. By bringing together delegates who are expected to take up positions in the next term and allowing them to meet with those who are stepping down from their positions (usually for another role), these events allow the transfer of knowledge and experiences between the HDK's members, collective planning of current and future work, and a more democratic decision-making process within the movement.

#### *Annual Thematic Symposia*

The annual symposiums/conferences organised on different themes each year are also crucial spaces where activists learn and produce knowledge to struggle. For instance, most interviewees mentioned a three-day international symposium titled 'From Capital to the October Revolution, from the October Revolution to Revolutions' held in Istanbul on November 10-12, 2017, on the 100th anniversary of the October Revolution as one of the most important learning experiences for themselves as activists. The symposium programme focussed on both historical dynamics and consequences/effects of the October Revolution, and more contemporary revolutions which were sustained and inspired by this inheritance today. It brought together many renowned intellectuals, academics and activists from around the world. The papers presented at the symposium were later published into a book by the HDK (*Kapital'den Ekim Devrimi'ne Ekim Devrimi'nden Devrimlere Sempozyum Kitabı*, 2018).

The October Revolution symposium contributed to *learning to struggle* in two ways. Firstly, it allowed an opportunity for activists to discuss and analyse what the October revolution on its

100<sup>th</sup> anniversary had left as a legacy, together with its relevance and meaning for today's social movement struggles on the basis of continuity and ruptures. Secondly, the symposium enabled all of HDK's individual and affiliated members to reflect on their struggles whilst analysing the revolutions from past to the present. Through allowing activists to reflect upon the different experiences of revolutions and struggles taking place both in Turkey and around the world, the symposium also came to create a space where activists learned from each other's struggles and knowledge as they shared their experiences and formed new solidarity and communication networks between movements and activists.



The annual symposium of 16-17 November 2019 was organised under the title of 'Immigration, Refugee and Discrimination Symposium' to discuss issues which have become key in Turkey, especially in the context of the Syrian War. This two-day seminar explored a range of themes related to the phenomenon of immigration, which has always been a topic of relevance since the establishment of the Turkish Republic. The seminar also focussed on refugees' differentiated experiences of discrimination, with a specific emphasis on the Syrian refugees population which sought refuge in Turkey following the war in their own country. The symposium considered the capitalist policies of hegemonic global imperialism, and the wars caused by nation-state nationalism. It also discussed how to develop a strategy for struggle for a new life by considering equal citizenship-based cooperation and resistance from below. At this symposium, activists engaged in discussion on which strategies/forms of

struggle should be developed in order to create an alternative future life and deal with the problems created by the policies of hegemonic global imperialism. Activists emphasised that both symposiums created a dynamic space for knowledge-making and learning.

#### *HDK Schools*

'HDK schools' are another structured educational space created by the HDK, as well as a tool through which the HDK aims to create new forms of learning and knowledge. The idea of establishing 'HDK schools' was first discussed at the 2017 HDK General Assembly, and later developed at sub-commission level. According to the HDK's 8<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, the decision to form the HDK's own schools emerged out of a necessity to '*build a common language and a rich intellectual grounding for creating a common perspective against social problems and producing new politics/practices to solve societal problems; and to form a collective HDK vision/idea and common HDK identity*'.<sup>31</sup>

A prominent female activists, former Co-Spokesperson of the HDK explains the process that gave rise to the idea of creating HDK school:

Over time, we realised that we need to develop the HDK perspective. Yes, we had a perspective, but it was a raw perspective that needed further processing, developing and deepening in every aspect. Another important point is that while all HDK components share common values and ideas, we lack a precise road of how to achieve these common values and visions. For instance, we advocate ecology and agree upon the idea that we should not harm nature, but what is our ecological approach/strategy to obtain this? Is it people oriented or nature oriented? (...) It seems like we are gathered around common ideas and do not have a common understanding/perspective/position regarding to how to put these common abstract ideas into practice. It is not that we have to agree on everything... but we lack a common space where our ideas collide/clash and where we collectively discuss (...) In the end, we all want to change and transform society. Thus, we need to engage with this society. There are lots of things that society can give us and a lot we can learn from. Thus, we do not conceive education as a space where only professionals gather and transfer knowledge. We consider education itself a process whereby the interaction between educators and participants is crucial. In this sense, we believe that this interaction can be best triggered/enhanced by the participation of the public. Such interaction without public will be limited in its role transforming society. So, the idea of HDK School emerged out of these discussions which later turned into a Congress decision in 2017. In 2018, we drew up a plan of

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<sup>31</sup> From a document produced by Working Group to form HDK School titled 'Schools of Peoples Democratic Congress'.

action to put this decision in practice, but the increased violence and political turmoil and arrests and imprisonment of our co-spokesperson and prominent members meant that we could not carry on this work. But it is now back in our agenda again as one of the main priorities (Individual Interview, T53).

The HDK school is imagined both as something that is connected to the HDK but which also functions independently, whereby the school will help to '*develop, disseminate and expand the HDK ideas and vision*' while at the same time remaining '*undisrupted by the daily practices and political instability of the HDK, retreats and setbacks*' (Ibid). According to the former spokesperson, this quasi and particular form, and the nature of the relationship between the HDK and its school, will allow the school to carry on its work come '*hell or high water*' (Ibid).

The idea of the HDK school can also be understood as an initiative generated by social movement 'organic intellectuals' seeking to create new knowledge and new intellectual grounding in their struggle, in order to construct an alternative future. Especially in the context of Turkey, where top-down state-centric education and knowledge production remain dominant not only in mainstream political and social life but also in the progressive politics and spaces as well. One activist notes:

we are partly trying to contribute to creating an intellectual life with the HDK school. Because we believe that there is a serious flatness and arrogance intellectually, especially when it comes to intellectual knowledge-making. This is because we do not have a free-thinking environment to discuss openly. All spaces are being closed down by the top-down sovereign power, everything is under so much control, and everyone is prone to too much self-censorship. We want to take an active role in this, and most importantly in the context of great ideological attack, which we consider this process as hegemonic ideological attack, we want to build a counter hegemonic ideological defense line and a counter hegemony based on new ideas. We believe that we can form this counter ideological hegemony with these schools. Because when you don't have ideological hegemony, you actually don't have mass power. So, you need to believe and make people believe in something. Yes, we say there will be a new life. But first, I need to believe in that and then, I will convince the people around me. I will believe and make people believe in a more just, more equal and less gender-oriented society. These schools will also fulfil this function. They will get institutionalized themselves throughout the process but never become professionalised. In this sense, the school will try to move forward with an amateur spirit (Individual Interview, T53).

In 2018, the HDK Education Commission prepared a framework paper titled ‘People’s Democratic Congress Schools’ outlining plans for the schools. Stating that the very existence of ‘HDK’ can be considered as a school in a broader sense, the framework paper starts with the statement *‘HDK is a social, cultural and theoretical/ideological interacting platform with its experience of being in struggle and coexistence between diverse peoples. We can define these various interactions/ encounters as reciprocal learning processes’* (HDK, Education Commission Report, 2018). The paper argues that the school would be essential in establishing a ‘common HDK identity’. Under the principle of ‘Unity in diversity’, the text identifies three ideological resources (the new paradigm of Abdullah Öcalan, Marxism, Libertarian trends and movements) which inspire and guide the HDK school in constituting new radical subjects and common identity: *‘We anticipate that with the manifestation of the HDK’s identity in our social and ideological life, the relations between the movements that make up the HDK will deepen, and by doing this we anticipate that our common ideas and identity will attain a self-improving dynamic’* (ibid).

The framework paper links a significant number of everyday problems facing the HDK in its struggle, to the overall objective of building a ‘new life’, and argues that a new caring perspective/relationality between marginalised communities who face similar problems can only be constituted under such a new life perspective, which requires radical ideological/theoretical thinking. The paper also emphasizes the crucial role of the HDK in the formation of counter hegemony as it unites and represents the collective power of all marginalised communities. It recognizes the need for constant labour (material and immaterial) to building counter hegemony, and it emphasises the need to concentrate on specifically developing an ideological/theoretical grounding (a process that seems to be not taken seriously at the current moment in time by the HDK). Moreover, the paper defines ideological/theoretical precision and development as one of the fundamental three prerequisites (political, social, ideological) for the construction of hegemony from below. It is within this context that the idea of creating the HDK School emerged in order to facilitate the constitution of a common HDK idea and identity, and ultimately new subjects.

The framework paper argues that it is possible to form a common identity, unite around common goals and work collectively towards achieving these goals without falling into creating convergence (ideological, theoretical) between the diverse identities and knowledges

of the HDK. Instead, it argues that the interactions and connections between these diverse theoretical/ideological movements, if done correctly, could unleash their common power and enable them to be more than the sum of their parts. Thus, the HDK school is conceived as one example of a manifestation of this collective power as it seeks to provide a space of dialogue and encounter between theories, knowledges and ideas as they are '*standing side by side, rather than ignoring the ideas of each other, creating new forms of comradeships as we walk the same path with our diverse ideologies and theories and forming new reciprocal interactions*' (HDK, Education Commission Report, 2018).

Following this framework paper, the HDK formed a specific commission (HDK Schools Operating Commission) at the beginning of 2019 which has since then carried out two important steps towards putting this idea into practice. Firstly, each individual and affiliated member of the Commission was asked to create a draft of their own regarding the HDK Schools (defining what HDK schools would look like/do/perform etc) in line with their own ideas, theoretical perspectives and pedagogical approaches. A common draft for the school was formed out of these collective discussions. The draft common programme states that the HDK schools should approach its pedagogical activities with a radical perspective that focusses on learning and knowledge production processes through struggle based on the pedagogy of the oppressed (following Freire, 1972). Within this context, the school is based on a new pedagogical horizon/imagination that removes the binary between *learner* and *teacher*, creates and socialises new radical knowledge produced by learning from and through each other in the process of struggle. In an open and safe space, the school is based on a democratic approach that rejects all types of existing social hierarchy (age, gender, status etc.), adopts individual and social emancipation as a principle, and socialises knowledge by opposing the private ownership of knowledge and channelling the learning experience towards the expansion of the struggle.

The former HDK Co-Spokesperson, who participated in one of our research meetings in Colombia within the scope of the research, states that our social movement research partner NOMADESC and its radical pedagogy (which she experienced during the visit to Colombia) inspired her whilst she was involved in working towards the establishment of HDK schools:

Our visit to Colombia, and seeing what NOMADESC has been doing in their struggle, excited me greatly so I became so curious to know more about their work. While I was there, I had chance to ask them directly and

learned from their experience. What inspired me most was their diploma programmes that allow activists to enhance their knowledges and later use that knowledge for their own movements/communities. In Turkey, this usually takes place at political party schools where women, youth, communities engage in learning process during the course of their struggle (...) But we live at a different time and political conjuncture where we find it difficult to maintain long durable party forms that people could stay in for a longer period. The other thing is that often the nature of education that takes places in these political parties is targeted to form new subjects alongside party ideology and needs. I think for these reasons, we need to rethink the forms and ways and meaning of education in our places. The experience of NOMADESC becomes important in answering and finding our own ways of education and knowledge-making. As such, we got in contact with them and wanted to learn more about their experiences, which they shared eagerly and helpfully. Based on their experiences, we will come to understand what we should do and shouldn't do here in our context. Everything and every experience is very precious (...) we want to learn more about what challenges and obstacles we may face as well as the positive sides so that we do not fall back in those traps laid in our path ways and we build our way more solidly (Individual Interview, T53).

In summary, it is possible to say that the HDK's decision to create their own school emerges out of two important reasons: First, it emerges out of a need to create a space where wider collective reflection can help deepen the understanding and implementation of HDK's novel organisational form and political approach. Secondly, it emerges out of crucial need to support and increase capacity and development of activists and create new empowered radical subjects with an alternative pedagogy. Indeed, the high turnover rate amongst the HDK's activists since 2011, the lack of mechanisms for the transfer and circulation of learning and knowledge produced in struggle, as well as the prefigurative character of the Congress model, made the need for these schools even greater.

#### *Ata Soyer Health and Politics School*

Ata Soyer Health and Politics school is another important learning space where HDK activists produce new learning experiences and knowledge during the course of their everyday struggle. Ata Soyer Health and Politics School was formed by a number of Kurdish health professionals working actively in trade unions in the health sector in the 1990s, emerging out of collective discussions on the need to develop a better critique of the hegemonic health system (its politics and policies).

The school initially carried out various activities to challenge the hegemonic health system, the increased neo-liberalisation of health sector (a process that intensified under the AKP in recent decades), where health becomes a commodity as well as a space for further capital accumulation. Later it extended its activities and perspective beyond a simple critique/challenge, to develop a new alternative health system beyond the state's spaces. This shift was needed particularly in the context of Turkey where the hegemonic capitalist system attacked the public nature of health, and eliminated the 'healing ability of society' and 'other alternatives medicine' under the dominance of western health knowledge and practice through technological innovations, modernisations etc , leaving society no other choice by claiming that 'there is no other alternative in health' while at the same time devaluing and marginalising alternative knowledges and practices of medicine. Unfortunately, this dominant (modernist) understanding of health has also been replicated both in society and even within progressive political institutions, trade unions and activists working in the field of health. To this extent, the school emerged as a critique not only of hegemonic top-down health politics and practices, but also against existing narrow analyses of health policy within the progressive trade union movement in the health sector.

The school was formerly established on 05 December 2009 in Ankara. Inspired by the new political paradigm of the Kurdish Liberation movement, the school adopted a political 'philosophy of social freedom' and created its own working groups and commissions to look for alternative health experiences across Turkey, discuss issues related to health issues, organised seminars, conferences and summer camps. In working closely with people in different localities and creating local assemblies and working groups, these initiatives have created new knowledge that allows them to reconceptualise a new, radical health politics and practice.

Between 2010-2013, the school worked under the umbrella of the DTK (Democratic Society Congress) and from 2017 it became one of the founding members of the HDK Health Assembly. Since then, the school has been working with others at the HDK's Health assembly to develop an alternative health politics and practice, carrying out various activities. Since December 5, 2009, the school has brought together more than 250 healthcare professionals, students, etc.

It is important to mention the gender dynamics of this process, and the role of women in establishing and developing this alternative health politics/practice particularly. The role of women often goes unnoticed or is not considered as equal to that of male labour. This was highlighted below by a woman activist who has been active in this process:

Right from the beginning women made significant qualitative contributions. In my opinion, through constant intervention and interrogation of internalised hegemonic gendered hierarchies and demanding equality between man and woman, women have had a direct/active role determining what is critical about Ata Soyer Health Politics School today. Masculinity, the most fundamental character of today's neoliberal capitalist health system (its politics and practice), which continues to produce masculine form of relations and culture, was right at the heart of our critique and intervention. Because we as women are affected from this male dominated health system far more than others, we took a decisive move to be at the centre of the formation of the health school with a hope that would lead to a totally different system and relations. Thus, our gender intervention/labour was and still is an integral part of this process. Our desire to create a new alternative health system can only be achieved if our critique /challenge of the existing hegemonic health system is taken seriously and reveals the existing male dominated structures, male reasoning and male extortion. Therefore, our politics and practice should transcend all the existing culture, norms, values and relationships which we have been inherited over time and space if we are to succeed in creating something new, otherwise we would carry on replicating those relations over and over again even though we try to do the opposite. It is this importance that we need to vindicate and make visible female labor/care has gone in producing what we have now but also make sure that in whatever we do. Like I said before, in the current state of the health policy school; redefining relationships within the school (between men / women and women themselves), criticising male-dominated relations and values (inside and outside) and constituting a new form of sociability and institutions, women's viewpoints, approaches, voices and practice has been vital (Education and Alternatives pedagogies, Focus Group 1).

The School of Health Politics emerges as a critique not only of the dominant hegemonic capitalist health system but also against the nationalist perspective of progressive trade unions, organisations and movements working in the health sector. To that extent, the emergence of this school can be seen as an external critique as well as an internal critique of capitalist, nationalist practices, tendencies and policies:

Most of our discussions on health and health related issues took place in our organisations and institutions where we carried out our struggle as

health professionals (such as trade unions, Left social movements and chambers of medical doctors etc). We active participated in the daily activities, events and managements of these organisations. In the 1990s, we carried out our work often uncritically to think that we had joint and similar problems and we would find solutions to our problems collectively. There was not a critical and reflexive approach or different thinking in our work. For instance, I can recall the left inside the health trade unions seeing the universalization of health and legal structuring of health under this process as a profound development in the health sector and in fact they still praise it. But they seemed ignorant about what/how this univeralisation process has affected the Kurdish region, and how it was used by the state to do different things under the pretext of bringing health services to the Kurdish region. For instance, after the enactment of the universalization of health law in 1961, the first health center opened in the Kurdish city of Muş and later these centres opened across Kurdish cities. Ironically, these health centres were opened initially next to public schools or in the gardens of these schools....these health centers became 'governing institutions' and 'power centers' to assimilate the Kurdish populations through the mechanism of delivering health services. The impacts of these centers were profound in the region, a point that was/is often unnoticed or overlooked by the left and progressive movements (Education and alternatives pedagogies, Focus group 1).

The activists who gathered under the Health and Policy School have come a long way in the process of searching for an alternative new health politics/pedagogy and testing out the strategies/theories they developed from this search in the course of their struggle. Inspired by the democratic, ecological and gender libertarian paradigm of the Kurdish liberation movement, the activists continue their search (which they started under the umbrella of the DTK) to constitute a new health politics under the HDK health assembly. In this sense, we can say that the example of the Ata Soyer Health school constitutes one of most unique experience whereby the movement has come close to implementing some of those 'ideals and values' of the 'new life' at the present time in line with the prefigurative politics of the HDK. The dynamic nature of the school, the hard work and dedication of people working at the school and their long term experiences in the health sector is an important factor that determines the dynamic nature, young membership profile and the operational power of the assembly (in terms of its size, reach and ability). They are testimony to the important experience gained and produced by the praxis of social movements.

### *Gender Reading Workshop*

Women have played a crucial role and been at the centre of the formation of the ‘New Life Association’ in Ankara which initially emerged from the necessity to provide a physical space for people to gather, and later turned into crucial ‘solidarity space’ with the increased number of public services employees (including university academics) that were dismissed. However, while they played a crucial role in the daily and long-term activities and management of the association, the women realised their labour often went unnoticed, overlooked or seen as secondary due to the existing internalised/normalised patriarchal mentality. It was within this context that the women-only reading workshop emerged to create an autonomous space where women would read, discuss and develop a feminist perspective. Talking about this process, one activist explains how the idea was born:

We (women) were at the centre of all activities of the associations: organising workshops, fundraising and campaigning etc. But we realised that our labour often went unnoticed; what we were doing was not enough to shift or change the existing mentality within and outside and that even between us (women) we lacked a common understanding of what feminism was etc. So, we decided to take control and create our own feminist reading group to address some of these challenges. First, we began reading on *Jineology (a form of feminism developed in the struggle of Kurdish woman)*, then we moved on to reading on *Cooperatives as alternative organisations/governance forms and female labour* and this followed by reading on other form of feminisms. I have to say I have benefited a lot from these readings and readings with and thinking with other women. I felt happy to be in the company of women where we just listened, talked and shared each others experiences. It is very nice to think collectively with other women to develop new strategies, organise ourselves in our everyday lives and take part in the social reproduction of society. The readings we have done, discussions we have held and experiences we have shared all help us ask questions regarding what we can do at our localities and how we can reach out to other women and mobilise them beyond the conventional forms. Our readings started from these questions but have evolved over time. We came to realise that if we wanted to change this world, we need to change us (women) and mobilise them into an important mobilising force.... While we are reading and thinking we are finding our own solutions to tackle our own problems. To this extent, these reading groups are acting as mirrors to shed light on us, and our lives (past present and future) (Education and alternatives pedagogies, Focus group 1).

The gender reading workshop also allows women to rethink and reflect upon gender and power relations in their past experiences and present time political activism. A female activist

explains the significance of this for her and other women at our focus group meeting on education and alternative pedagogies:

We have been trade unionists for 20 years now; we have been engaged in social struggle for 20 years. Although we are supposedly organised within progressive political organisations against the hegemonic system, our (women's) efforts/labour in all kinds of work we carry out here and the knowledge we have produced, it turns out to be insignificant under the internal male-dominated mentality. We have come to see in our experiences, the issue is not only this male dominate mentality in knowledge, but also men's control over the means of productions, even in our progressive spaces. This is why we wanted to take initiative to create our common power so we produce our own knowledge based on our experiences. We are reading on all sort of issues that facilitate this change. As we saw that even our progressive spaces of struggle, positivism seems to be dominant which turns every bit of our knowledge/practice we produce into a man's one. As this remains a fundamental issue, our task is to engage in a struggle to produce our own knowledges, women's ways of thinking... (Education and alternatives pedagogies, Focus group 1).

Another important aspect of the reading group is the diversity of women participating in terms of profession, experiences and backgrounds. As most women participating in these reading groups have been dismissed from their public duties and jobs (doctors, teachers, academics, nurses etc), this created an opportunity for these women to get together and share their diverse experiences and exchange their expertise. For instance, the coordinator of the reading group is a critical scholar/academic (professor), a member of Academics for Peace initiative who was dismissed from her job after signing the peace declaration. Her dismissal in fact allowed her to get involved actively in the New Life Association to deal with her local areas which she could have not done whilst a civil servant. By being together with a range of diverse women at the reading groups, participants come to raise critical questions to challenge hegemonic power relations and knowledge system, and produce new knowledge that can help them in their struggle for emancipation:

(...) capitalism as a system disrupts our relationship with knowledge. It in fact instrumentalizes knowledge whereby we come to seek knowledge in order pass our exams, or be successful at something, or get a good job or simply get some appreciated from someone or some institutions.... We don't learn because we are curious or we want to understand what is going on our lives...But here at our reading group it is the opposite: we learn because we want to know, explore, understand more and we learn because we need to change ourselves (and our communities) for the

better...We learn from each other collectively, without any intermediaries. Therefore, what we do here is extremely valuable for us. In my life, I have always valued the importance of learning and producing knowledge collectively. But a country like ours, when this is often top-down and in a hierarchical manner, it is not an easy thing to do, even at universities...Because the hierarchical structure of universities prevents you from doing it, even if you want to! But here, we can easily do this and learn and produce together in line with our needs in life (Education and alternatives pedagogies, Focus Group 1).

One member of the gender reading workshop tells us how being with other women from different classes and backgrounds after losing her job at the University in fact made her question the role of academics, academia and academic autonomy:

As a matter of fact, leaving the university and getting out of formal academia/education has been very liberating for us. Because there are some serious problems in terms of the type and quality of knowledge and knowledge sharing (...) However, knowledge gains its significance and its relevance in real life; thus, knowledge has to be produced and shared in real life. People seem to criticise universities as Ivory Towers, but I don't think the ivory tower analogy is after all unfounded... Indeed, we were standing somewhere up above and doing our own work almost in isolations with the rest. We were not engaged with society in a meaningful way. Thus, I came to be cynical and critical about some concepts and processes, even the word education bothers me! What we need to do is create and produce our own concepts that explain better our experiences. For example, we should define 'learning' and learning processes differently than the way we are used to!' (Education and alternatives pedagogies, Focus Group 1).

This feminist pedagogy-based emancipation process also has consequences that directly affect the daily lives of women participants in the group. Some activists highlighted how learning and knowledge gained in this space has come to help them to express themselves, redefine their strategies and generally increased their consciousness, which in turn empowers them both in their organisations and society. For instance, one woman activist told us how the collective reading, discussion and sisterly solidarity increased her confidence; while previously she had always hesitated to talk in public and share her opinion freely and openly, later she broke that silence and became the first one to take the stage so that other women too would have courage to follow her, especially in mixed spaces:

At the General Congress of the HDK, I observed that we, women were very hesitant to come to the stage and talk about our issues and express our opinions. But the men, at every opportunity did not hesitate and took

the microphone and talked about their issues, even though they had sometimes nothing to say... I was not observing this first time though, I was always aware of this situation but could not show the courage to overcome it...But that day, after seeing man after man going up and talking, I said to myself 'it is my turn and I am going to stand on the stage with my microphone for five minutes even though I had no clue what I was going to say' ..Similarly attending these reading groups enhanced my relationship with my daughter as I came to understand her world better. I began to think differently about things in a manner that I have never done so (Education and alternatives pedagogies, Focus group 1).

Another member of the reading group explains how their readings together transformed her perspective and her 'will and desire' for a new future life:

I have come to notice more and be aware of how my female friends and colleagues use masculine language in their daily lives (this includes me as well). Every sentence and perspective we make seem to be masculine. When this happens and you start noticing it, it begins to bother you. The street disturbs you, the bus you take disturbs you, and you think that they raped you and you are in a state of constant flail...While we do spend two hours in the reading group with other women who share the same values as me, the reality is that we spend most of our lives outside with people who necessarily share the same ideas and values as us. You feel safe in our spaces, but when you step out, everything bothers you even the choice of a colour!.. There is a dark world out there, a world that was built by men with wars, violence and in other ways and somehow, we women internalise all of this and we carry on living in their world without ever questioning it... I believe, we (women) need to find separate words, use separate sentences against the world is created without us... I think we first need to start with our own husbands, our own children and our own institutions. Because when you explain this desire to someone, you need to set an example yourself. Building a new language and new knowledge for this new world is absolutely crucial You need to build a new language on your own. Because, once things start bothering you, you cannot be the same person and use the same language as before (Education and alternatives pedagogies, Focus group 1).

Both the New Life Association and the gender reading group have become crucial solidarity spaces during the most difficult times for women who come from a long tradition of struggle (trade unions, universities, political parties, hospitals, factories, civil society organisations) and has enabled them to reflect upon their own past experiences:

Our discussions here are not limited to the content of a book we read. With our readings, we make connections with what we experienced in the past at trade unions, organisation or other environments and it allows us to think and discuss. Linking those experiences to the present and

bringing them into our conversations here have taught us a lot of things. Another important thing for me is that normally when we try to convince people we are discussing with; we try to convince them for the correctness of our own thought. However, what we do here is different; our discussions here is not based on convincing someone to believe in our truth. For example, we discussed essentialism in a book we read, and everyone except one friend largely agreed. Here, we pay attention to what that person says, why it is important that we listen to her and learn from her rather than simply trying to convincing her or dictating upon her our own ideas in order to come to an agreement. Thus, our discussions are never empty discussions but rather enjoyable one that makes us all change as we learn from each others. So, I will continue to come here with great joy (Education and alternatives pedagogies, Focus group 1).

These reading groups are not only a *common space of solidarity* for a range of women during the most difficult times, but also a common space of learning and knowledge-production whereby women through the praxis of their struggles and experiences come to produce new learning and knowledge that guides them and enables them to *struggle* more efficiently and collaboratively.

## Conclusion

As this chapter has highlighted, learning occurs in many forms and at multiple spaces/places/scales, as people plough through their lives. The HDK is a critical learning space in which diverse social movement activists learn a great deal of things as they struggle to change the conditions of the world they live in for the better. As our analysis in the chapter shows, this learning within the HDK happens in many ways (informal/formal, incidental/unexpected, structured, semi-un/structured); takes many forms in its non-linear development and produces contradictory and unexpected outcomes (positive and negative experiences) due to subjective life experiences as well as broader social/political/cultural and economic processes. Regardless of the varying forms and modes of learning, the HDK represents a rich ‘pedagogical space’ and has opened up new possibilities and opportunities for many activists engaged in struggle to constitute new radical subjectivities, emotions knowledges, values and relationships. We hope that our analysis into these learning processes has revealed how the varied spaces of activity in the HDK are inherently pedagogical spaces where a great deal of learning, knowledge production, community development and solidarity is taking place. Despite the extremely difficult conditions in Turkey, these pedagogical spaces

offer new hope and opportunity not just for those involved in the struggle but also for the wider society.

## 4: Knowledge Production in the Prefigurative Spaces of the HDK

In this chapter, we will focus on the types of new knowledge being produced through/from/in the struggle of activists in the collective spaces of the HDK. Our analysis shows that, the HDK, as a congress form of social movement, represents a counter-hegemonic front with a new alternative social imaginary that posits itself against the existing hegemonic power, and a movement that builds a prefigurative politics through constantly developing its vision of ‘the new life’ and its ‘future horizons’ through the experiences and effects produced during its interactions and encounters.

As a result, the dialectical relationship between the knowledge produced by the HDK through the various experiences of its activists and the knowledge learned is essential. This dialectical relationship is shaped by experience, whereby a prefigurative political future horizon constantly collides with the existing political realities and demands of everyday life. This is important as it shows us that the type of knowledge being produced sits at the frontier of the emerging tension between what is actually being produced (what is) and what is being imagined (what should be) by the HDK and what role this new learned knowledge has played in the transformation of subjectivities (individual and collective) and social relations.

Eyerman and Jamison (1991: 14) argue that '*social movements are not merely social dramas; they are the social action from where new knowledge including worldviews, ideologies, religions, and scientific theories originate*'. In agreeing with Eyerman and Jamison (*ibid*), a number of scholars point out the significant role of social movements in producing new knowledges (see Choudry, 2009; Choudry and Kapoor, 2010; Cox and Flesher Fominaya, 2009; Hall et al., 2011, 2012, Cox, 2014; Novelli, 2010, 2007, Novelli and Ferus-Comeleo, 2010). Collectively they come to argue that as '*epistemic communities*' (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991: 10) social movements role in knowledge production should be taken seriously as knowledge producers rather than simply passive recipients. But what is less agreed upon and therefore remains a challenging task is how to analyse and interpret these new knowledges produced by these epistemic communities, considering that they are '*not always visible or explicit*' (Brock et al., 2004: 12). This is particularly important given that 'reality' is in a constant flux and the fact that different social actors are approaching the world from very diverse situated standpoints and experiences (Haraway, 1991) and in the context of highly uneven systems of

power. Hence questions such as the following become crucial: what is considered as knowledge? What is new about supposedly new knowledge? How to extract this new knowledge from a vast amount of rich data collected?

In distinguishing different forms of knowledges, Gramsci (1971) talks about the important role of public intellectuals in creating ‘good sense’ through their encounters and engagement with the philosophy of praxis (new knowledge produced as a result of praxis on the basis of critical consciousness gained) which, according to him, has emancipatory and transformative power to change the conditions of power. He contrasted this with ‘common sense’ knowledge that emerges from hegemonic societal relations and processes primarily for purpose of maintaining power. But how can we identify what is ‘good sense’ as opposed to ‘common sense’? and how do they differ from each other? (See Cox, 2014).

Bearing these challenging questions in mind and recognising the difficult task we face, we believe that both the Gramscian concept of ‘good sense’ and the ‘systematization of experiences’ (Freirean, 2000), our methodological framework outlined elsewhere, will allow us to engage with activists as knowledge producers and help us to identify what new knowledge has been produced by the HDK through its dialogical and reflexive engagement.

However, before we move onto our analysis of what new knowledge is being produced at the HDK, we would like to make a few points in relation to the concept of ‘knowledge production’, as a way of defining the framework for our analysis in this chapter. First, the concept of knowledge production is a highly political and contested one that has been used differently by many people (state, non-state) in line with their divergent (and often conflicting) interests. Secondly, knowledge production is deeply rooted in power relations, that is to say that knowledge and power are inextricably intertwined: knowledge itself becomes power, as Foucault argues (1977:27): *‘there is no power relation without the correlative constitutions of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations’*. Thus, any knowledge (however produced) has the capacity to create new meanings, new identities, new sense of belongings as well as new political forms and institutions and power relations with new boundaries for exclusion and inclusion. Hence, knowledge production represents a battleground over creating new ideas in order to develop a ‘culture of silence’ (Freirean ideas, 1973) for the maintenance of hegemony on the one hand;

and to resist, challenge and construct a better and just world on the other hand (Kabeer, 1994).

Thirdly, knowledge production occurs within the dialectics of social praxis, which is tested and translated in a variety of ways and through multiple strategies which may (or may not) be (or become) emancipatory for social transformation (Hall, 1981:12). However, knowledge production alone may not be sufficient to form a new political social order. Its translations into meaningful action depends on, first of all, humans (for their (re)production, re-articulation and re-translations) as well as non-human and non-discursive elements (such as physical and material spaces, nature) (see Fairclough, 1995, 2003; Fairclough, Jessop and Sayer, 2004). Drawing on the Gramscian notion of hegemony, Robert W Cox (1996:9) identified three interrelated dynamics that can constitute a new form of historical social structure: (i) material capabilities (for instance technology, resources), (ii) ideas (creating new intersubjective meanings, identities, sense of belonging and norms); (iii) institutions (new ones if necessary or reconfiguration of old ones) which are seen as the technologies for change and hence are at the forefront of the battleground for oppositional attack. It is the dialectical relationship between these three dynamics that gives us the ‘parameters of our existence’ (Cox and Sinclair, 1996). However, while new knowledge production implies a particular way of seeing, being and acting, throughout its developmental process knowledge gets contested, challenged and attacked by other knowledges (state as well as non-state). Thus, it has ruptures, setbacks and ups and downs due to internal and external pressure. Thus, for it to be successful it needs constant reworking and re-articulation.

Last but not least, knowledge production does not happen in a vacuum but rather is located in a particular historical and geographical context and within the struggles of various social actors. While we are particularly concerned to identify what new knowledge is being produced by the HDK and recognise its unique and distinct qualities (temporally, spatially and relationally), we argue that this knowledge is being (re)formed and (re)shaped by the accumulation of previous knowledges (including tacit knowledges, oral knowledges and emotions), previous struggles, experiences, sentiments and suffering (see Wainwright on tacit knowledge and suffering, 1994). Thus, our analysis on knowledge production is done with a critical historization in which we seek to trace the historical genealogy of knowledge production (through the social, cultural, political and economic context/conditions that have

shaped it). Further, our fixation with history is not simply to explain/identify what happened in a particular time and space, but rather to identify what kind of knowledge was produced at these particular historical moments, with what consequences and by whom. This has profoundly affected our understanding of power and social relations (state, social movement, gender, identity democracy) and the ways in which these transform identities . More importantly, this process of tracing the historical genealogy of knowledge production can be important to challenge the notion of knowledge as pre-given, and emphasises the importance of social actors in shaping their own histories, which is seen as crucial in the process of decolonisation of knowledge production and learning from the ‘epistemologies of the South,’ (de Sousa Santos, 2018).

As we argued in the previous section, the HDK emerged out of the learning experiences of previous social struggles, and as a new political form to unite all those social actors and communities marginalised by the ‘matrix of power’ constituted by Turkey’s modernity under processes of nation-building, capitalism and patriarchy. The unity of such diverse social actors/organisations/communities was secured on the basis of a radical prefigurative politics and practices that were put in place to overcome the limitations of previous social struggles and critiques of the top-down ‘hegemonic matrix of power’, and bring about a new form of power from the bottom-up through everyday acts of struggle. To this extent, the experience and experiential nature of the HDK’s praxis reveals a great deal about what kind of knowledge is being produced when these new policies and practices are tested in real time.

While we are aware of the challenging task we face when we analyse and interpret the new knowledges being produced by the HDK, we argue that the case of the HDK represents one of the most interesting and important members of wider ‘*epistemic communities*’ (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991: 10) in Turkey which seeks to create new thinking and doing about society, social relations and social spaces. In implementing this radical/distinctive politics and practices and its prefigurative pedagogy and bringing them into direct contact with the demands of current reality, as well as those of other political struggles (hegemonic and progressive), the HDK has come to create important knowledge on society, societal relations, belonging, social relations, gender, identity (self and the other).

Below, we focus on some key areas which emerged out of the research. This by no means represents the full extent of the thematic areas where the HDK has produced/reframed

knowledge, but is hopefully illustrative of the exciting new thinking that HDK processes have contributed to. We identify 6 key knowledge-making themes. Firstly, we explore Unity in Diversity; secondly, we explore issues related to Political Party vs Social Movement; thirdly, we explore Struggle in time of conflict; fourthly, we explore knowledge making related to peace and the peace process; fifthly, we reflect on the issue of prefigurative politics within the HDK; Sixthly we explore knowledge-making in prefigurative gender spaces. Finally, we draw some conclusions on the knowledge making process in HDK.

### **Unity in Diversity: From Unity in Diversity to Commoning**

The anti-colonial struggles carried out in the 1950s in Asia, Africa and Latin America not only resulted in the liberation of peoples from colonial rule but also created a new conceptualisation of nationalism which challenged the monist and homogeneous conception of nationalism that had dominated since WW1. These anti-colonial peoples' struggles rejected the nationalism that had emerged in a particular European/Western history constructed by colonial powers on the basis of a particular language, history and race whilst simultaneously eliminating and excluding other languages, histories and races. As a result of these anti-colonial struggles across the world, many so called Third World Countries (from Indonesia to Guatemala) came to embrace the issue of diversity. For example, Indonesia's official founding motto was 'Bhinneka Tunggal Ika' (unity in diversity), which expresses the pluralistic approach to differences created by the processes of colonialism and modernity (Prashad, 2008: 84). It is the legacy of these anti-colonial struggles that new social movements have centred 'unity in diversity' as a fundamental principle/strategy in their struggle against the narratives of neoliberal capitalism and the monist nation-state across the world. It is this historical legacy of these anti-colonial struggles around the globe, as well as historical struggles in Turkey, which inspired the varied social actors involved in the formation of the HDK as a new type of political formation.

In this section we will focus on exploring what type of new knowledge on/about unity in diversity is being produced by the learning experiences of these diverse social actors, whom for the first time in Turkey's history came together under one common umbrella, the HDK. How and in which ways have these new knowledges - constituted through their diverse struggles and experiences - come to challenge our understanding of unity, diversity, and unity

in diversity; and to what extent do they offer us new understandings and conceptualisation of these issues?

As unity in diversity is one of the most important principles and strategies of the HDK's prefigurative politics for social change, our analysis provides us an opportunity to examine more closely how the unity in diversity principle is experienced in this prefigurative social movement space. Our analysis in this section is largely based on the individual interviews and collective discussions we had with the activists in our workshop entitled 'Togetherness in Diversity' in Istanbul which offered us extremely useful insights and understanding. The workshop brought together different individuals and components of the HDK and enabled us to talk about unity in diversity, discuss its strengths and challenges, and understand how this principle worked in practice through the lived experiences of activists. At the beginning of the workshop, we asked the participants what they understood by the concept of 'unity in diversity' and whether this concept was useful. We wanted to understand the perceptions of these diverse activists, based on their experiences, in order to use the concepts that have been created by their own knowledge and experiences, rather than us imposing our own concepts upon them. This is particularly important as we recognise the importance of filtering those concepts emerging within Western/European Epistemologies through the prism of the 'epistemologies of South' (See Santos, 2014). While this is in line with our political and ethical framework, at the same time we found that this methodological approach helped us arrive at a better understanding/interpretation of the realities we sought to analyse (Krieg, 2000).

#### *Radical Prefigurative Diversity Politics (RPDP)*

Based on our analysis, we argue that the HDK radically and prefiguratively re-conceptualises the notions of diversity/difference and unity, and offers new ways of thinking, being, doing and acting on the Self, the Other and the Common. This has been key in dismantling those hegemonic identities that hinder processes which seek unity, and has allowed for the creation of new radical subjectivities, which we call 'radical prefigurative diversity politics' (henceforth RPDP).

Before we move on to analyse what type of knowledge activists have created in their interaction with/through the RPDP, we briefly identify some key aspects of the RPDP:

### *Diversity as a positive resource: towards creating equal and self-autonomous subjects and self-governance*

Against Turkey's highly mono-cultural 'monist' and assimilist national state and society, which seeks to eliminate diversity and difference, the HDK's RPDP recognises and vindicates diversity as a source of power rather than division, and locates the subject position (agency) of those diverse bodies within the HDK at the centre of constituting a new form of social life. Crucial in this understanding is the HDK's situated *intersectional analysis of diversity* that draws attention to the essential role of history, knowledge, memory and wisdom in the making of our differentiated identities (whether it is classed, ethnicity, religion, sex or gender). This manifests itself through recognition of body (and soul) with all its heterogeneity and diverse qualities (such as culture, wisdom, memory, history and knowledge). It is the mutual intersection of these varied qualities that produce both '*different, even opposed, but still legitimate perspectives on the situation*' (Sherry Ortner, 1995: 175).

But it is important to note that the RPDP does not see diversity as yet another 'feel good-factor' whereby the diversity principle is embraced merely to deal the issue of underrepresentation's of those marginalised communities (gender, race, religion, sex etc) and broaden their inclusion, without challenging the social structures of power that produced them. Thus, beside recognition/vindication of diversity (sovereignty), the HDK's RPDP is fundamentally concerned with enhancing the power (self-autonomy) and confidence of diverse social actors/communities who have historically been oppressed and subjugated. Thus, the RPDP seeks to create new social structures and adopt strategies and practices that can bring forth new ontological beings which are equal in our everyday struggles, while simultaneously challenging the existing unequal power structures (including internally within movements). The horizontal political form and system of equal representation (co-sharing of power) within a quota system (50% women, 10% youth and 60% institutions and 40% individual) are part of the new technologies and strategies for the realisation of this (self)autonomous power in order to strengthen and guarantee the rights/demands of minority voices (individual/communities) in the context of uneven power relations (within the HDK and beyond). In this context, the HDK: '*aims to reveal the power of those who object to the existing antidemocratic political system and order and to create a democratic society by organising*

*this power.*' (HDK Program and Statute, 6)<sup>32</sup> Central to this self-autonomy is the recognition of the right to self-defence against oppression and domination. This is expressed by the HDK in the phrase '*power emerges from being together*'.

#### *Diversity as relational and complementary: Towards creating new forms of solidarity and sociability*

The RPDP fundamentally seeks to create new forms of social relations between (and within) the diverse social actors/communities that form part of the HDK, in order to radically transform how they relate to each other in their everyday lives. Hence, the HDK defines diversity as a relational rather than isolated phenomenon. By drawing attention to the relational aspects of our diversity, the HDK's RPDP shows the inter-relatedness and interconnectedness of the nature of our diversities, and highlights how our difference is shaped in relations to the other human and non-human beings without reducing one identity to the other. By conceptualising diversity in this way, the RPDP make a strong case for intersectionality and for the complementary nature of identities. By the conceptualisation, one identity can be strengthened and enhanced by interaction with another, in contrast to analyses which define diversity as oppositional and non-complementary.

By emphasizing the interconnectedness and complimentary nature of difference, the RPDP seeks to create a new relationality/solidarity between diverse social actors/communities, which is '*governed by the norms of equity and complementary reciprocity*' (Benhabib, 2007: 16) based on cooperation and dialogue rather than competition. It is through '*treating you in accordance with these norms, I can confirm not only our humanity but your human individuality. If the standpoint of the generalised other expresses the norms of respect, that of the concrete other anticipates experiences of altruism and solidarity*' (Benhabib, 2007: 16). This conceptualisation of diversity helps to understand the organisational structure of the HDK and the importance placed upon equal representation of its diverse social actors/communities, as well as distinct and autonomous organising spaces. These spaces (both autonomous and mixed) are thus central to the realisation of this radical conceptualisation and practice of diversity, through encounters and dialogues, difficult conversations and processes of self-reflexivity taking place when interacting with others. It is

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<sup>32</sup> HDK Program and Statute is available online at

<https://www.halklarindemokratikkongresi.net/Images/UserFiles/Documents/Editor/HDK%20Program.pdf>

through these processes (which are often messy, emotional, and complex) that new radical expressions of relationships, based on values of reciprocity and equity, are being forged in flesh and bones as the HDK engages in unthinking and rethinking, being, doing, of the self, the other and the common in our everyday struggle and practice. As one activist puts it: '*it is not enough to know or accept someone, it's a very different thing to be in contact with him/her and to act together.*' (Togetherness & Unity and Diversity, Workshop 2)

#### *Diverse yet common: Process of commoning towards a future world where plural worlds co-exist*

The HDK's RPDP is geared towards bringing together divergent, marginalised social actors/communities, seen as a crucial task considering the highly dynamic and divergent nature of Turkey's social movements. Knowing the crucial importance of unity in creating a better ontological world in which all these divergence communities co-exist alongside each other, the RPDP moves beyond the false dichotomy between unity and diversity. Drawing on the complementary (rather than oppositional) and interrelated nature of our identities, the RPDP goes beyond the unnecessary distinction between our individual and common qualities and thus manages to bring together all these diverse social actors on the basis of what constitute our 'commons' rather than our differences. It tells us how we can be different (with all of our distinctive qualities) yet come together to create a better future world. Hence each of these diverse constituencies and their multiple struggles are recognised as distinct but also as part of a 'common struggle' under the notion of unity.

As stated in the HDK bulletin, HDK sees '*the spaces of struggle of all democratic oppositional forces as a common space of struggle and draws its strength from that. Our Congress is the common struggle space for all the oppressed and exploited; workers, laborers, immigrants, women, peasants, youth, retired people, disabled people, LGBTQ individuals; all those excluded and ignored ethnic minorities and faith communities as well as those people whose living spaces are being destroyed*' (HDK Brochure: p. 2).<sup>33</sup> Thus, unlike approaches to diversity which remain at the level of recognition of difference and diversity under the notion of 'irreducibility', HDK's prefigurative diversity politics sees diversity as a source for forming a new form of unity between diverse subjects while recognising their autonomy and self-

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<sup>33</sup> Halkların Demokratik Kongres Nedir (What is Peoples Democratic Congress), HDK (2012b)  
<https://www.halklarindemokratikkongresi.net/Images/UserFiles/Documents/Editor/HDKBROSUR.pdf>

representation. The central focus here is how can we construct a new form of power whilst at the same time creating the collective power necessary for bringing about a new diverse, equal and plural social life. Reflecting upon how the form of ‘commoning’ that the RPDP seeks to create compares to previous notions of unity amongst the progressive social movements, one HDK activist from the LGBTQ Commission: notes:

First of all, let me say something about the concept of unity. The concept of unity has become a fetish in both the left-wing movement in Turkey and in other geographies. ...I am talking about unity in the sense of joining forces. (...) When we say the multitude, it is an irreducible situation in my opinion, that is, it cannot be reduced to each other and cannot be compared to each other. This state of not being reduced to each other does not mean that we do not learn from or transform each other. This brings together a state of transformation. If we stand together without seeing our resemblance or what makes us the same, that unity is realised in our imagination. I think that this will not be built from the top, it will take place from below (Individual Interview, T27).

By allowing these distinct and diverse struggles to grow and develop their autonomous power, while at the same time working towards uniting them on the basis of common shared ideas and values, the HDK aimed to constitute a new common form of power for all (HDK Nedir?, 2012b:8)<sup>34</sup>. Thus, we argue that this new form of unity (as both meaning and practice) as manifested in the RPDP can be better understood as a process of ‘commoning’.

While we are aware of significant variation and ambiguity over the use of the concept of ‘commoning’<sup>35</sup>, we use the concept to refer to the process of constituting a new form of

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<sup>34</sup> Creating a common shared sentiment within/between highly diverse social actors/communities has always been central to both top-down hegemonic power and bottom-up counter hegemonic power. In his book Muqaddimah (Introduction to history), the 14<sup>th</sup> century historian and political thinker Ibn Khaldun (1377/1406) talks about the crucial role of creating common solidarity/sentiment which he describes as '*asabiyya*' for the rise and demise of the civilization of his time. According to Khaldun, the lack or demise of '*asabiyya*' was the main factor for the dismantling of any given civilizations and thus, the reconstituting a new '*asabiyya*' within the changing social/political context remains a vital Importance for the success of any form of civilization. Similarly, Gramsci (in his writing on Southern Question, 1926<sup>34</sup> from his prison cells), was occupied with the process of ‘commoning’, creating a group solidarity within Italian left on the basis of common values (social, political and cultural) as a core binding principle for constituting a new counter hegemonic power. The central focus of his writing was how to turn those existing ad hoc relations within the Italian left into a long-term unity and solidarity that allows them to both transform the subject and meaning solidarity as they continue their struggle. Gramsci sees the forming of solidarity between diverse social actors as crucial for the creation of what he calls as ‘popular collective will’ (Gramsci, 1978) upon which people will unify for social retransformation of their society through a counter hegemonic revolution

<sup>35</sup> Recently, both the concept of ‘commons’ and ‘commoning’ have gained a renewed interest with the increasing number of collective struggles and resistance taking place across the world, radically refusing existing social structures and power relations whilst simultaneously re-appropriating and re-claiming space for alternative politics/economies (Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2016) and demanding common/shared

collective power from below (by the HDK) which is called elsewhere '*biopolitical power*' (Hardt & Negri, 2009: 283) or '*reproductive labour*' (Dinerstein, 2016: 84) for the '*social reproduction*' of a new social life (Hardt & Negri, 2009, Dinerstein, 2016; Federici, 2014). Thus, crucial to this commoning process is the social reproduction of those immaterial resources (knowledge, wisdoms, memories, languages, emotions) that bond/unite, and provide the fabric for a new form of sociability amongst the diverse social actors. These processes can realise in the present a new future world based on '*a quality of relations, a principle of cooperation and of responsibility to each other and to the earth, the forests, the seas, the animals*' rather than one that is '*intended as a gated reality, a grouping of people joined by exclusive interests separating them from others*' (Federici, 2010: 229).

Hence, the HDK engages in a radical re-expression of oneself/the other/the commons in a way that has reconfigured our relationships with each other and also with our ancestors, land, histories and memories. This process aims to bring together these diverse social imaginaries, histories, wisdoms and knowledges and allow them to develop both individually but also to bring their struggles together – for a common shared future. This is expressed by the HDK in the phrase '*power emerges from being together*' (HDK Program and Statute).

As highlighted by HDK activists during our unity in diversity workshop '*being together while respecting each other's individuality*' '*recognising their difference*' and '*standing side by side with differences*' (Togetherness & Unity in Diversity, Workshop 2) does not mean creating a new universal difference, nor sameness or uniformity, but rather how to bring together and unite 'these 'irreducible differences' whereby they can be 'in a constant state of flow' as they struggle to create a new alternative world in which differences live freely while in 'common': *Like a tree alone and free, Like a forest in brotherhood*' (Togetherness & Unity in Diversity,

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access to public spaces and wealth. The Gezi Park Protest, Tahrir Square, occupy movements across the world are amongst these collective actions which seek to create an alternative diversity and 'new opening' against all 'enclosures' and 'indifferences' manifested by global hegemonic power (Holloway, 2010b: 29–30). While the concept of 'commoning' was previously used to refer to the collective access and decision making over natural and material public goods (See, Ostrom, 1990), recently it has also been used to refer to the 'immaterial labour' of social movements for the social reproduction of immaterial goods such as solidarity, cooperation, communications etc required for an alternative social life (see Hardt & Negri, 2009; Dinerstein, 2016; Roggero, 2010).

Workshop 2).<sup>36</sup> It is important to note that this ‘commoning’ above all refers an important strategy/principle that allows us to reorganise and build a new society in the here and now with our struggle in the present, with a recognition that this experiment will radically transform ourselves, our goals and our common future, in unexpected and unpredictable ways.

This radical reconceptualization of unity in diversity as ‘commoning’ fundamentally challenges Turkey’s state-centric understanding of ‘unity’. For the Turkish state, diversity is seen as a negative resource, and the unity of the nation is fundamentally secured not by embracing the diversity of its people but instead by imposing the supremacy of unity over the diverse tapestry of Turkey’s geographical territories. unity which has to be maintained through the elimination of difference at any cost. For the state, the basis of the *Turkishness Contract* is that ‘where there is diversity, unity is less and where there is unity, diversity is less’ (cf. Ünlü, 2018).

This reconceptualization also challenges orthodox notions of the ‘unity’ of social actors within progressive social movements in Turkey. A brief historical analysis of progressive social movements shows that unity has usually been manifested by social movements as a ‘united front’, as an oppositional response, and as a temporal/conjunctural tactic to challenge sovereign power. Secondly, the issue of diversity and difference has often been seen as an afterthought. Difference and diversity were often seen as negative dimensions that could prevent/delay the struggle for the control of production (class). Similarly, it was often suggested, explicitly or implicitly, that our differences would disappear with the coming of the revolution. These practices were part of the reason why many activists and movements left those groupings and organisations and formed their own identity-based movements. To this extent, this new HDK unity in diversity approach challenged the negative and often sectarian perception of unity within the left.

#### *Unity in Diversity in Translation*

However, it is important to note that this process of ‘commoning’ has not been an easy task. The adoption of these new policies and politics whilst simultaneously challenging and

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<sup>36</sup> A line from Nâzim Hikmet Ran’s poem titled ‘PLEA’ (Davet). Nazım Hikmet Ran (1902-1963) was one of the most prominent poet, social movement actor in 20th century Turkish literature. In his lifetime he was known as the best-known Turkish poet in the West, and his poems were translated into several languages.

critiquing the hegemonic domination and injustices going on in Turkey was a challenge for the HDK. This was also coupled with the path dependency (historical legacy of our actions) of HDK activists, whereby actions and practices of activists in the present are often shaped by various historical, social and cultural contexts, past habits and practices which despite actors' best intentions often influence their actions and undermine the changes that they are seeking.

#### *Emerging tensions in the HDK's diverse spaces*

The HDK's radical 'commoning' process sought to bring together diverse social actors to create a diverse, pluralist and equal future life through practices such as the commoning of collective memory, and the commoning of space for individual/collective holistic learning. However, as highlighted by most activists, while this radical reimaging of unity in diversity (commoning) has created an opportunity for attributing positive meaning and ways of acting towards the self, the other and common, this prefigurative radical commoning space is by no means conflict-free. It is a space that contains various tensions, emerging from the practical implementation of this principle in real life and real time whilst simultaneously challenging the authoritarian, repressive power of the state in a country like Turkey.

Based on the data collected within the scope of our research, we came to define these tensions areas under five main headings. These pertain to tensions between (1) individual and movement affiliated members as well as tension between movement affiliated members, (2) tensions between the dual organisation structures of the political party (HDP) and the congress model (HDK), (3) tensions relating to gender (4) tension between prioritisation of struggles relating to class or identity, and finally (5) tensions between the centre and local structures of the HDK (over different agendas and methodologies for struggle). These thematic areas can be considered fundamentally as 'challenging' areas that emerged during the implementation of the HDK's radical prefigurative policies and praxis. As we will discuss, the tensions over gender and between the party and the congress under separate subsections, we will now briefly discuss the other three tension areas identified.

#### *Tension between HDK members*

One of the unique characteristics that distinguishes the HDK from other social movements in Turkey is the inclusion of both collective and individual. Collective members include organisations such as organised political parties, radical magazine and newspapers, trade unions, associations, initiatives and platforms etc, and individual members are people who do

not have any organisational affiliation but want to be included through their own personal activism. Their participation and involvement in the decision-making processes are guaranteed within the HDK's statutes and programme through a quota system. Whilst the 'component rule' that operates the quota system (40% individual, 60% component) was an extremely positive factor that increased individual participation at the time of the HDK's establishment, over time it has come to create mixed subjective experiences in practice, and occasionally has come to constitute a source of tensions within the HDK's agenda. Indeed, based on our field work, we can say that since the establishment of the HDK, the relationship between independent individuals and component representatives involved in the participation mechanism have been one of the main sources of tensions within the movement.

Without exception, all activists interviewed talked about the debate around the 'component rule'. As mentioned by individual members, the 40% quota system was adopted in order to guarantee the representation of independent individuals who are not affiliated with any party, group or formation, and secure their participation in every decision-making mechanism of the HDK. However, over time, the individual members we interviewed felt that the affiliated members have come to influence the decision-making mechanisms on the basis of their institutional representation, isolating individuals' members and their capacity to influence decision-making, which ultimately caused some to leave the HDK. However, when interviewed many representatives of the affiliated components argued that individual members approach the decision-making process on the basis of their own individuality, and hence underestimate the importance of the representation of the components. According to the representatives of component members, the previous negative experience of individual members in membership of political organisations is often the reason why they come to define component members as either 'repressive' or 'disciplinary'.

This tension seems to primarily manifest itself as a result of the unequal power dynamics between individual and affiliated members. The affiliated members see themselves as the point of reference within decision-making process, isolating individual members. While in the earlier years this tension was managed through dialogue, more recently it has become an increasingly divisive issue. This tension is imbued with the presumption that the individual does not represent any collective power, and that there is a need to 'put pressure' on those

individuals to ‘discipline’ them in the manner of a political party. This was seen as one of the reasons for a reduction in the numbers of individual members since 2015 in comparison to the HDK’s earlier years.

One activist, a component member of the HDK explained the root of this tension as differing expectations on the part of individual and component members:

The situation of the individual member is very different, the situation of the component member is very different. They both come to the HDK from a different perspective. The component was sent to the HDK by his/her party, with whom their loyalty lies. For members working at the HDK, this is another task that has been allocated to them by their parties. However, the situation of the individual member is very different. They come to the HDK with a different mentality, perception and belief which makes them approach the HDK differently, like a ‘Dervis’. Therefore, the participation of these two different groups has different meanings and values. The individual members seem to accept the HDK values and work hard towards achieving those values, because there is only one organisation for them: the HDK. As they see the HDK as the only political organisation, they began to critique those components for their lack of commitment and inability to make decisions. While those individual members wanted to make decisions quickly, the component members have to share the information with their organisation before coming to a decision. Of course, the component members have to follow an organisational line and ideology. Their approach and understanding of issues such as feminism and gender is shaped by various accumulated experiences. The individual members have a completely different experience and perception... (Individual Interview, T12).

One activist, an individual member of the HDK, talks about the difficulty of working at the HDK and not being able to achieve desired outcomes as one of the motivations for individual members leaving the HDK and joining its party, the HDP:

At first there were more individual members. Later, most of them left. So why? It (the HDK) was a difficult area for individual members who did not have any political affiliation. Having no political background with any type of collective organisation, those individual members who recognised the need to organise in order to change the existing system of domination chose the HDK as their political organisation due to it’s alternative structure, idea and vision. But they see lots of arguments, fights taking place between the affiliated members which prevents them from getting anywhere (Individual Interview, T9).

The following quote from an individual member describes how within the HDK they HDK had to do more work in order to be recognised in comparison with the movement-affiliated

members with their political affiliations, and how affiliated members have more leverage in the decision-making process:

The individual members work more than the affiliated members. This is always so. You have to show yourself more. This is how I felt for myself. You are a woman, you did not come from an organisation, there is no one behind you. In this case, you have to work constantly. It's incredible. Here you have to be everywhere. You have to be indispensable. You have to be indispensable so that you can stay there, if you want that. Of course, not everyone can do this. That's another matter of belief, another matter of determination. Whether this is a must is a separate issue. This is not a must, no one should do this. But after a while, the independents declined. What happened when it decreased? They were in both the HDK and HDP. After a while, those independent members left the HDK for the HDP... (perhaps)... the HDP is trying to pay attention to their representation. Sorry but it is like that (Individual Interview, T9).

However, other narratives from individual members of the HDK show us that the experiences of these individual members are not monolithic: there is a great deal of divergence in the experiences of activists.

Tensions also emerge between the Kurdish liberation movement and other components affiliates or between other components. The tensions between these different constituent parts of the HDK, and the failure to establish a new mode of relationship between these social actors, was blamed by some participants upon existing prejudices, and the barriers which such prejudices create. As a result, the HDK's relatively small (in size and representation) parties and individual members seem to be concerned with 'being swallowed', 'being side-tracked' or 'remained at the back seat' by the Kurdish Liberation Movement, as one of the largest components in the HDK. While most representatives of component affiliates stated that there was space for wider participation within the governance and decision making process, and that they have not had any experiences where the Kurdish liberation movement imposed its political agenda, the idea of '*being eaten by a bigger component*' which has more social base nonetheless remains an significant concern. Due to this concern, some smaller political organisations/groupings filled with the fear of losing their power choose not to fully commit or engage in the HDK, and instead 'focus on their own political organisations as *a reflex to protect themselves*' (Individual Interview, T1).

The nature of the relationship between these components and the Kurdish liberation movement before the establishment of the HDK, their ideological affiliation, and the

relationship that developed with the components outside of the spaces of the HDK, such as the revolution in Rojava; were amongst the factors for the establishment of a better relationship between the Kurdish liberation movement. These encounters and engagement transformed the existing relationship, and along with any underlying prejudices.

In the quote below, one component member representing the ‘Call for a New World’ magazine discusses the relationship between radical left activists and the Kurdish Liberation movement. Whilst recognising the emergence of a new relationship of solidarity based on the recognition of the importance of each other’s struggle, and unconditional mutual support, he argues that the relationship with the Kurdish Liberation Movement was also one of ‘patronage’ within the HDK and particularly within the HDP, as the membership of these two organisations was thought to boost the Kurdish liberation movement’s power and popularity within wider society:

The revolutionary groups, which are the components of the HDP, joined the party because they thought they would develop and become stronger by doing this. It should be understood that the revolutionary movement in the west (of Turkey) is very weak, very weak in masses. So if you add us all together, still you won’t have a mass movement. So it’s not even one percent. Bring the entire revolutionary Left, the reformist Left together, you can’t even get one percent. For instance, TIP (the workers’ Party of Turkey) was created. If TIP participated in elections independent of the HDP, could it send a member to the Parliament.? Would ESP (Socialist Party of the Oppressed, Ezilenlerin Sosyalist Partisi) be able to send a member to the Parliament if it entered the election independent of the HDP? No, it would not! By joining the HDP it can create itself and send a representative. They are trying to expand their power and work more widely, and the HDP allows them to get beyond the 10 percent national threshold. Is this the solution? I do not think so. The solution should be based on this; the Kurdish movement is of course a mass movement. The struggle it wages is a democratic one, it has democratic content. This democratic content should be supported unconditionally. But unconditionally supporting it does not mean that we cannot criticize it or ignore its mistakes (Individual Interview, T18).

Talking about the perception which activists and organisations held towards the Kurdish liberation movement, one activist coming from Socialist Party of the Oppressed (ESP, Ezilenlerin Sosyalist Partisi) notes:

Undoubtedly, the Kurdish Movement plays a very important role in the HDK. So we cannot ignore this. This is so in terms of the human power and organisational power that they have put into creating the HDK. We are

not in a position to deny this. It may be the case that this power on some political occasions operates more actively. While in the initial period of the HDK, within the Kurdish Liberation movement there was resistance towards the establishment of the HDK, as they had their own institutions and assemblies, lately they have come to reflect upon this and changed their perception of the HDK and come to agree on the necessity of working/organising collectively under the HDK. There are some revolutionary groups that have come to think that: the Kurds are dominant, they get whatever they want, what should we do? Now I think this is a very unnecessary concern. Those with this concern eventually either limited themselves, retreated, or otherwise expressed their issue. The problem here is not that the Kurdish movement has joined, this is not the point. The Kurdish people participate because Kurdish people both in the West of Turkey and Kurdistan are political. They participate in the HDK as political people. But on the other hand, there are some that come here purely for their own (social, political, cultural, individual, collective) demands...they want to see their own demands being achieved here. This is understandable. The problem here is: If political people are participating massively, why can't you or we carry the masses, why can't we participate massively? We cannot build a common political form through these kinds of discussion (Individual Interview, T14).

Reflecting on his experiences, one of the most prominent individually affiliated activists who has been active since the establishment of the HDK, and is a former Co-spokesperson, talks about how both individual and component members of the HDK position themselves in relation to the Kurdish liberation movement.

The Kurdish liberation movement has always expressed their intention of creating a common space where everyone can express themselves freely and be treated equally. But for some reason, what I see is that individual members and in the other major components have gone along with what the biggest component says by not confronting or contradicting it. Although we have criticised this, this has entered into our daily life a lot. Of course, it is very clear by the attitude of the individuals. For example, If there are two spokespersons and one of them is from the Kurdish Liberation Movement and one is an individual Member, when people speak they look at the face of the Co-Spokesperson from the Kurdish movement and they pay attention to what he/she says. This shows you have no claim or expectation of being equal. There should be no place for such an understanding and practice here at the HDK, it shouldn't be like that. This has to change, and when we share this experience with people, it creates breaks and ruptures (Individual Interview, T50).

One prominent HDK activist from the Kurdish liberation movement, who has held HDK leadership positions, discusses the perceptions of other components affiliates of HDK towards

the Kurdish liberation movement, and the notion of the Kurdish liberation movement's imposition of its own agenda upon the HDK:

Actually, both are correct. For example, friends from the Kurdish movement who have not had any experience in working in common organisational structures think they can make a decision however they like. Such things happened from time to time. My general attitude is that if we are to make a decision, it must always be made collectively. Another thing , which I believe strongly, is that we did not establish the HDK so that it would become another Kurdish organisation that simply follows the Kurdish liberation movement's primary discourse or create a similar political discourse to our own. In contrast, the HDK was formed as a new political form, to speak to the workers, the poor, the peasants, the Alevis in the West. So, it was created to focus on the concerns and issues in the west and bring them side by side with those issues in Kurdistan and unite them together. As I am so committed to this idea, often I am the first person to stand up against the Kurdish people that see the HDK as another Kurdish party....I tell my friends that we already have our political institutions where we state our own positions and beliefs. If the HDK become just another one of them, it becomes meaningless for us to be here. Secondly, there is the issue of recognising the subject position of the other social actors and their demands and needs, for instance the needs and demands of the working class. This is also my critique to those components who have an auto-control system... refraining themselves from speaking against the Kurdish movement or bringing their own agenda to the table. We have emphasised this in many meetings. 'Friends, you absolutely need to feed your agendas to the HDK. Whatever you are discussing, you need to bring it to HDK's table. You need to take what the HDK discusses to your internal organisation so that we can capture this thing. ....I can say that they have unwarranted fears of extinction, of melting, the components have such fears. As I said, I can say that it is due to the prominence of the Kurdish discourses in the common institutions, and not bringing their agenda due to their reservations. In other words, it is a class struggle, an ecological struggle, which are also central to the demands of the Kurdish liberation movement, it should also be seen. This is rather a situation where people don't bring important issues of their concerns to table and not paying enough attention to the work and say that we are being crashed under someone's agenda when someone constantly putting effort in organizing the table. Thus, I think, saying that this agenda does not reflect us has something to do with either people not taking things seriously or bringing their agendas on the table sufficiently (Individual Interview, T53).

These tensions clearly show the complexity bringing together these diverse social actors with their differentiated and situated bodies, knowledges and experiences, some of whom come from long-standing political traditions whilst others have no experience of organising, and

uniting them within the common space of the HDK. Whilst this coming together has been crucial in many aspects, especially in terms of new learning experiences and knowledge production, it has also produced new tensions and challenges in the practice of encountering with the Other (bodies, voices, knowledges, experiences). Each social actors (communities) comes with their own historical baggage that includes individual/collective perceptions and prejudices that are shaped by the particular nature of their struggle, as well as the broader social conditions within which they live/operate.

#### *Tension over Class versus Identity*

Another issue which emerges from the HDK's experience of 'unity in diversity', 'multitude' or 'commoning', is the situation whereby on occasions tensions emerge between the class-based perspective of some components, and identity-centred perspectives of others. Drawing upon the collective reflections of activists, it seems that those political groups and organisations that emphasise the legacy and heritage of Turkey's left movement are identified with 'class politics', while the Kurdish movement and the new social movements which emerged after 2000s are identified with 'identity politics'. In this regard, it is possible to say that during the early years following the HDK's establishment, the first group distanced themselves from the individuals and components which were labelled as 'identity-based'. Although these boundaries dissolved over time, such a duality still occasionally manifests itself in tension within the HDK.

One social movement stated that this initial tension has subsided due to the mutual acceptance and recognition which developed over time through struggling together. An independent female activist who was one a founding member of the HDK, and also a member of the Peoples and Beliefs Commission, reflects upon this tension in earlier period:

When we held our first the Peoples and Beliefs Congress...I felt that not all the HDK components (old socialists as well as new socialists) were very sympathetic to the work of the Peoples and Beliefs Commission. Although these political parties, groupings all have had people coming from different beliefs and ethnic background, when we asked to contact these people, no components showed willingness to help us and left us alone to find these people by ourselves.... It seems like 'beliefs' and 'ethnicity' remain at the back of the components, if not all, for majority that is the case. I think this is the general problem and dilemma of the Socialist Movement in Turkey. Ultimately, if we are concerned with the realities of our geography we live in and seek coexistence and to live together with

all these different identities and beliefs in peace, then I think, they should have the right to speak like us... (Individual Interview, T22).

This debate over the primacy of class or identity can is a deeply ideological one, and goes to the very foundations of the new congress type partnership between the socialist movement and the Kurdish liberation movement. As highlighted by activists at our 'unity in diversity workshop', one of the criticisms that is directed at the HDK by the left/socialist organisations which are not part of the HDK is that it is an organisation that 'primarily' deals with the Kurdish issue, leaving aside the issue of class within its struggle. Another viewpoint that emerged in our workshop points to a shift in the government's position towards social movements, and the association of identity struggle with the Kurdish liberation movement. One female independent activist who played an important role in the establishment of the HDK notes:

During the rise of the first left movement [in Turkey], the system was attacking the class struggle with all its power. Later, the increase in identity politics that rose with the Kurdish movement and the increased identity-related demands of other peoples turned the regime's attention to the identity struggle, this time attacking identity struggles with all its might. I am a working woman and I belong to a class which has its own demands and aspirations. But on the other hand, I am an Alevi Kurdish woman, and it is in these identities where I am more oppressed. As such, my main priority is to fight for my identity and the demands of my communities. I was participating in my class struggle in the trade union movement. But as a result of these increased attacks on my identity and community, I had to leave the class struggle in the background and turned more towards the identity struggle (Individual Interview, T22).

The political position that identity politics divides the working class by focussing on the differences that divide people (race, gender, sexuality, disability, etc.), stems from the confusion of some prefigurative political approaches that associate intersectionality with the neoliberal tendency, often dismissed as 'identity politics'. Indeed, there is a strong link between identity politics and intersectional forms of prefigurativism, but not in the manner assumed by most critics on the left. Raekstad and Gradin argue that radical intersectional prefigurativism is very different from the liberal conception of identity politics. The purpose of radical prefigurativism is not to assimilate marginal groups into the existing society and status quo, but rather to replace the structures that support the status quo (Raekstad & Gradin, 2020: 145, 151). In fact, many radical intersectional approaches go even further. Whilst liberal identity politics presupposes the desirability and permanence of both existing social relations and the identities of the people involved, many intersectional prefigurative

approaches attempt to transform not only the social relations but also those identities. Because our identities are understood as products and mechanisms of social structures, they are not fixed or innate (Raekstad & Gradin, 2020: 148). On this basis, we can say that the HDK's identity politics is based on the feminist notion that 'the personal is political' and that '*different hierarchical structures are interconnected and mutually constitutive*', or in other words that they 'intersect' (Raekstad & Gradin, 2020: 148), in a sharp contrast to the liberal interpretation mentioned above.

#### *Spatial dimensions: local-center tensions*

The main goal of the HDK is to build a radical, direct, participatory democracy by creating a broad social movement through assemblies at local level. In this sense, the HDK was conceived as a 'decentralized' congress movement. However, primarily due to the creation of the HDP in 2014 as a mass political party, rather than as a 'congress party', this aim of establishing local assemblies was not fully realised. With the increasingly authoritarian character of state power since 2015, the situation led to increased centralization of decision making and activity.

A second dimension of this tension is linked to the relationship between, on the one hand, the Executive Board and the General Assembly, which form the centre of the HDK; and on the other hand, the local assembly spaces. This tension is also related to the relations between the HDK and HDP in local areas. Whilst the HDK's centre positions the HDP as a party which emerged out of the movement and adheres to the HDK's agenda, the popularity and effectiveness of the HDP in the political sphere makes the HDP much more prominent in local areas, whereby the work of these assemblies is often subordinated to the agenda of the HDP, especially during the intense electoral process. This situation causes divergences in the agendas and priorities of the HDK's local structures and central structures. In this sense, it is possible to say that the relationship between the HDK and HDP has become even more important in local contexts, and the inability to form fundamental national assemblies such as women and youth, makes it even more difficult and challenging to form local assembly spaces.

Since the political configuration in local spaces is more sensitive and fragile, national-level macro agenda and processes can often directly affect these places more profoundly than at the centre. For example, during the period of peace negotiations following the establishment of the HDK, there was serious HDK organisation across different cities and localities of Turkey, even in the Black Sea region (which is often considered a no-go zone). In contrast, at

the time of writing, the HDK's local organisations are finding it extremely difficult to find a space to meet. This has led to the need to search for new strategies in some local spaces in order to cope with and overcome the current situation, such as the formation of the New Life Association in Ankara, which represents an example of local branches taking the initiative and finding new directions in line with their concrete and real-time needs, and as a consequence pushing the centre to reposition itself and reconsider its politics/policies accordingly.

### **Political Party vs Social Movement**

Progressive electoral parties, in opposition and in power, can tactically have positive effects, but as a complement to not a substitute for social movements (Negri & Hardt, 2017: 8).

In this subsection, we will look at the forms of knowledge which are being produced by the praxis of the HDK's activists in operating two different political forms and spaces (the HDK as a social movement and the HDP as a political party). The relationship between the HDK and the HDP is one of the central issues for our research. It is one of the most significant moments in the history of the HDK since its formation in 2012, one which changed the fate of the HDK whilst it rapidly developed the HDP and created a mass party. Thus, we argue that analysing the dynamic relationship between the HDK-HDP and the ways in which these two distinct yet interrelated political forms affect each other (form, vision etc), can shine valuable light on our understanding of the relationships between social movements and political parties, as well as issues of social change, governance and democracy. Our analysis is based on the collective reflections of activists working in the political spaces of both the HDK and the HDP, from both individual interviews as well as the thematic workshop which we organised specifically on this issue in Istanbul, in 2019. Before we go on to discuss the relationship between the two, we will briefly outline the HDK's understanding of democracy is, and what kind of politics and practices it should entail.

#### *Radical democratic politics: Democracy as an emergent strategy*

In line with its radical prefigurative politics, the HDK has come to radically reimagine both the meaning and practice of democracy, and to adopt new practices in order to realise this radical new democracy. This politics seeks to constitute a direct, participatory, bottom-up democracy whereby people can engage directly in the governance/organisations of the affairs that affect them in multiple spaces and spheres (politics, economic, social and cultural). The main aim is to remove all the obstacles that prevent people from participating in debates, organisations and decision-making processes, in order to strengthen agency and control of people in every

aspect of their lives. Hence the HDK's radical democratic politics allow each group/community to form their own distinct and autonomous organisations in the form of assemblies and councils, whilst also working within the common spaces of the HDK.

Thus, assemblies and councils are key mechanisms for establishing and developing this strong bottom-up democracy. To this extent, assemblies are political spaces in which diverse social actors/communities come together '*to determine their own forms of government, their own sociocultural practices, and their own economic organisation*' (Díaz Polanco and Sánchez 2002, 45). However, assemblies are more than just forms of organisation, they are also considered a process through which bottom-up participatory democracy can become an '*emergent strategy*' for the construction of a new future democratic life by '*creating and developing various forms of autonomous governance models that can serve the diverse demands and needs of peoples*' (HDK, 2014a: 16, HDK, 2014b). These democratic practices are thought to provide a new way of thinking and doing democracy (governance) both within and beyond the HDK, which then can turn democracy into an emergent strategy for creating a new future life. Thus, democracy becomes a *means* for a radical future rather than the end itself: a means which will facilitate a process which will ultimately define the nature of the future governance form that we desire.

Central to this radical understanding of democracy and governance is the issue of inclusivity. Under this model, distinct and autonomous spaces are created in order to develop and strengthen the power of the HDK's diverse marginalised communities in order that they increase their capacities in order to creating better futures for themselves and their communities. The horizontal structure based on equal representational quotas and co-presidency are seen as crucial for the construction of democratic structures and cultures within the HDK, while at the same time protecting and guaranteeing the rights of the minority groups against the majority (women, LGBTQs, ethnic and religious groups, young people and individual members). This radical democratic praxis not only recognises and develops the right to self- governance (autonomy) and sovereignty of each individual and community, but also their common right to self -governance within their common future. This is about more than recognising people rights and increasing their capacity to engage in participatory politics (representational): it is also about seeking to lay the basis for a new whole democratic system and structure where diverse actors are in control of the governance of their own as well as

the common affairs. By giving importance to the local, district and national assemblies, the HDK comes to reimagine power relationship between these levels, and challenges top-down hierarchical decision-making processes and forms of governance, such as those which are prevalent in Turkey which aim to maintain the hegemonic power of hegemonic and continue to exclude marginalised communities, voices and politics that are defined as a threat to the unity and integrity of the state. The HDK's radical democratic praxis seeks to build democracy from below away from the state, with the prime concern of strengthening the power of society.

This radical democracy politics goes beyond liberal understandings of representational democracy in which democracy (politics/practice) is confined to representational spaces, where participation is sustained through elected representatives, and citizens are understood as 'voters' who are thought to have no knowledge in the governance of the affairs which affect them. Indeed, seeking to create a radical democratic politics/praxis through everyday struggles and resistance from below, without taking state power, also challenges those progressive theories of social change which argue that real democracy can only be obtained by overtaking and dismantling sovereign power (See Holloway, 2002).

The HDK's radical democratic politics and democratic forms have captured the imagination of the diverse social actors and communities which have been excluded from political spaces in Turkey. It is the first time that a political organisation has managed to unite diverse individuals and communities under a common roof and political project. In a political system where the social agency and the diversity of these communities have ignored and suppressed, this radical democratic politics represented 'hope' for the diverse communities which conform it. Many activists from minority groups talked about how the HDK's decentralised and horizontal congress form was the reason why they wanted to join an organisation for the first time in their lives

However, activists do not operate on a blank canvas, real life throws up challenges and dilemmas as well as opportunities as they seek to manage/shape their surroundings whilst operating within a melee of competing ideas and uneven power relations. Such challenges force activists to come up with a new approaches and interventions. The HDK's decision to form a political party was based on the perceived need to expand the power and reach of the radical imaginaries of the 'multitude' grouped under umbrella of the HDK.

Despite its aim to radically reconstitute democratic practice, the demands of the time (in the context of upcoming elections, lack of progressive political parties), the HDK decided to engage in struggle within electoral sphere by forming its own party, the HDP. Whilst there were a great deal of divergent opinions over both the nature (a congress party or mass party) and temporality (long term or just for elections) of such a party, the decision to institutionalise some of the movement's power into the form of a political party was based on the belief that the struggles in these two different spaces (political and social) would be crucial for the struggle to create an alternative future Turkey, as stated by those movement activists who played crucial roles in the formation of the Party. The decision to form the HDP can therefore be seen as the movement rejecting the binary between seeking the transformation of political structures from within (the state) through representational politics, or building a new political system and structures beyond the state, what Hardt and Negri (2017: 254) call '*antagonistic formations within and against the state*'.

This reconceptualization of the political party as an institution for struggle and resistance, and as a political space for the creation of a radical politics necessary for the transformation of society and societal relations, was the reason why the HDK came to create its own party less than two years after its foundation, before it had been able to form its local organisational structure/assemblies.

The crucial questions which emerge are: what happens when a social movement (the HDK) with radical democratic politics and praxis decides to institutionalise some aspects of its power in the form of a political party? In what ways does this new institutionalised form of power (and its politics) come to affect the social movement from which it emerged and alter the power dynamics between the two? Below we will try to answer these questions through an analysis of the HDK/HDP.

#### *Social movement vs political party: HDK vs HDP*

The positive environment and energy created by the HDK was further intensified first with the revolution in Rojava, then with the low conflict environment secured by the peace negotiation process since 2013, and finally with the Gezi resistance that broke out at the beginning of the summer of 2013. The HDP emerged as an articulation of the decades-long revolutionary labor of the Kurdish liberation movement and socialist and left movement and new social movement emerged from form the 2000s onwards. Initially designed as a 'party of the

congress' (see Hamzaoğlu, 2019b, 2019a), with the intensive and hard labour of activists, the HDP gained its official status. By exceeding the 10% electoral threshold in the June 7, 2015 elections the HDP initiated a period similar to the excitement created by the Workers' Party of Turkey (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*, TIP)<sup>37</sup> in 1960s, but with much greater and wider ramifications.

Hardt and Negri point out that, first in Latin America and then in Europe, progressive political parties emerged from strong social movements and came to power on the shoulder of those movements, and subsequently became mainstream opposition parties. They point to examples of the Workers Party in Brazil, the Movement towards Socialism (MAS) in Bolivia, Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain (Negri & Hardt, 2017: 22). Raul Zibechi defines this process as the transition from 'insurgent dynamic' to 'institutional dynamics' for Latin American countries (Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina, Venezuela, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay) (Zibechi, 2010). The HDP indeed represents one important example of these parties which emerge on the shoulders of social movements. Hardt and Negri emphasise that these experiences are very important in developing new political and organisational forms as '*the party of movements*' that are '*animated by the constitutive action of the movements beyond the traditional mechanisms of representation and regulation through which the dominant modern tradition has understood democracy*', and '*give the responsibility for strategy in progressive and liberation struggles to the movements and limit leadership to a tactical position*' (Negri & Hardt, 2017: 71). However, they also draw attention to the danger that these experiences may face in their struggle; the danger of 'populism', especially '*when populism is understood as the operation of a hegemonic power that constructs 'the people' as a unified figure, which it claims to represent*' (Ibid: 23). This is because of the central paradox that defines populism as '*constant lip service to the power of the people but ultimate control and decision-making by a small clique of politicians*' (Ibid).

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<sup>37</sup> Workers' Party of Turkey (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*) was founded in February 1961 by a group of labour union members. It became the first socialist party in Turkey to win representation in the national parliament with the [1965 general election](#) when it got 3% of the votes in the national elections and won 15 seats in the parliament. TIP deputies' highly publicized active participation in parliamentary sessions contributed to a radicalisation of the political scene in the country. By 1967-68, militant left-wing student organizations and labour unions were formed. It was banned twice (after the military coups of 1971 and 1980) and eventually merged with the [Communist Party of Turkey](#) in 1987.

The new social movements mentioned above which emerged from the 2000s onwards have succeeded in generating a new ‘repertoire of collective action’ that advocates participatory and egalitarian decision-making processes designed as a fundamental critique to conventional forms of politics and political forms. Nonetheless, in Turkey, as in many parts of the world, the historical predisposition of the left political tradition towards the party form/system, and the restoration of the diminished reputation of the political party as a result of the emergence of a new wave of left-wing populism, have highlighted the importance of such ‘movement parties’ which rise on the shoulders of new social movements.

Inspired by the long-term political determination of the previous Kurdish political parties that fought hard to gain electoral representation, despite the repression of the Kurdish movement’s democratic struggle since the early 1990s (see Watts, 2010). The volume of the HDP’s vote created a great deal of excitement, and strengthened the counter-hegemonic imagining of a new ‘new life’ for ‘another Turkey’ (Güneş, 2015; Şimşek & Jongerden, 2015).

The electoral victory of the HDP, can therefore be seen as an important milestone in Turkey. For the first time in Turkey’s history many diverse representatives had been elected as members of parliament for a party, rather than as independent candidates. By becoming the third largest party in the parliament, the HDP was for the first time able to challenge the neoliberal authoritarian AKP government.

Raul Zibechi (2010: 13), who writes on new social movements and resistance in Latin America in his work on the El-Alto struggle in Bolivia, argues that the success of the political parties that emerge on the shoulders of social movements ‘cannot be consummated without the existence of a dense networks of relationships between people relationships that are also forms of organisation’. According to Zibechi (*ibid*: 13-14) the dominant western political approach is one of the reasons why these vertical, highly centralised and vote-oriented party organisations come to the fore instead of horizontal and consensus-based democratic organisations:

The problem is that we are unwilling to consider that in everyday life the relationships between neighbours, between friends, between comrades, or between family, are as important as those of the union, the party, or even the state itself. In the dominant imagination, organisation is understood to mean the institutionalized and also, therefore, hierarchical, visible and clearly identifiable. Established relations, codified through formal agreements, are often more important in Western culture

then those loyalties woven by informal ties. In short, association (where the bonds of rationality turn people into means for the purpose of achieving an end) is usually considered more important than community (woven at base on subjective relationships in which the ends are the people). Reality suggests otherwise: community-based relationships have an enormous power and movements, or insurgencies are forged in the bosom of those relationships...’

The HDP’s electoral success also created new challenges and tensions within the HDK and between the HDK and the HDP. The HDP managed to relate to wider society, it rapidly developed into a mass political party and in doing so came to change the fate, politics and practices of the HDK. This created a tense relationship between the HDK and HDP, to the extent that many have come to question the necessity and importance of the HDK for social change.

#### *Analysing the uneasy relationship between the HDP and HDK*

Our workshop on the HDK-HDP relationship in Istanbul provided us with the opportunity to have an in-depth conversation with activists from both the HDK and HDP, including the co-presidents and co-spokespersons of both institutions. Their collective reflections highlighted the complex nature of the relationship between these two organisations that were formed to work together in order to bring about an alternative future in Turkey. Based on these collective reflections and conversations, there seem to be various competing and conflictual views over the meaning, roles and effects of these two institutions (on individuals, communities and collective struggle). Despite the divergent views, all seem to have a common sentiment over the historical significance of the HDK/HDP’s electoral success and the representation of plural diverse communities (minorities, women, LGBTQs) in national electoral politics first time in Turkey history.

As our data shows, there seem to be two different understandings of the relationship between the HDK – HDP. The first one, which seems to be the more predominant view, described the HDK and HDP as two different political forms which complement each other. In this approach, the HDK is considered as a base from which the struggle for an imagined ‘new life’ is being carried out, whilst the HDP was a means to reach this ideal. This conceptualisation is evident by the movement activists’ description of the HDK at one of our workshop as *‘flowing into the capillaries of society’* whereas the HDP is an organisation that is *‘obliged to legislate these capillaries in the centre’*; *‘HDK is political illumination of the HDP in the realm of politics’*, *‘HDK*

*is an address while the HDP is a house' 'HDK is the spring where the water comes out and the HDP is fluidity (mobilization) and 'HDK as a dream, HDP a reality'* (Political Party Vs Congress, Workshop 5).

What activists put forward with this positive conceptualisation is that the HDP has contributed to the HDK (and its collective struggle) significantly by "*socialising its radical politics and policies within wider society*". This has also allowed the congress to 'reconnect' and 'reach out' to other sections of society beyond the HDK's immediate members. The successful electoral victories increased the 'visibility' of the HDK and '*turned into an important political actor*' and '*an address for those diverse peoples and beliefs that have long been marginalised*'. Furthermore, according to this view, the success of the HDP '*has shown everyone the power of the commons and how collective common power can bring successes that they would have not achieved individually*' otherwise. Thus, the HDP in fact has strengthened the collective power of the HDK, which could have been dissolved in other circumstances. Thus, rather than 'hindering' the movement, the HDP becomes '*a yeast that keeps the HDK together*'. Furthermore, the success of the HDP has shown that the 'dream of a new democratic society' '*a new form of democratic existence*' can be possible with the radical prefigurative politics of the HDK, as the HDP has brought those new politics and policies to the centre of Turkey's politics and political system (Political Party Vs Congress, Workshop 5).

The second prominent understanding of the relationship between the HDK and the HDP is less positive. Activists who subscribe to this view see the relationship as 'problematic' and 'tense', and as having had a negative affect upon the HDK and having caused its regression. This viewpoint was manifested in activist descriptions of the relationship as 'a problematic Iceberg', '*The two who cannot make the decision to separate but cannot bring the relationship to the right order*' and an act of '*Unfaithfulness*' on the presumption that the '*HDP does not do something about its past*' in the process of becoming more powerful and "*swallowing*" the energy created by the 'meeting of peoples' under the HDK (Political Party Vs Congress, Workshop 5).

According to this group of activists, while it may have helped the socialisation of some aspects of the HDK's radical politics/policies in the short term, the HDP has fundamentally '*prevented the HDK from becoming a popular social organisation*' in the long term as this process of

*'socialisation has not been turned into an affective source for wider mobilisation and transformation'* (Political Party Vs Congress, Workshop 5).

Contrary to the positive views of the HDP, activists who subscribed to the second viewpoint argued that once the HDP made gains and became more popular, it came to prioritise its demands over those of the HDK; *'started distancing itself from its social base and its sources of nutrition'*; *'stopped contributing to the development of the HDK'*; *'hindered'* and *'preventing it from ever becoming a 'social organisation'* (Political Party Vs Congress, Workshop 5). According to this view, this process has come to create 'new power dynamics' (uneven and unequal) and hierarchical relationships both within and between the two institutions, which affected the 'diversity and unity' and 'power of individuals and communities' without any institutional power.

Movement activists who share this second viewpoint argue that by operating within the existing system of power the HDP has increasingly resembled a 'conventional political party' despite its radical politics and procedures. Hence, rather than affecting the existing power structures and relations, it has come to affect the radical politics of the HDK negatively by *'confining this radical politics to the realm of parliamentary politics'*, which then has come to limit the possibility of radical change outside the state power, as the struggle within the existing system to 'revive and reform' is represented as the only and best way for social change (Political Party Vs Congress, Workshop 5).

Indeed, as highlighted by these two differing points of view, the relationship between the HDK and HDP is highly dynamic and complex and needs to be analysed critically. Rather than seeing them in complete opposition or in binary terms, these reflections show the HDP (political space) represents new possibilities and opportunities (of political space) for the HDK, while at the same time limits the socialisation of those radical possibilities. Talking about this, some activists urged us against the danger and limitation of such binary analysis that sees HDK and HDP inevitably/inherently oppositional and highlighted the complex nature of the relationship:

Analysing these two institutions as a binary term is problematic. That is to say, the HDK was formed as a rich political form with an aim to bring all those diverse and dynamic social struggles within its remit in order to create a new social life. But it has had some limits in its struggle. While it brought together the socialist left movement and the Kurdish movement

it did not manage to include other social movement. But the HDP, which emerged out of the HDK, managed to take the HDK's radical ideas of to a much wider section of society through parliamentary politics and elections while not fully complying with the principles of the HDK. Thus, the HDP has become a place for many diverse and different sections of society. While the HDP-HDK relationship could not achieve the issue of localizing and organising assemblies, the HDK together with its party have been the front runners of the struggle for democracy in a highly authoritarianism context and that is an important positive contribution of both to the democracy struggle and broader social struggle in Turkey (Political Party Vs Congress, Workshop 5).

In their analysis of different strategies for struggle, Hardt and Negri stress that we must '*cease viewing strategies as divergent and recognize their (potential) complementarity*' (2017: 278). According to them this involves not just adopting a different perspective but also transforming our practices. Thus, '*taking power, by electoral or other means, must serve to open space for autonomous and prefigurative practices on an ever-larger scale and nourish the slow transformation of institutions, which must continue over the long term. Similarly practices of exodus must find ways to complement and further projects of both antagonistic reform and taking power*' (ibid). It is through this 'three-faced Dionysus' which acts as '*the coordinated formation of counterpowers*' that we come to constitute '*a dualism of power both within and against the ruling system*' (ibid) and succeed in creating new social realities.

#### *The HDP as quest to form common political space*

As mentioned previously, the HDK was created a new political form to bring together diverse social forces which were operating separately and unite them one umbrella on the basis of shared values, drawing upon the lessons learned and knowledge produced by rich histories of social struggle across Turkey. The decision to form a congress type of political organisations was ultimately based on a need for a new political form with new radical politics as well as a fundamental critique to the party type organisations that have been seen dominant form for social transformation. It was this significance that attracted the attention and interests of diverse range of actors. However, the social and political developments of the time pushed the HDK in the context of upcoming elections to form its own political party soon after its own establishment with an aim to offer an alternative third way to those progressive society who stuck with two hegemonic political bloc (the conservative/Islamic and Secular), one that would represent the demands and vision of these different social opposition movements at

representational spaces. An artist activist, one of the founders of HDK and a member of the Culture and Art Commission, describes this search process as follows:

Turkey had entered a new election period... We were discussing what to do and what role we should play: should be participate in the coming elections as independent like the Kurdish movement has done so, or whether there is a need for a new political structure (party) along the ideas of the HDK. However, this decision did not stop all discussions as there were a lot of disagreements amongst the HDK members; while some strongly opposed it, others showed their reservations. At the end, it was agreed that forming a new party was a necessity while keeping the HDK as a decisive institution... While we can admit that the HDK has played an important role, providing an alternative path/politics to the existing status quo/politics and to some extent this is the HDK's success, since its establishment all attention turned to the party rather than the HDK (Individual Interview, T19).

Seen as a 'historical need', HDK activists spent most of their energy, effort and resources in institutionalising the political party, leaving aside their HDK organising. While no doubt that the HDP has provided lots of opportunities for activists and contributed a great deal to their causes and demands, as well as increased the visibility of the marginalised groups which are affiliated, it also has generated some limitations and challenges as the HDP has gained more power vis a vis the HDK to the extent that has comes to affect the HDK's fate and radical politics/practices significantly limiting its role for social transformation. The decision to dissolve the pro-Kurdish party BDP and join the HDP, further increased the tensions both within the HDK and between the HDK-HDP. One activist argues:

I believe this was one of the most important breaking points. I thought this was not true because a gigantic building cannot enter and stay inside a smaller structure that determines it, and that's what happened. For example, this is one of the reasons for leaving EMEP (Labour Party/Emek Partisi). In other words, it would be like this at HDK, because this was the protocol. It was what I call component law, the ground for the components to relate together at a certain distance through a negotiation. But the BDP's passing to HDP with all its relations and power by dissolving itself brought some problems immediately. These were not seen because there was a success in the Presidential election, which was held right after that, and I think the success has covered up the complications that may arise. In other words, Selahattin Demirtaş's success in getting nearly 10% of votes was a great success and ultimately this success had covered up those existing and emerging tensions within and between the HDK/HDP (Individual Interview, T20).

The dissolving of the BDP and the HDP's decision to work as a 'mass party' rather than as a 'party of the Congress' with an intention to appeal to the wider society, brought the first break with the HDK. The Labour Party (EMEP), one of the socialist parties, which played an important role in the formation and development of the HDK, left the HDP and then later left the HDK, on the basis of a critique that the fusion of the BDP party to the HDP '*would increase the power of the Kurdish movement within HDK/HDP and make it more decisive in every aspect of the two organisations* (Individual Interview, T49).

EMEP's departure, as well as the HDK's 'vague' and 'slow' position during the Gezi resistance, reduced the excitement of the initial years of the HDK, while the HDP has been stood out more and more due to its electoral successes, as its popular politics has come to resonate with wider society. One activist from the Kurdish liberation movement, a member of the HDK, analyses the process as follows:

I think power is decisive in these matters. In the geographical space where we do politics, in our political traditions, structures and individuals, the sense of existence, leaning on power, and partnership with power is very strong. I am not saying this in terms of judgment. I'm saying it to draw attention to a reality. Now, for example, in the foundation of the HDK, HDK was very strong, and its star was shining. Turkey was actually a place to move to a new plane of politics. There was lots of interest flooding from all over Turkey towards the HDK. People were stepping on each other's feet to become delegates or members. However, today the situation is different. The heavyweights in the HDP did not leave untold words to each other at the meetings here. I mean, there was such a political dispute, such tension. Here is EMEP 'I am the second biggest brother here' but there was such an atmosphere of internal competition like ESP 'No, I am the second biggest brother'. But when the party was formed and achieved a very serious level of representation, then it turned to the opposite. This time, everyone started to line up and take the party as the basis. Of course, there are two main things here. First, there is an orientation regarding the appeal of current politics, the appeal of popular politics, and what it promises in the short-medium-long term. But another aspect actually has to do with the inadequacies of our ideological approaches. So, we have difficulty internalizing and tracing everything we read. In other words, we actually do the most perfect theories, but we have more difficulty in working hard to make it reality. Being in the HDK now means making effort, working like a dervish, means having no expectations. That means you will go to the neighbourhood; you will go to the association, and you will bring the solution. But being in the HDP means managing something. It means being the executive of a process. This inverse asymmetric relationship is very important in daily life. That's why we are

also similar to DTK. For example, when we call a meeting, the recipient of that meeting call is different from the recipient of the HDP call. For example, we sometimes do this, we say ‘with the participation of someone from the HDP’, we leak the information. We do this to increase participation. Perhaps because our daily hassle is less, we can discuss more refined things here. We can discuss a political view. We can discuss the need for the new process and often want to discuss it with our components. For example, when we say let's discuss, we see that they came there less prepared, they came sloppier, they sent their lower-level representatives, but in a call made by the HDP, this was done at the level of co-chair or co-spokesperson. This is actually a political dilemma. This has a lot to do with everything, of course, there is no place to test what this place has produced. So, we cannot measure a success scale. But by election, the number of deputies, etc. you can measure with. But there is nothing you can currently measure the NGO's ideological and political perspective (Individual Interview, T53).

#### *Elections vs Assemblies: The rise of ‘antagonist reformist strategy’ under the electoral downpour*

In their book entitled '*The Assembly*', Hardt and Negri proposes three essential paths for social movements to constitute a new form of governance, each with its 'own promises and pitfalls': '*the strategy of exodus*', '*The strategy of antagonistic reformism*' and '*the hegemonic strategy*' (2017: 297). '*The strategy of exodus*' is ultimately an escape strategy that is designed to '*withdraw from the dominant institutions and establish in miniature new social relations*' beyond state spaces, whereas '*the strategy of antagonistic reformism*' implies a struggle within '*existing social and political institutions in order transform society from within*' and '*hegemonic strategy*' refers to a strategy that seeks to '*take power and create the institutions of a new society*'. (*Ibid*). According to them, the issue is not which one is right, but rather to think and come up with new ways to link these strategies together depending on any given context so that they come to help you to create a new form of self-organisations and self-governance. When we think in terms of these triple paths, we can clearly say that the HDK mostly follows to '*the exodus strategy*', while the HDP follows the '*the strategy of antagonistic reformism*'.

As highlighted by most activists, the need to institutionalise some of the HDK's power in the form of a political party emerged on the basis of necessity in the context of the time. '*The strategy of antagonistic reformism*' aimed to carry on the struggle within the state spaces and institutions in order to strengthen '*the strategy of exodus*' of the HDK beyond state spaces, with the hope that these two interlinked strategies would ultimately help to build a

new form of self-governance and self- organisation whereby people take control over their lives and affairs rather than doing this through the medium of representatives.

However, the political and social context of the time, and the need to take part in the upcoming elections whilst still in its infancy meant that the HDK had to pull all of its human and non- human resources towards the elections, in order to secure the representational power of the HDP. While these elections played an important role in strengthening the HDK, they also shifted the attention and the focus away from forming assemblies, which are central to the HDK's political vision

Hardt and Negri (2017) disagree with the view that social movements should direct all of their energies into creating a progressive party that can represent them in elections. They argue that the potential power of such political parties participating in elections within an existing system of power is quite limited because '*the state is ever more occupied (or sometimes actually colonized) by capitalist power and thus less open to the influence of parties*' (*ibid*:8). However, they argue that '*progressive electoral parties, in opposition and in power, can tactically have positive effects, but as a complement to rather than a substitute for movements*' (*ibid*:8). A common theme raised in the reflexive analysis of HDK/HDP activists regarding the nature of relationship between the HDP/HDK noted the tension between 'substituting' and 'complementing' the movement. According to activists, the party which emerged out of the HDK reached a point where it came to substitute the movement over time and space, therefore significantly affecting the movement (and its radical politics), rather than being a complementary political institutional power.

In the citation below an activist from the Kurdish movement discusses the meaning attributed to the elections by social opposition in a country like Turkey, with a context in which democracy is not fully established, and relates it to the reasons for increased interest in the HDP:

As the HDP became more visible, many people and groups prefer to work at the political spaces of the party instead of social spaces of the Congress. This is partly due to the existing political system of power and the ways that it has affected our understanding of politics and political practice. We are used to and like to engage in what we call high politic, as it is a lot easier. It is also an effective system for demagoguing, haranguing and showing our self in the public space. At the same time, we are a community that is fundamentally shaped by the nation state. There is a

thousand-year-old state tradition in this country. We cannot deny the effects of this political system of power on our bodies and how our bodies and genes are being ingrained by the very structure... Just to provide an overall picture of one of the important shortcomings of the HDK (without generalising this to the whole HDK), I can say that we can't stop thinking like a system and acting like a party. In many local places, we appear to think, behave and act like a party even though we have a different organisational structure. We have a problem of producing similar policies/politics as the state. While this may seem natural given the historical presence of the state traditions, we need to go beyond this in our thinking and practice. Beside this, we are also in a country where the main form of politics is through representational politics. We have highest number of political parties with the highest election turnout with the participation rate up to 90 percent in Turkey in comparison to the rest of the world. Even though, the people do not like the existing political system and believe that the elections would not change anything significantly, in the recent decades both locally and nationally, they have come to take part in electoral politics. Of course, when we give such a value to the elections and electoral politics, we cannot free ourselves from thinking with the same logic and mind as the state. This is, I think, one of the most important point that obstructs us in our struggle. This is why we find it difficult to do social struggle in the society (Individual Interview, T25).

Indeed, the increased interest and participation in the elections in recent years can also be seen as a result of increased social/political polarisation of society under the AKP -MHP government. This manifested itself in a range of factors. Firstly, there was a deepening of opposition between the hegemonic paradigms of the nationalist-Kemalist-secular base and the nationalist-conservative and 'neo-Ottomanist' base. Secondly, the emergence of the HDP as a counter hegemonic challenge offering people as a possible 'third way' beyond those two hegemonic blocks. Thirdly, was the emergence of elections as a vehicle for conducting this oppositional struggle. All of these factors contributed to the HDP substituting the place of the HDK in terms of political priorities. Talking about why this issue of 'substituting' and 'replacement' has come to be one of the important issues between the HDK/HDP, one activist who works at the Journal of Theory and Politics argues:

Why did this happen? With the successful election victory, everyone's heart started to beat at the HDP. It was almost too easy and happened naturally. There were no local organisations formed by the HDK and the HDK had not yet organized itself locally. We had some theory and politics on how to form these local assemblies, but in practice we had not done anything yet. Instead of focusing to work on establishing these, we created our own political party without even yet learning anything from

our experience. So, there had not yet emerged an opposition within the HDK that could challenge and oppose this mass effort that went into the shaping and institutionalization of the party. Perhaps, it is only natural that the HDP would fill those gaps that have been filled by the HDK throughout the struggle and if the HDK could not protect itself, it had to dissolve its power towards the HDP. This is the dynamic of the struggle (Individual Interview, T44).

While the election campaigns created a window of opportunity for the HDK to establish its local organisational structure in previously untouched areas, as the HDK activists directed their energies to election campaigns they began to focus more on the antagonist reformist strategy and leave behind progress on more radical trajectories. The main source of tension between HDK and HDP seems to be the balance between these two approaches/strategies.

As Hardt and Negri point out, elections and electoral process are one of the areas in which antagonist reformism often contains an underlying assumption that '*once elected a person can substantially and even fundamentally change the structures of power*' (2017, p. 276). Hardt and Negri (2017:177) argue that 'antagonist reformism' can provide some opportunities and make significant contributions to social struggle in various areas at certain times even if [these strategies] result in short-term frustration and 'appear as failures' in the short term, as often their fully effects take time to be materialised. However, they draw attention to the apparent limitations and challenges associated with these strategies if they are used as the only path to social transformations, as '*too often the long march through the institutions gets lost, and the desired social change never comes about. This, in part, is explained by the production of subjectivity: even if you enter an institution aiming to change it from the inside, often instead it will change you*'. (ibid) Thus, the crucial point here is whether these 'antagonist reformist strategies' are adopted in struggle in order to make some changes within the existing institutions of power to transform the social political structures of power, or whether they have come to support the existing structures and relations of power.

However, as indicated by some activists, the HDK/HDP's prioritisation of the 'antagonist reformist strategy' seems to be also linked to the needs and demands imposed by the political developments that took place since 2015, whereby HDK was pushed to focus on the institutionalisation of its party power while it was at a '*stage to carry on the necessary practices for establishing and expanding its power*'. Below, one activist talks about how the context of the time pushed the HDK to refocus on the HDP:

While the HDK was at a stage to shape its presence, it had to send its most active cadres to work in the establishment of its party. Each of us was confined to this area as our only focus was to concentrate on this area. Of course, during this four-year period Turkey had experienced its worst crisis in its history. In a normal situation, we would have 1 or 2 elections in a 4 year term, but we don't even remember how many elections we had in these four years. People had to put forth a struggle for survival and existence in every sense; institutional, subjective, representational and peoples-beliefs-freedoms. Whether we liked it or not, in order to be present in the elections the HDP's identity had to be brought to the fore and strengthened, not as a result of a choice, but rather something that was imposed upon us by the agendas and priorities of the time. So therefore, this history has a huge bearing on what we are going through in the last few years. If things proceeded in its natural course, perhaps we would have been in a different situation where the HDP and the HDK would exist on a healthier ground. But this did not happen (Political party vs Congress, Workshop 5).

#### *Social spaces vs political space: A complex 'mission' around the autonomy of political space*

One of the important discussions that comes to the fore in activist's reflections is the issue of the 'spaces of struggle' of the party vs the congress. Within this conversation, the first of the two main views consider the congress and the party as two complementary political structures, one carrying on its struggle on the axis of the 'socialization of the political' and the other on the axis of 'politicization of the social'. The second view states that the congress and the party are completely different from each other, in terms of both organisational forms and areas of struggle, so they must act with different modalities.

While the HDP was formed on the basis of a political understanding that it is interrelated with the HDK, and as a complementary space of struggle rather than an isolated one, the lack of clarity over how these two autonomous yet interrelated institutions operate in practice, who does what and where, has in practice caused a great deal of tension between the two institutions over time. According to activists, this confusion over the duties and roles of these two institutions has intensified, with the HDP gaining more power over the HDK. An activist from 'Yeni Yaşam İçin Çağrı Dergisi' (Call for New Life), a socialist magazine, describes this 'confusion and complexity of mission' between the HDK and HDP:

The mission assigned to the HDK and the HDP has never worked properly. What is the mission assigned to the HDP?: 'you are a political party, you will carry on your struggle at the parliament, you will do politics, you will participate in elections, you will carry our people's voice to the parliament'... Very roughly this was the mission... The mission stated that

the HDP will struggle around those demand of women, youth, environment, working class and labor struggle etc. and will be the voice of all those marginalised and excluded sections of society (...) What is the mission assigned to HDK?: 'You will organise social space and will not do electoral politics'. The HDK will establish assemblies starting from the smallest locality...In that sense, The HDK Is given a mission of facilitating societal transformation via social revolution. Now, in the current context and reality of Turkey, defining these missions as such to these different political institutions is wrong. It is wrong in the following sense: 'You do politics, but you do not do politics', 'you deal with social domain, and you deal with political domain. In fact, these two domains are already intertwined in Turkey. So, social domain is not independent of political domain. For instance, if there is a local problem, such as a sewage problem or lack of road, these issues are not independent from politics, in fact these social issues are central to politics and are the main areas of responsibility of politics. This may be defined as a municipality's work, but municipality represent the state itself in a locality. Thus, inevitably, politics gets intermeshed with the social. For a long time at every meeting, conferences, we talked about what these two institutions should do: 'the HDK should form assemblies not the HDP' and 'the HDK should not get involved in politics and the HDP should not get involved in social issue' because it is written like this in the programme. All these discussions neither generated a good working relation between the HDK/HDP nor the HDK has managed to form its assemblies as required. But in order the HDP to carry on their political form they had to form their own assemblies in local places This was a must! The reality of life does not develop as we write it in our programme. I think the problem is that we do not create programmes by looking at the reality of life. We create a programme according to our own reality and then try to adapt the reality of life to this programme. However, at this point in life, the practice has shown us clearly that this would not work (Individual Interview, T18).

Indeed, this allocation of missions, that the HDK should work in social domain while the HDP works in political domain, was initially defined as a way to create a form of 'rule' that clarifies and defines the roles and duties of each institution, as well as relationship between the two. Instead, it came to create a great deal of confusion over the missions and generated an ongoing tension between the institutions. The HDP becoming more prominent and powerful than the HDK exacerbated this tension even further, as the HDP has come to take over some spaces of the social movement. For instance, the transfer of the HDK's two most important and dynamic assemblies (Women and Youth), that constituted the organisational backbone of the HDK in local areas, over to the HDP after the successful election victory in June 2015 not only increased the tension between the HDP/HDK but also fuelled a heated debated on the HDK's incapacity to form its own assemblies, a central plank for its radical democratic

politics. Seen as turning points in the history of the HDP/HDK, the decision of passing the HDK's most dynamic spaces of struggle to the HDP was seen as an attempt to say '*well If you cannot do this job properly, we will take it over as we cannot wait any longer for you*' (Individual Interview, T8). This was seen as an example of 'substituting' the social movement which had given the party its existence and its power. This has become an issue over the years to the extent that the HDP comes to detach itself from the components that created it in the first place, and came to act as if it was a completely different organisation, in many instances replacing and substituting the movement. This is one of the deep tensions in the relationship between the HDP/HDK.

Another activist talks about the debates and the perception of politics that shaped the debate on elections and electoral politics and the missions of the HDK and the HDP:

The numerous elections that the HDP had to participate during its earlier years of establishment had a lot of effects on the dynamics between the HDP and HDK. When we say that the HDK does not do politics, we mean that the HDK should not engage in politics in a narrow sense where politics is often understood as party politics or representational politics. Whereas our perception of politics is much more broader than this, one that differs significantly from the perception of politics defined by the state. As we all know the conventional politics is designed around elections and often in a party style. Of course, we know that every aspect of life is political and therefore, the HDK itself is a political movement, but just one that has a broader understanding of politics. However, the elections and electoral process created an environment where the perception of politics in a narrow sense came to dominant over other space as the HDP has become more popular (Individual Interview, T24).

Perhaps the dominant public perception of politics and the political form of the party both within the society and within the movement came to assign different value and meaning to the HDP and HDK, whereby the HDP is seen as more valuable than that of the HDK. This is evident in the increased interest in the HDP which resulted in an increased transition of HDK cadres from the congress to the party, especially after the June election in 2015 (see Hamzaoğlu, 2019a). While the HDK leadership decided to transfer power and resources from the HDK to the HDP in the early years of the party, with the HDP gaining more power, this transfer became a more challenging issue and threatened to undermine the HDK. While there are various reasons that led movement activists to choose the HDP over the HDK, the issue of power seems to be a crucial one. Reflecting upon this, one Armenian activist notes:

There are two aspects here with regard to the transition of people from the HDK to HDP. First, as the HDP was created and developed by the HDK's cadres, it was kind of normal to see people moving from one to the other. But the other aspect, which I think is important, is the issue of power, in the sense of what value being at the HDP generates. What is this value? Well, the value comes from the representations, having deputies and being part of governance... The society seems to move towards these values as the HDP has gained more power, especially those components of the HDK, who found it easier to find their space in the HDP, while the situation was much more difficult for those individual members who found it more comfortable to work at the HDK (Individual Interview, T46).

From a different perspective, an activist from Socialist Refoundation Party (SYKP) evaluates the shift of resources towards the HDP within the context of security and individual/organisational interest to keep safe themselves/their institutions from the increased repression since 2015 onwards:

After the war, the HDK became one of the first institutions that was targeted for criminalization and repression. You have on one side, a congress type of political form (which is undoubtedly legal and legitimate for us) whose legitimacy is not recognised by official powers, and a legal political party that has such a number of parliamentarians and operates as a group in the parliament... Those people that are currently on trial because of their activities at the HDK are subjected to more scrutiny and more tougher sentences than those that are working at the HDP. That said, in recent years, the HDP itself has come to face increased violations and repressions, as you know many of its members including the former co-spokesperson are in prisons now despite its legal status and legitimacy. But still the struggle at the HDP seems to be considered safer than at the HDK. The second thing is more specific. They may be considered small but nonetheless I like to mention. That is, at the HDP you can be a deputy, a mayor, a mukhtar, a local or provincial council or somebody, so there is success and prosperity! Undoubtedly, this is one of the things that have come to motivate people in their decisions to choose the HDP over the HDK (Individual Interview, T20).

An independent female activist who was active in the early days of the HDK, explains how the difficulties created by the relationship between the congress and the party became a deadlock, especially in terms of the division of labour between the two structures:

The relationship between the HDK/HDP is still something that challenges us immensely. Because the HDK position, especially after the establishment of the HDP was that: we would create local assemblies in neighbourhoods and districts where people would come together and engage in a real politics. However, this was the most difficult task to do, so doing party politics is far easier...For instance, it is easier to challenge

the government policies or response the prime minister than deal with the sewerage problem in your neighbourhood. (...) I had a lot of quarrels with everybody about this issue. If we have to create assemblies than let's just focus on creating them rather than continuously worrying about why the HDK has not yet created them year after year. As a person who has been in the middle of these ongoing debate in both institutions, I argued openly on many occasions that the HDK should stop engaging in big politics and leave this to the HDP, because that was the right thing to do. (...) But unfortunately, the HDK could not do this. As I said, it is easier to do the conventional form of politics in Turkey, where things happen every day and change rapidly. So, it's easier to make a press release or just organise a meeting than engage in creating something new. As creating something new is more demanding and requires more resources, more people and more mobilisation. Unfortunately, this is what has happened... Unfortunately, the HDP also abandoned the place where it came from. The HDP has explicitly excluded the HDK and ignored the HDK and the movement that gave its existence. From time to time, it said that the HDK is very important, it should be our component and participate in all of our meeting and that the party should have a HDK quote, but all these intensions remained at the level of discourse as they have never been turned into practice and internalized. As they have not been internalized, this issue has turned into an unsolvable issue (Individual Interview, T9).

Below, one activist discusses the possible drawbacks of treating the relationship between the Congress and the party as one of absolute reciprocity, and offered a different interpretation:

The relationship between the two institutions is much more complicated. Yet we seem to evaluate this relationship in an uncomplicated way, whereby we perceive the HDK and HDP as two institutions that overlap, but they are not! First of all, the HDP should not be viewed as a party of the HDK. If the HDK has organised itself as congress type of political form, it could have expanded its power. But we could not do that! Perhaps this was due to the elections or something else. Beside any of these possible reasons, we have also experienced an institutional and organisational weakness. Because we did not manage to establish ourselves as a congress type of organisation, as a new political form that that requires a new political aesthetic in line with its new radical political paradigm, even though we had witnessed the possibility of this taking place at the Gezi protest. Unfortunately, the HDK has not reformed itself in the light of these developments taken place in Turkey. Of course, the HDK is the only reference point for the HDP, which means when the HDP carries on its political activity and action, it should look to the HDK. But the HDK does not have to look to the HDP directly. If it does, then how can he focus strengthening and expanding its social organisation. Instead, it will become like any other political party that is confined to existing centralised politic, having a parallel existence alongside of its own party

without any local, district and regional connections. We have been suffering a lot from this parallel existence of two similar institutions (Political party vs Congress, Workshop 5).

As we can see from the above reflections, the HDK is generally identified with the social space, while the HDP with political space, and the dynamics of struggle in these two domains are generally understood as either oppositional or independent of each other. However, Hardt and Negri, in their book entitled *The Assembly*, question the widespread assumption of *the autonomy of the political space* from that of the social, argue that the struggle of the new social movements that have emerged in many parts of the world since 2011 has gone beyond this separation, by problematising and challenging the most basic ideas about the autonomy of the political space in successfully '*subordinating notions of the autonomy of political to projects that weave together political, economic, and social liberation*' (2017, p. 35).

They argue that a political understanding which defines politics/the political space as independent and an autonomous space can lead us to 'disaster', and that a path to a genuinely democratic form of politics can only be achieved through the transformation of power and social relations (2017 :278). According to the authors, the only effective and realistic way for new social movements to resist/respond the attacks of neoliberalism is to '*shift our perspective from the political to the social terrain or, better said, to wed the two. Only then will we be able to recognize and foster the existing, widespread circuits and capacities for cooperation and organisation, and indeed to comprehend that the talents of social cooperation are a broad and solid basis for political organisation*' (ibid :40). They argue that only by doing this '*we might learn from Lenin's formula, nonetheless, is the need to couple revolutionary political organisation with a project of social transformation*' (ibid:40).

## **Struggle in Times of Conflict**

According to Albert O. Hirschman's famous study titled '*Exit, Voice and Loyalty*' (Hirschman, 1970), members of any political or social institution have three possible options when the organisations they belong to have deteriorated in their performance and no longer provide the required things: Exit, Voice, and Loyalty. Hirschman's framework has been adapted to protest movements, political parties and authoritarian regimes. He argues that when people find themselves in a situation of extreme violence or war, where their rights are being violated, they may choose to 'exit' by removing themselves from the situation and withdrawing their relationship with their respective organisations (political party/organisation/state; to 'voice'

by attempting to change their situation through active engagement in collective action; or they may choose ‘loyalty’. Loyalty is a crucial element in determining whether people choose to remain and fight (Voice) (even though the exit as a choice is available to them) or ‘escape’ and ‘withdraw’.

Of course, it is important to note that in a conflict situation, one’s options with regards to ‘exit’ or ‘voice’ are highly contextual and depend upon the form/level of violence, and the spaces of collective action for the manifestation of ‘voice’ which are available etc. Hence, rather than seeing them as separate options, these three are interrelated and mutually inclusive, determining each other in a dynamic way and often producing variegated and differentiated outcomes. In a country like Turkey, where authoritarianism is on the rise, people could be argued to have these three options identified by Hirschman: to speak out openly against the authoritarian regime and transform this discontent into political action; to choose to exist and go into exile, an option that is only available to a few and an ostensible affirmation, without actually supporting the regime. So how does this work for a counter-hegemonic social movement like the HDK? How do activists respond in a context of increasing authoritarianism such as that of Turkey: An outspoken Voice’ of refusal, an Exit, or seemingly accepted loyalty?

In this subsection, we will focus on what type(s) of new knowledge has been produced by the HDK’s activists while carrying out their struggle in the extremely authoritarian context which emerged from 2015 onwards, and the new coping, survival and security strategies have been developed on the basis of these new learning experiences gained in this process.

The HDK, like other oppositional social forces in Turkey, has been affected massively by state repression and violence. This new political reconfiguration of power has not only reduced mobilisation on the streets to almost zero, but also resulted in an increased number of imprisonments of activists and forced exile. As we will highlight in the coming pages, this has had significant consequences not only on the safety and wellbeing of activists, but also on their collective struggles (politics and visions), collective knowledges and collective memories. The imprisonment and the forced exile of many of its diverse cadres have significantly impaired the HDK’s unity and diversity principles. This process also reduced the transfer of knowledge and experiences within the movement, and limited the opportunity for knowledge sharing and learning between and between activists who come from different political traditions, background and generations.

However, our research with HDK activists shows that state repression and violence in these difficult times can also play a unifying and solidaristic role, in parallel to its tendency to destroy and atomize. This *new solidarity ethos* created in the struggle enables activists to support each other under the most difficult of circumstances. The wave of repression forced the HDK to react with a range of organising initiatives, all of which can be understood as examples of this *new solidarity ethos* which emerged at the peak of violence in order to attempt to overcome the most extreme injustices. These included the formation of new solidarity committees to follow up on the court cases against HDK members in order to support members (as well as those who were dismissed from their jobs under the special decrees) both economically and emotionally and to support survivors and relatives of those who lost their lives in Diyarbakır, Suruç and Ankara massacres; as well as initiatives to establish new solidarity networks and spaces such as New Life Associations, Solidarity Academies and Cooperatives

#### *Understanding the Present Time*

As mentioned above, the HDK was created and developed at a particular political and social moment, in which the demand for an alternative democratic and peaceful society was at a historic high. The peace talks between the PKK and the state created an environment of hope, as many came to believe that this new political opening may lead to a new beginning in Turkey. However, as set out elsewhere, this drastically changed from 2015 onwards with the collapse of the peace process and an acceleration of violence and conflict in the Kurdish region. It was crucial for our research to understand how HDK activists understand and analyse how the recent conjuncture has affected their struggle in the ‘now’, and how that ultimately has a bearing on the struggle in the future. With this intention in mind, we organised a workshop entitled '**Struggle in difficult times**' in Istanbul, in order for activists to engage in reflexive and collective dialogues.

While recognising its internal/national dynamics, activists locate the present context of shift to deepening authoritarianism and violence within the broader global context, whereby authoritarianism has been in the ascendency worldwide in response to the crises of global capitalism.

Activists highlighted what they understood to be the defining features of the current period: the rapid transformation of power and increasingly authoritarian-fascistic character of the

state; the increased chaotic political and social environment due to the dissolution and transformation of existing state institutions in line with new state politics (for instance the legal and juridical system); the all-out assault on freedom of expression and organisation; increased social polarisation; the collapse of solidarity networks within society, breaking societal ties and damaging the social fabric through mechanisms of fear that lead to isolation, and an increased sense of loneliness.

The collective discussions at this workshop highlighted the particularities of the violent conjuncture, while recognising its continuity with the past, where violence and oppression has always been a favoured political strategy to discipline and govern society in Turkey, especially those sections of society deemed as a ‘threat’ to sovereign state power. According to activists, the current authoritarian phase represents a new wave of “*Fascism without boundaries*” which is ‘*limitless as it tries to reach every domain*’, one that primarily manifests itself through extreme ‘*polarization*’ and ‘*divisions*’ of society. Some drew attention to its ‘*ruthless*’ character as it penetrates all domains of society, ‘*leaving no element of surprise*’. However, despite its ‘*ruthlessness*’ and ‘*limitless*’ character, some activists argued that the new authoritarianism in Turkey operates on the basis of a ‘*balanced repression*’ which allows it control at a level that neither ‘*allows any organising and mobilisation to take place*’ nor ‘*pushes the oppositional forces to use extreme forms of struggle, such as armed struggle*’ (Struggle in Difficult Times and Future Perspectives, Workshop 3).

This contemporary authoritarianism restores and reconstitutes itself not just through the ‘*destruction of oppositional struggle*’ but also through the ‘*destruction and dissolution of existing democratic institutions, such as the rule of law and freedom of expression*’. This destruction, together with the ‘chaotic environment’ it created, is in fact fundamental for the reconstituting of structures of power required for the AKP to refine/reshape society/societal relations. Central to this contemporary authoritarianism is the operationalisation of fear as a fundamental technology to ‘*break and eliminate collective solidarity networks*’ while ‘*increasing the interconnectedness and bonds with the existing hegemonic system*’. This has generated an increased ‘*polarization and division of every unit of society (including the family) along 50 -50 lines and increased usage and reference of right populism*’ as ‘*many come move towards right politics more and more*’ and ‘*become more authoritarian and fascistic*’ in Turkey and globally, even oppositional social democratic parties, as this the existing system is

threatened by the '*the breakdown of the separation of powers and the concentration of all power in one place*' (Struggle in Difficult Times and Future Perspectives, Workshop 3).

However, some activists warned us against the tendency to define the present temporality as an exceptional or unique period. They argue that the tendency of 'unique-zing' may hide or downplay the historical continuity of state violence, and the extreme conditions under which social movement struggle has taken place throughout Turkish history. One activist argues:

There was no easy time in Turkey...Today, I am 44 years old...At the age of 6, I encountered the 1980s military coups. I remember very well the traces of the 80s coup in my childhood. In the 90s, the unsolved political murders and massacres were taking place in front of my eyes. And starting in 1999, a period of increased political genocide... These past years actually were a period where the regime transformed itself and developed its total destructive war machine, which was crucial for our period now. So, it's hard. It has never been an easy time in this country. In fact, the HDK emerged in this difficult time as a need, a necessity (...) We know this very well that the best medicine in difficult times is organisation, organisation of society in the present. It is a matter of organising all dimension of social space. We consider this also to be case when we try to overcome these difficult times now as we strongly believe that the more we can organise, the more society gets organised and the stronger the locals become, the sooner we overcome this pressure and get rid of this repression. So, we consider organisation as the ultimate medicine for difficult times (Individual Interview, T25).

Another activist points out the difficulties and possible danger of emphasizing a sharp distinction between before and after 2015:

The issue of conflict, lynching and repression existed in 2011 when the HDK was first established. At that time too, the HDK faced violence and repression. So, it was not much different from 2015. It is often said that the HDK/HDP were established and developed in an environment of peace and the current state of war is shown as the reason for explaining the present time conditions they are in as well as their roles. But we know that the HDK was not established in an environment of peace, but rather in an environment that was dominated by oppression and violence (Socializing the struggle from DTK to HDK, Workshop 4).

From a very different perspective, some activists talked about the inability of social oppositional forces to be self-reflexive and self-critical during this difficult period in which the 'spirit of acting collectively' was being weakened dramatically. However, activists also talked about how even the under most extreme conditions, people continue to fight and mobilise on

the streets as we have seen with women's movement and the Kurdish liberation movement, important political subjects at the forefront of struggle.

Perhaps one of the reasons for these different interpretations of violence within the HDK is the differentiated and situatedness of subject positions. Whilst for some actors, the violence and oppression has always been part of their reality, for others they may be facing this for the first time.

#### *State Violence, Criminalization and Justification*

According to activists, one of the main aims of the new state-oriented war concept which started with the Gezi Resistance of 2013 and become thoroughly evident in 2015 is to eliminate the common struggle and egalitarian bottom-up peace process that has been built and developed under the leadership of the Kurdish liberation movement and the socialist movement in Turkey. At our focus group meeting on gender and women's struggle, one female activist sums up this situation as follows:

In fact, the chaotic situation we are experiencing right now is the result of the system attacking our unity. There is a dictator who cannot tolerate this unity as something that has been shaped around him. The violence that started from the Suruç Massacre and continued with the Ankara Station Massacre, just like the 1980 military coup is an attack on Turkey's democratization process, the positive affect made by the Rojava Revolution, as well as on the unity between the left-socialist movements and the Kurdish Movement. The only reason it attacks us is that we are together, and the system does not tolerate this. This is also experienced in Rojava. The same nation-state logic that was imposed on Rojava in the international war against it, is the same as the state logic that has been imposed upon us in Turkey' (Women, Gender & Social Change, Focus Group 2).

During our workshop in Diyarbakir, Kurdish activists under the roof of DTK and the HDK talked about how this new orientation of the state affected them:

...there is very serious pressure and attack on us. These attacks and pressures broke our backs in many areas. It narrowed us both in terms of cadres and other issues. Through these attacks, the state also began to work out the HDK. Unlike previous unity front attempts and partnerships, the HDK has done something different, something never done before: it brought all those oppressed, excluded and ignored together and united them. The state saw this and came to eliminate all those diverse social forces that created this unity. Since 2015, the state has been trying to spread the discourse that the HDK/HDP are in fact two purely Kurdish organisations. With this, the state wants to criminalise the HDK/HDP as

terrorist organisations as it has been doing historically in order to break the unity within the HDK...I think that, as a result of this, some members of the HDK (and the HDP) have withdrawn themselves a little bit. I think the state is banking on this. The Suruç Massacre was very important for me. The message there was to isolate the Kurds and to distance all the others from the Kurds, and this inevitably has affected us (Socializing the struggle from DTK to HDK, Workshop 4).

An activist who played an important role in the founding of the HDK points out that one aspect of the criminalization of the movement is the prevention of the HDK-HDP from reaching wider society through the complete censorship applied by the mainstream media, especially since 2015:

Until mid-2015, the media broadcasted the HDP (HDK) and the processes driven by the HDP more than they deserved; they wrote more columns on them and their possible role was valued somehow. (...) Our group at the national parliament and our spokespersons received a lot of attention and their concerns were on the agenda. During the peace process, the HDP became even more present in the media. In that respect, while the media gave more coverage to the HDP up until mid 2015, this completely changed and disappeared after 2015 (Individual Interview, T45).

Another activist draws attention to three main areas and reasons why the HDK and HDP are terrorized and criminalised: the Kurds, the Armenians and LGBTQ communities, three issues that have been red lines and bleeding wounds throughout Turkey's history:

It wants to totalise all Kurds with Kurdish liberation movement, define anyone supporting/working with them as a threat and by doing this wants to terrorise all of them as the Other. Well, I mean by this, the state wants to criminalise the HDK/HDP in the eyes of society. The second thing, the state hits us on the issue of LGBTQ by saying publicly 'they support LGBTQ'. The third thing, they are trying to criminalize us because of our approach to the 1915 Armenian genocide. Perhaps, the constant problematisation of these three issues as threats (The Kurds, Armenian Genocide and the LGBTQ movement) lies with the fear that they fundamentally challenge the state' (Political party vs Congress, Workshop 5).

This criminalisation leads the Turkish state to define the Kurdish political struggle for freedom and equality as 'separatism' and 'terrorism' on the basis of the unitary nation state; the women's movement and the struggle for different sexual orientations as 'immorality' and 'indecency'; and the demand for recognition of all state crimes against different ethnic and religious groups, especially the Armenian Genocide and confronting the past, as 'treason' and 'insulting Turkishness' on the basis of denial.

Another element which was identified as a driver of state repression were HDK's attempts to solve local problems by locating itself within local social networks through assemblies and commissions:

For example, in all of the HDK court cases, the most punishment was given to those people who were engaged in forming local people's courts to solve existing problems and find solutions to the disputes between families in their neighborhoods. So, they see these moments and spaces where we feel we are in power, and they attack them directly. It is also very interesting that they attack our educational institutions and spaces. Especially, they attacked those educational academies that we established in Kurdistan. At least we can say that that there is a clever system out there that knows what/who to attack on (Political party vs Congress, Workshop 5).

A founding member of Socialist Refoundation Party (SYKP), states that the first step of the transformation of the state's approach was to criminalise the HDK and all other social oppositional groups.

The period in which the HDK formed and developed was a particular period when the democratic solution and Kurdish issue had evolved from the field of conflict into the field of conversation in Turkey. But the democratic solution option once again was replaced by an armed mentality and war/civil war is always something that narrows democratic politics (...) There are three aspects to what is happening to the HDK. First, it was rapidly turned into a criminalised political organisation by the system. How did the system do this? It did it by filing lawsuit after lawsuit. There are currently more than 10 different court cases opened against the HDK, and no doubt many will follow. Once one of these court cases concludes that the HDK is a criminal organisation, anyone that has been engaged in the HDK will therefore be described as criminal and working for a clandestine organisation. People in Turkey have a very powerful memory of punishment. The case of the DTK (Democratic Society Congress) shows us this very clearly. Today, for a speech that we made at the DTK congress and for participating in their congress (not as a member but as an ordinary participant) Ertugrul Kurkcu and myself are being taken to the court with a 43-year imprisonment sentence for me and 30 odd years for Ertugrul Kurkcu. By pushing the HDK towards this domain of criminalisation, the state has unfortunately narrowed the HDK. The second aspect is that since every member who was arrested or imprisoned has also contributed to the work of the HDK in one way or another, it came to create a perception that working in the HDK is a reason to be arrested/imprisoned/persecuted. By doing so, a space of struggle that once was seen as comfortable and democratic, has slipped away and turn into something different. All of these in fact have

contributed to the reduction of the HDK work and its power (Individual Interview, T28).

The second important situation that emerges from the criminalization of the HDK's struggle by the system is that some activists choose to move to the HDP and carry on their struggle in the 'legally formed party' space, instead of staying in the congress spaces which lack a 'legal basis'. Some activists even withdraw themselves completely from struggle. Talking about this and the effect which it has had on the HDK's politics, one activist notes:

Something like this happened; people that belong to political organisations/groupings have generally more experience of struggle and hence seem to be more determined in the difficult and violent situation as opposed to those individual activists. I am not one of those who belittle individual participation, but rather one that values and cherishes such participation. But an academic or environmental activist or an artist who contributes individually may not always show this acumen as much as those members coming from an organised background. To remain silent and keep quiet in fact means to withdraw from struggle. When this energy that was sustained by these individual members was interrupted and blocked by various situations, we turned into the sort of space made up only by typical leftists and organised leftists. But this is unfair! (Individual Interview, T28).

Talking about some of the reasons for the HDK's members (especially individual members) either gravitating towards the HDP or withdrawing themselves completely, one activist:

I know that my comments may bring some suspicion, but I want to say that it is because the HDP is more protected! The HDK can be criminalized more easily and cases against the HDK can be opened rapidly. Of course, when I say the HDP is protected, it means as protected as they can be in a country like ours. It has five thousand members in prison including its former co-chairs, provincial co-chairs and ordinary members (Individual Interview, T20).

A young HDK activist from the Kurdish freedom movement comments on what might be considered to be movement success in such a repressive context:

In the lawsuits opened against the HDK, the HDK is described as an urban organisational/political form of the KCK<sup>38</sup>. The reason for this is the similar policy between the two and the fact that both seek to bring social change through a bottom-up transformation of society. However, the fact that these different political organisations have similar goals does not

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<sup>38</sup> The KCK is abbreviation for Kurdistan Communities Union (*Koma Civakên Kurdistan*, KCK). KCK is a political organisation that was created in May 2007 with a commitment to implement new politics/practices of the Democratic Confederalism as outlined by Abdullah Ocalan, the imprisoned leader of the PKK.

mean that they are the same political structure. There may be a dimension of each being influenced by each other's methods, politics but that is it. I think, to some extent, we have achieved something here. In an environment where legality is being imposed as the only way for legitimisation collective action, maintaining ourselves as a political organisation and continuing to form ourselves as such, I believe, can be represented as a success. At least, being a mentally flexible political structure and sustaining ourselves under these circumstances may be enough for us to see ourselves as successful (Individual Interview, T1).

One activist, an exiled scholar from Turkey who played an active role in the formation of the HDK, talks about how she gets inspired and emotional when she sees people in Turkey during the elections, under such extreme violence and difficulties, continuing to organise, challenge and defy:

When I am looking at Turkey from the outside (Exile), I can see amazing things are happening during elections in Turkey. While these elections seem funny to me (I mean meaningless), when I see people turning these elections moments into real choices and possibilities in spite of the AKP's dirty tricks again and again, this process seems like an incredible and daring resistance to me. Whatever happens, there is political will, determination and tenacity through which they reproduce and transform themselves. The opposition is being suppressed in Turkey, but against this the opposition refreshes itself and adapts their struggle to challenge/overcome the oppression, which I can say, they are very successful at doing despite all the pressures (Individual Interview, T52).

The comment shows a very different interpretation of the elections and why they constitute such an important aspect of the movement's agenda. In countries like Turkey where authoritarian forms of power have closed all other spaces for collective organisation, elections can be one of the few avenues available. Whilst there is widespread criticism that elections persistently make society focus on a parliamentary representational democracy and prevent more egalitarian representation and participation from below through assemblies, through organising and resisting within the electoral system, oppositional forces have become immovable, even despite authoritarianism.

#### *Emerging New Strategies for Survival and Coping*

What new strategies of survival and coping with state coercion has the HDK developed during this process? What kind of cohesion and coping mechanisms has the HDK created in its struggle, at a time when democratic expression has been almost completely eliminated by the

state of emergency regime, street mobilization has been reduced to almost zero, and activists have been intimidated by methods of oppression, violence, detention and kidnapping?

An activist from the ESP (Socialist Party of the Oppressed, Ezilenlerin Sosyalist Partisi) who has been active in the HDK for a long time, provides a self-critical answer to such questions, and emphasizes the opinion that the HDK's caution in taking the struggle to the streets in the midst of violence was in fact a strategic mistake:

To be honest, we haven't been able to develop a specific strategy. It would not be like this if we could have done so! At the HDK, we discussed the decision not to go out on the streets many times and the HDK expressed how it felt about this decision and about its ideas (...) Our co-spokesperson on different occasions stated that the decision not to go out on streets was wrong. It was clear that this approach has encouraged the attackers (...) Ultimately, their aim was to get the Kurds out of the streets, to narrow the HDP, to terrorize it, to clamp down on it and strangle it. And this strategy still continues today. Now we discussed this at that time; if we move towards society, strengthen our relationship with wider society and create a position where we expand the circles around the HDK/HDP we can then break this political isolation of oppositional forces in general (locally and centrally) and tackle the narrowing of the Kurdish Movement specifically. We have made such efforts, but I have doubts that we are getting the results we want (Individual Interview, T14).

One of the most drastic, concrete effect of the repression was that the HDK and other social opposition withdrew entirely from the streets. The observations below of two HDK activists give us a clear idea of the before and after 2015:

We retreated a little, we turned inward. We have used the street less and less. We organised fewer public meeting, even closed spaces indoors. All of this pushed us back significantly in practice. We tried to establish new form of actions, routines for adapting to this new situation and creating sort of balance. How's that? The discussions such as 'We can't do that' started to increase as we began to hear more and more repercussions that 'the current possibilities are not suitable to do this'. Indeed, this had spontaneous reflections on concrete events and practice. We began to pay more attention to 'our power is not suitable for this', 'let's do this in a closed hall', 'let's do this, let's not do this' etc. (Individual Interview, T10).

In the earlier period of the HDK, knowledge production was so intense, where workshops were being held constantly and we got together with diverse people that had never got together before. This period lasted until 7 June, 2015. During this time, we had increased the number of participations and people were coming and going to our events

comfortably. We did not need to prepare a plan B and have to manage a crisis situation. Later, the climate changed completely. We came to watch ourselves and be careful about what we are doing/saying, even on the phone. For example, you mention the HDK's name on the phone, later you find this changed as the HPG in the indictment that was opened against you. As the uncertainty and unknown situation increased day by day, we began to make plan B just in case our A plan did not work. There was no such thing before 2015, where we had an enormous crowd, self-confidence, increased societal interest and sympathy (Individual Interview, T8).

One of the HDK's coping strategies developed in the new period was to create a new common 'democratic front' against the AKP-MHP government with other social movements and political organisations. Organising a series of 'democracy conferences' in different localities and undertaking the formation of a local 'democracy front' demonstrate the HDK's intention and desire to build a common oppositional front against the rising authoritarian character of the regime:

Since the June 24 election, the [congress] has not limited itself to a political organisation solely based on its components. Since fascism is seeking to re-institutionalise itself again and that this new institutionalised form of fascism is not a problem only of concern to the HDK/HDP's components, we began to think carefully how to form a new social/political resistance organisation that allows us to carry out a broader social struggle and to better respond to the current challenges and problems affecting everyone. Our intention is to form an oppositional response against this authoritarian power that is pervasive in our lives. Therefore, what we are trying to do is reorganise and reconfigure a new broader oppositional power that recognises the present day problems and acts upon them. For instance, we contributed greatly to forming an electoral alliance between TIP (Workers' Party of Turkey), Halkevleri (People's Houses) and other progressive forces during the 24 June election. After the election, we began to take an important role in how this electoral political alliance can be turned into broader social alliances that include all those political organisations such as EMEP and ÖDP. Again, with the series of Democracy Conferences which we organised with the HDP and other social organisation such as TIP, our attention is to explore the local oppositional possibilities and opportunities across different localities against fascism and help them strengthen their power' (Individual Interview, T1).

A female activist from the New Life Association in Ankara draws attention to impact upon cadres and pressure to desert the struggle due to the particular character of the conflict period:

We have a sad reality in Turkey, we wake up every day with more detentions.. One enters the prison, and another comes out! Along with these prisons and the detentions, there are numerous court cases. We have a slogan that says 'every HDP member is also a member of the HDK', but no cadres really have a future...In Turkey like in the Middle Eastern countries, 24 hours (a day) is such a long time and anything can happen and everything can change in the blink of an eye. Of course, all of this is affecting us and putting pressure on people to retreat from the struggle. (...) In reality, this hinders our relationship with one to another and prevents us working together collectively. For example, while initially we had more than 70 people attending our assembly meeting here, we had only 20 people in our last meeting. Of course, conflict, violence and repression have a share in this. As a result of this, nobody stays stable in their position for a long time, and everything changes so rapidly that we don't even have time to establish a sort of culture that we desire to, and this is our biggest and saddest reality (Education and Alternatives pedagogies, Focus group 1).

Another activist complained about the HDK's lack of ability to develop an effective *repertoire of actions* against this state's authoritarian power since 2015:

I don't think (as the HDK) we have an alternative perspective/understanding on how state power and its repressive apparatuses operates. This is apparent in our responses to the current situation... Yes, there have been some actions, but they are rather local and non-strategic and emerge as spontaneous reactions to what had happened. This is my observation at least. For instance, when a friend is at risk, we have not acted quick enough to pull him/her out of the situation and locate them somewhere else. While some components of the HDK have done this for their cadres, the HDK as a whole has not developed any special techniques and strategies that can help us to work in this extreme conflict environment. What I am talking here is not a de facto response to something that had emerged such as taking care for imprisoned friends or replacing new people in those vacant roles, but rather a carefully thought through organisational and political strategy that allows us to prepare ourselves and carry on our struggle. But of course, as I said before, this is perhaps because of the nature of the HDK. The HDK is not a single organisation that can make decisions very quickly, but rather is made up of multiple organisations, which I see also as one of the reasons for not creating a common identity and strategy. Of course, when you are attacked by someone, you immediately come together in struggle with the others to defend yourselves, like it happens in prison spaces. Apart from this immediate action, there has not been more developed common strategy by the HDK (Individual Interview, T5).

A Kurdish movement activist who is a member of the HDK General Assembly and also the HDP, who works at the DTK in Diyarbakır, draws attention to the HDK's inadequacy in building the

economic dimension of the struggle, particularly in response to the mass dismissals under the special decrees passed after the failed military coup in July 2016:

We are insufficient in building the economic dimension of our struggle. I am very serious about this. We talk about building a self- economy where we are in control in Kurdistan and yes, we have a good model here, but we have not implemented this in practice. Maybe, it is a new one that have been talked about in the last several years. But, if we miss the economic dimension and leave that aside from other domains of struggles, I believe, there will be a problem there... In the simplest way, the massive dismissals under the Decree has shown us both the importance of this and also how deeply we are connected to the state. Some of our friends actually fell into a huge void in terms of making their own living. We are hiding this, but hundreds of our friends have been diagnosed with cancer as a result of this psychology. The economic problems are indeed big problems when you have a mouth to feed. As the saying tells 'You are right, Moses, but the pharaoh feeds us'. The more we break our ties with the existing system of power in every domain, the stronger our politics and political arguments will become. We have been fighting in this geography for more than forty years, but have only began to work in the field for the last four or five years. ('Socializing the struggle from DTK to HDK' workshop)

From a different perspective, another HDK activist points out how the movement has successfully entered a different mode of struggle: a survival mode which prioritises the protection of human and non-human resources, and keeping political ideas alive under the most extreme conditions in order to be able to carry on the struggle in the future:

It is very difficult for those political forms or organisations to come back and rebuild their struggle again after being almost at the edge of disappearance due to the intensive attacks. Thus, preserving and protecting what you already have at the present time despite its shrinking in power and constricting form is very crucial for future struggle. Even if a political organisation comes to withdraw or turn in on itself, this withdrawal and turning can be an important moment of critical thinking, discussions and reflections and strengthening the solidarity relations within which then can lead to the production of new ideas, new practices that will provide a new strategy for a new beginning. I think that the HDK still embodies this potential in one way or another ... one that seems to be more robust amongst the other political forms that emerged after the Gezi Protest (Individual Interview, T27).

This process of increased conflict and violence has not only affected the HDK but also its components (both individual members and political organisations/groupings etc), especially

the most vulnerable communities such as Armenian, Women and LGBTQ. Talking about how this process has affected their communities, one activist notes that:

this process (the conflict) and the conflict environment in Turkey has hit Armenian communities dramatically as many of their community members had to go abroad (exile), as living conditions have become threatened by the emerged practices and discourses. Whilst I moved to the HDP to work in this process, some of my friends that I worked together with at the HDK had to leave the country as result. We became less active in these spaces of struggle as the conflict intensified (Individual Interview, T46).

Below, an activist discusses how the increased repression has affected the struggle of LBGTQ communities, as state power has come to close those spaces available to them and define them as a ‘threat’ to existing gender norms and values:

During these two and a half years, the state of emergency rule affected us dramatically. There was a State of Emergency rule in Kocaeli like elsewhere in Turkey. The state of emergence rule in Kocaeli was specifically intended to eliminate the local struggle in Kocaeli city and at the Kocaeli University, as this local struggle was seen as a real threat. The expulsion of our professors at Kocaeli university caused us to lose an important space of struggle/solidarity that we had created over the years. This space was very important for us as having progressive academics who support you and your rights was crucial for developing our struggles. Especially when we wanted to organise an activity, these academics were beside us and when we were writing our thesis on controversial issues, such as sexuality or intersectionality of our identities they encouraged us. All of this was gone! There are no academics left that want to support our lines of inquiry, or encourage our thesis and publish them. Therefore, there is a relationship between the expulsion of these critical academics and us losing our spaces of struggle and solidarity. For example, I can no longer write a thesis on sex workers, no more! ...Or if I wanted to book a hall at the University to organise an event, we no longer have those academics who could sign a letter of support. That's why we lost those spaces and this started to create a big problem for our gay community here at the University. While earlier, a non-sexist language was beginning to establish itself at the academia, now we are witnessing the opposite: a hostile academic environment. Of course we are still continuing our struggle to change this environment but our job is even harder now as the universities are occupied by those academics that don't want to challenge existing sexual perceptions. When we say to these academics that the language that they use is sexist and demand that this need to be changed, they threaten us with other things, such as using the grades as weapon against us. Those critical academics that were dismissed from their jobs were not like these ones and never used such tools against us. Indeed, the

banning of our protests in the halls and prohibiting us to do any press releases on campus have decreased our visibility both on campus and in the city. But of course, none of this deterred us from our struggle. Because the LGBTQ Movement is a movement that can produce such extreme ideas even in the most extreme situation. That is why we decided to refocus on our internal organisational form and form of struggle in order to strengthen it. We have held many meetings in various locations (of course behind the closed doors) and increased our activities. In all of these organisations, we are paying special attention to how we can improve and redevelop the theoretical and practical aspects of our struggle. Because we want to be ready against fascism now and we want to be ready for the future, when the state of emergency is lifted! At the same time, we made a decision to keep our own organisational dynamics strong so that our ties would not be broken. To this extent, we have organised new workshops, tea/breakfast gatherings with psychologists in order to expand our ties in society. We also did not remain silent to those challenges and problems caused by fascism. While they closed all spaces for us, we took to the street at nights to hang banners on bridges, we used bridges to make our voices heard. Despite all the forms of repression, we have not remained silent as we have shown our presence on the streets. We painted many streets of the city in rainbow colours. In fact, this has showed us that our political action does not need to be in the form of a press release and that there are many forms of political action that we can use to express ourselves. The rainbow that we drew on the street with a reading that says 'trans women are women' is in fact one of these new forms of political action that creates visibility. We want to be on the streets to show them we are here despite everything and that excites us a lot...The more the pressure upon us increases, the more we will leak through those cracks... Because closing those cracks is not that easy and we aim to widen those cracks. Sometimes these cracks diminish and sometimes widen but they will never end and close completely, that's a sure thing! (Individual Interview, T46).

The experiences of the LGBTQ activists in Kocaeli demonstrates the interdependence and inter-relatedness of different social opposition actors, especially at local level, and how situations which affect one actor can affects the others (individuals and organisations) around them in a chain reaction. To this extent, future research could provide valuable insights by investigating and analysing the effects of the dismissal and criminalization of critical academics upon on local student movements and LGBTQ communities.

#### *The Cost of Collective Action*

Analysing and investigating the effects of the structural crises of the capitalist neo-liberal regulatory governance on a global scale, the ongoing proxy wars at the regional scale, and the intensified repression, violence and intimidation in Turkey, sheds light on what type of

situation social movement are subjected to whilst they are operating in extremely difficult times. It also demonstrates the cost of their collective action for them, their organisations and their communities:

Most of the institutions we created were shut down by the dictatorship. If you notice, ninety-nine percent of the institutions were closed. This created extreme grievances (individual and collective) and generated a new form of passivism in the context of increased arrests and imprisonment. As a result, many either had to withdraw themselves from struggle or leave the country and go into forced exile. The closure of all those democratic institutions with the special decrees generated a huge political/social gap. We saw our own limitations to protect those institutions that were taken from us. Due to pressure, arrests and internal immigration and mass displacement of people, all political organisations began to experience serious problems both in terms of quantity and quality. Social organisation and mobilisation has weakened. This led us to social passivity and withdrawal not just within social movement but also in the wider society. Anxieties and fears forestalled the struggle. People's concern for their survival have weakened the common struggle for social change. (...) In order to protect themselves against fears and repression, people choose to stay away from any political organisations. Social violence and violence against women has been on the rise as they attacked women and women's spaces first, and imprisoned many of them (Socializing the struggle from DTK to HDK, Workshop 4; Women, Gender & Social Change, Focus Group 2).

In our workshop t with DTK and HDK activists in Diyarbakır, participants listed the effects of the repression and violence as follows:

While in the initial period, there was a lot of participation of individual members, with the increased and intensified repression and violence we have noted that these individual members withdrew. Due to this environment of pressure and violence we are forced to carry on our struggle behind closed doors away from public spaces. While being on the streets has made us and our struggle more visible, these pressures that prevent us from using the streets as an option has decreased our visibility accordingly. Compared to 2015, there is a decrease in the HDK numbers and situation of distancing and separation within the HDK, which in turn affected the unity and collective power of the HDK and weakened the relationship between the HDK components. Of course, this policy of violence and repression was not only directed against the HDK and the Kurdish Movement but also against other oppositional political parties and organisations. As such, most components turned in on themselves, which also weakened the relations between the HDK components. When the HDK components turned into themselves in order to protect themselves, their individual struggle instead of those common struggles

of the HDK, our common space of struggle has begun to disappear.  
(‘Socializing the struggle from DTK to HDK’ workshop)

The arbitrary use of the legal system as a tool of repression, together with prolonged penalties and punishment, meant that several activists and key members of the social/political opposition had to leave Turkey for exile. This negatively affected the capacity of the social movements they belong to:

One of the biggest and saddest realities of our country is that most activists who played an important role in the struggle and worked so hard had to go either to the prisons or to exile...When this happens, with every person imprisoned or exiled, our collective memory and collective knowledge gets interrupted and disappeared! This collective memory and knowledge that was embodied in these people was taken out from the HDK and Turkey (Socializing the struggle from DTK to HDK, Workshop 4).

One of the founders of the Socialist Re-Establishment Party (SYKP), one of the most powerful socialist components of the HDK, explains the difference between the initial foundation period of the HDK and the new period after 2015, and how this has affected the HDK’s work as well as the work of each component of the HDK. According to him, while there was a great deal of interest and excitement across Turkey in the early years of the HDK years, even in those cities that once considered as *no go zones* for progressive social forces, from 2015 onwards the support in such cities diminished as HDK and its individual components found it hard to carry on their struggle and mobilise, and some had to close their offices due to increased physical/verbal attacks especially in smaller cities and towns:

In smaller cities and towns] the people ‘do what they don’t dare to do in big cities...where they go to the front of the house of the president of city/district with a crowd of people hanging their flags and singing the national anthem. This is not something that can be endured. In other words, being targeted directly with the definition of terrorist, separatist is not something to be endured. Therefore, there is no space and chance for the HDK/HDP to stay there anymore (Individual Interview, T20).

Talking about the fragility of individual and organisational security in these difficult times, one activist who is a member of the HDK’s Peoples and Beliefs Commission and also member of the Parliament for the HDP, as well as co-chair of the Democratic Islam Congress, notes how the repressive and violent environment has exacerbated insecurity for oppositional forces, even members of parliament who were previously relatively exempt from such violent practices:

So, speaking of protection, we currently have no guarantees even as members of parliament. We have to account for every step we take. (...) Of course, the first reason for this is the anger, hatred and violent politics and practices of the governing elite today. There have been moments when we were surrounded for hours and subjected to lynching while we were just doing our work. My office which I use as the base for my duties, was raided as if it was an illegal place and I was not even allowed to wear my clothes by the male and female police. What I experienced here was something even worse than what I experienced during my struggle for right to wear the headscarf in public spaces in the earlier period. Against such violence, while I was trying to intervene in such violence, I was taken into custody with my hands handcuffed. So, there is no criteria in the level of violence anymore. In this sense, I am targeted directly and personally everywhere and many times (Individual Interview, T41).

However, it should not be forgotten that despite all these difficulties, there is still an opposition that continues to struggle in Turkey, as emphasised by many activists:

While we talked about how the state has increased its attacks on us gradually over time and waged a war both inside and outside, we also found a positive aspect of this violence. The positive thing is that; despite losing our power and the narrowness of our struggle, we have not given up our struggle. There remains a part of us that says "We will continue to struggle, and your attacks cannot destroy us" and continues to work more stubbornly and determinedly ever before. It is true that the state attacks and violence has kept both the HDK and other social movements off the street. This indeed affects the HDK's ability to reach the wider society, which we cannot do comfortably like we used to do before. The fear that was created with the violence affected wider society as well as us. We are no longer able to go out on the streets as strongly as we had done and express our reactions openly in public spaces. We chose indoor spaces to show our reactions instead of the streets. We make our press releases and organise events in closed spaces. Regardless of its size, today there still is a part of society that mobilises on the street despite all the attacks and oppressions and tries to continue its struggle in some way or another which is very important indeed (Individual Interview, T41).

According to some the HDK activists who participated in our research, those component members with some sort of political affiliations seem to be more organised and survive in the face of pressure from the state in these difficult times while those individual members with any political affiliation seems not so. For instance, an activist who works at the HDK's Education Assembly states that as a result of the change in the political atmosphere in Turkey, several individual members who were previously working at the assembly began to withdraw from carrying out work at the HDK. The same activist argues that organisations with

institutional power are ‘more resistant’ to violence, especially those that have survived historical violence, such as the Kurdish movement. For instance, they know the importance of swiftly replacing those who leave with the new cadres, whilst when *‘an independent member leaves, no one comes after them, which has created an interesting dynamic at the HDK’* (Individual Interview, T6). One of the important reasons for this withdrawal of individual activists seems to be the need to be protected by an organisation in times of conflict. It is thought that the HDK without an institutional and legal status ‘cannot protect’ those people who were dismissed from their jobs. As such they prefer to engage more in their union work as *‘the union has a name and a lawyer. When something happens to me, it comes and follows the situation. But the HDK does not have such a power’* (Individual Interview, T6). This suggests that the crucial role of human right advocacy within HDK’s work, has not developed sufficiently yet.

Unlike individual activists, activists who are affiliated to political party/organisation seem to stay within the movement as something which they see as part of their duty to struggle, in contrast to those individual activists who can decide to leave or stay as they choose.

Our data shows that activists that are affiliated to an organisation and/or political groupings seem to cope better with these difficult times. In answering what it means to struggle in difficult time and what motivates them to keep going despite the heavy costs involved, two activists (T1 and T17) from the Kurdish movement note the importance of belief in certain values (ethical and moral) that underpin the ideology (politics) of the HDK. They argued that this belief and the commitment to the struggle to. constitute a new democratic, equal and peaceful society, which is shared by every member of the HDK, pushes them to continue with great persistence and hope:

Each individual that seeks to take part in a revolutionary struggle should prepare himself/herself accordingly as struggle for change has its ups and downs. In that, we need to have some ethical and moral values that should not be diminished or deteriorated under any conditions and violence attack. These are the guiding principles in our struggles that help us go through the most difficult time. What are they? They can be your ideology, the values that you have created collectively in the course of your struggle and of course your commitment to these values. When you are aware of this and your potential, even though you may experience political contractions in your practice due to the violence and repressive attacks directed to you by the state from time to time. In some cases, such attacks may even demolish what you have (your organisations etc.).

But they will never completely delete everything. It is our belief in struggle, in our values and ideology and in life itself can only protect us from all these nearly total destructions...And it is this belief what keeps us alive! (Individual Interview, T1).

The youth movement, which tends to be one of the most powerful actors in terms of street mobilisation, has always been amongst the primary targets of the authoritarian regimes. A female activist, member of the HDK Youth Council, describes how the youth movement has been at the forefront of the struggle in Turkey, and has been targeted in recent years:

We lost so many of the friends we fought with in this struggle. Of course, when the war broke out, our friends did not stop fighting. We lost too many friends in Kobani in the course of defending Kobani...We lost too many friends in Suruç and in Cizre, after the first curfews... When I look back, I sometimes say to myself 'I don't have many friends left, almost all is gone!' I try to remember where are all those friends that we were side by side at struggle: Yes, I am here, alive, not dead and not imprisoned yet! Then I remember that A is in prison, B is not in Turkey, He/she went to Canada, C is in prison, D is in prison, E is in prison.... Some of our friends that are outside have moved into work in less risky places such as the Party. So, the cost is so high, and the loss is huge! Our generation therefore saw from first experience what is peace and what is war! This has been the experience of everyone that has been involved in the youth work. We had a similar situation in the 1980, where lots of youth lost their lives. I suppose, when you are active and participating in the struggle on the streets rather than doing politics around a table this is the price that you pay! Imagine one moment, you are so young and alive and right in the middle of something that is so big (struggle), and you are sharing a life and commitment to a better life and then there comes bombs and more bombs! Massacre after massacre! (...) So here are our friends: some are on exile, some alive and continue, some left the struggle, and most are either dead or in prisons (Individual Interview, T4).

## **The Peace Process**

I want to address the people who have a conscience...What happened in that village? ...No lie will be enough to cover this truth...When the warplanes bombed the thirteen, fourteen and fifteen-year-old children, those children hid under the bellies of mules. They thought they could protect themselves from the bombs. But their torn bodies and their blood mixed with the torn bodies and blood of the mules. I suspect the humanity of those who don't get goose bumps when confronted with this picture (...) When we took their bodies out from under the rocks, the child of a village guard and another were holding each other's hands. Maybe, they thought, if they held hands, they would cheat death. (...) I suspect the humanity of those, who do not apologize before this picture. One child was found with his index finger pointing to the sky, confessing his belief in God. I suspect the religiosity, the humanity of those who don't question

what has happened there. Everybody knows what happened there. What smuggling? Can bringing one pack of cigarettes be called smuggling? The homes of those villagers are in Turkey; the land they cultivate is within Iraqi borders. Those villagers smuggle and transgress borders—in your words—every day in order to cultivate their land. For years, they have been doing this activity in the daylight and in the knowledge of the state and all the authorities. How can you now say, we didn't know, we didn't see, we thought they were terrorists, it is collateral damage? In a situation where thirty-four people died, nineteen of them children, a human being wouldn't say, 'what can we do, it's an accident.' (...) First, one questions their conscience, one becomes embarrassed, feels sadness and shame. (...) What terror? Is there anything you didn't excuse in the last ninety years, by saying that you are fighting against insurgents, against bandits, against terrorists? For ninety years you have been massacring a people: the Kurdish people. Who are those terrorists? Whose children are they? Did you once ask yourselves? There are a people there: A people with rights and with an identity. There is the Kurdish issue, there is no issue of terrorism. And there is the issue of lacking humanity and the issue of lacking conscience. (...) We will live here equally and free and dignified. Even if you do thousand more massacres, we will not live undignified lives. (...) Some tell us that they will not let us take root. What root? What taking root? We have been here for thousands of years. Our roots are already in rocks, in stones, in the mountains of Gabar, Agiri and Cudi, in the rivers of Dicle and Munzur. We are here. What roots are you talking about? Our ancestors are here, our language is here, and our graves are here. [ . . . ] I see my anger as legitimate as a woman, as a human being, as a mother. I have gone there, I listened to them, and I hugged them. (...) We will never let this be forgotten (Kisinak, 2014, Online).<sup>39</sup>

The speech above was made by Gültan Kışanak, a prominent Kurdish women and politician in the Turkish parliament, with regards to the bombing by the Turkish airforce which killed 34 people (19 of whom were children) in Roboski, a small town on the border between Turkey and Iraq. It powerfully captures the complex and dynamic nature of the Kurdish conflict that has dominated Turkey's social geography since the establishment of Republic in 1923. It eloquently describes how the conflict is a multi-spatial phenomenon, operating across various geographies (local, national, regional and global) and situated between and interplayed within highly complex and dynamic social, political, cultural and economic factors. It also involves multiple actors each, with differing social imaginaries, and who embody various forms of everyday micro practices that are linked to other meso and macro processes. Gültan's speech

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<sup>39</sup> Gültan Kışanak's full speech can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N4gc6jjLNnU> (last Accessed on 23 June 2020).

also shows this this long-running conflict is linked to other forms of violence (social, economic, political and cultural), and that violence has not only operated on individual bodies and souls through various forms and levels over time and space (degrading, humiliation), but also through the denial of collective identities, marginalisation and the elimination of collective wisdom, knowledge and ways of knowing and doing. But above all, her speech shows the conditions that provide justification for her anger and her right to defend and protect her community.

This complex societal issue has primarily been dealt with through an ongoing ‘continuum of violence’ by the hegemonic sovereign power since the Establishment of Republic in 1923 (See Yegen, 1999; Bozarslan, 2000). The Kurdish people’s struggle to create a ‘dignified, free, equal’ life in the land of their ancestries is considered by the Turkish state to be the most dangerous ‘threat’ to the ‘unity’ and ‘integrity’ of the nation, which needs to be fought at any cost even though it cannot be vanquished completely. The conflict has cost a great many lives on all sides.

We argue that the HDK was ultimately formed by a range of social actors who reflected upon the past and came together to say ‘no’ to the particular configuration of hegemonic power, which is seen the prime source of various social conflicts and injustices taking place in Turkey. This unified response also resulted in a recognition that the ongoing Kurdish conflict can only be solved through a radical retransformation of social structures and social relations in order to ensure a peaceful co-existence within diverse subjects in Turkey. The significance of the HDK lies in its strong commitment to unity between those long marginalised and silenced subjects in a common struggle which aims to build an alternative, peaceful Turkey:

HDK is Turkey's future structure... It represents a future model of Turkey... A Congress type political form, where everyone takes part in the politics with their own identity and their own institutions and work together while recognising each other's difference... HDK is a wealth for so many of its dimension. If there ever comes a peace in land, which will come for sure, a political form like HDK is a necessity (Individual Interview, T28).

What does HDK’s radical, prefigurative peace politics entail? How does it differ from other conventional conceptualisations of peace, at least in the context of Turkey? What does this new *thinking* and *doing* peace tell us about our understanding of peace and peaceful reconstruction of society with social justice? What are the challenges of this particular political approach at a time of increased authoritarianism as oppose to relatively low conflict time?

And what new knowledge about peace is being produced in these prefigurative peace spaces? We now attempt to answer these questions.

#### *Prefigurative Peace Politics: Societal Peace as an ‘Emergent Strategy’*

The experience of the HDK represents the first time in Turkish history that a political organisation managed to turn peace from being a seemingly impossible phenomenon into a eminently possible one. We argue that this occurred primarily through what we call a ‘radical prefigurative politics of peace’ that consists of a new way of *thinking* and *doing peace* in order to challenge and dismantle existing hegemonic understandings of peace (including internalised hegemonic perceptions). This alternative approach to peace seeks at the same time to reorganise subjects/society in new ways in order to bring about an alternative peaceful future in the ‘here and now’.

This focus on the ‘here and now’ draws attention to how peace can be built by all of us through our everyday practices and struggles, taking small and practical steps, rather than as something that emerges as an inevitable outcome of radical social change (such as revolution). Interconnecting our practices of ‘doing’ and ‘acting peace’ in the ‘here and now’ (our means) with our future dream of creating a new peaceful future (goals) turns peace into a tangible, everyday experiential act or in the word of Adrienne Maree Brown (2017) an ‘emergent strategy’ to bring about peaceful future utopias with alternative social structure and relations. As such ‘*peace will be the biggest step towards not only an end to conflicts, deaths and suffering, but also virtue, goodness and coexistence*’ as noted by Co-chair Pervin Buldan in 2018.<sup>40</sup> Thus, peace (doing peace) becomes an important strategy as well as a process for creating an alternative democratic reality not by appealing to sovereign power, but rather by reconstituting new power configurations beyond it (Polletta & Hoban, 2016).

#### *Radical Conceptualisation of Peace/Conflict*

Johan Galtung, pioneering peace theorist in ‘Peace, by Peaceful Means’ (1969), shows us how peace is a highly contested concept. Different conceptualisations of peace ultimately determine different types of conflict solutions with varying effects on identity, relationality (personal/interpersonal) and power. He proposes two concepts for our analysis of peace:

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<sup>40</sup> In a press release, The HDP made her vision of societal plan. <https://stockholmcf.org/hdp-turkeys-democratization-depends-on-permanent-peace/> HDP: Turkey’s democratization depends on permanent peace, SCF May 24, 2018.

'negative peace' and 'positive peace' and makes a clear distinction between the two. Whilst negative peace primarily concerns the 'absence of violence', positive peace pays attention to the social, cultural, economic and political structures and relations that underpin and foster such violence (*ibid*).

Our analysis shows that the HDK's radical prefigurative peace politics is a holistic, positive peace approach which understands conflict as an interrelated societal phenomenon, rather than an isolated part of social life. Thus, central to the HDK's notion of positive peace lies a critical analysis of conflict, whereby particular attention is given to the social context and structures that produce conflict. This is reflected in the HDK's radical (re)conceptualisation of the Kurdish issue not as an 'isolated phenomena' (negative peace) (Galtung, 1969) but rather a multi-dimensional (social, cultural, political, ecological and economic) societal issue that has been shaped by various social, economic, cultural and political structures. These various dimensions are interrelated and intersect with each other, influencing each other and producing outcomes in unpredictable ways. They also operate at multiple levels and spaces (from individual bodies to communities, from private to public and from local to global) with differentiated and gendered effects upon human/non-human bodies/souls, and destruction of ecological and knowledge systems that support and foster those bodies/souls.

*The Kurdish issue is not a problem of terrorism. It is a problem of power and freedom'* says one of HDK's members, an argument shared by many activists we spoke to. A similar argument was put forward by another HDK member who defines the issue not as one of security or terrorism but rather an issue of power:

The Kurdish problem is a power problem... the Kurdish demand for recognition is not an issue of separatism, but a demand for living equally and asking for the Kurds to be in charge of the decision making over issues related to them. Thus, this demand is essential and necessary for social peace and a common life (Individual Interview, T45).

The re-conceptualisation of the Kurdish conflict as a multi-faceted and multi-dimensional social issue contrasts sharply with existing hegemonic theoretical conceptualisations which define the Kurdish issue primarily as one of 'a terrorism', with the Kurdish struggle often identified as a 'threat' to national unity and integrity within the hegemonic security paradigm (Yegen, 2007). The HDK conceptualisation also problematizes understandings of the Kurdish issue as one of an 'under-development' rooted in the failure to incorporate the Kurdish people

into the process of modernisation. While these different conceptualisations have been altered and redefined over time, they are reproduced by the hegemonic sovereign power under what Meltem Ahiska calls the ‘Occidentalist fantasy’ (2003: 365; see also Zeydanlioğlu, 2008) which is used as justification for ‘exceptional violence’ against the Kurdish struggle. The HDK’s radical conceptualization of the Kurdish issue, we argue, critiques and challenges existing hegemonic conceptualisations that have dominated both within and beyond the academy.

The HDK’s radical conceptualisation understand the conflict as a complex, multi-dimensional and interrelated (to other forms of social conflict and injustices) societal phenomena which emerges out of a particular structuring of society. It challenges and goes beyond narrow conceptualisations whereby conflict is seen as an isolated phenomena that emerges out of ‘greed’ (Collier and Hoeffler, 2000), ‘grievances’ (often understood in economic and material terms) or ‘irrationality’ and ‘*essentially inexplicable primordial qualities*’ of human beings (Pugh and Cooper, 2003 cited in Berdal, 2005: 688).

It also draws attention not only to direct and visible forms of violence (attack, military presence, war) but also those silent, non-visible forms of violence (cultural, emotional, physiological, social and economic) which are often overlooked, and which affect bodies and souls in multiple and varying ways, as well as knowledge processes and livelihoods (Yegen, 1999). These silent and indirect forms of violence, such as emergency rule (Bozarslan, 2000), the ban on the Kurdish language, assimilation polices, renaming of Kurdish towns, villages and streets (Zeydanlioğlu, 2012), historical stereotypes, or even ‘mimicry’ can constitute ‘*the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge*’ (Bhabha, 1994: 85-86).

Through this radical reconceptualization of the Kurdish issue as a societal issue, HDK demonstrates the interconnection of the Kurdish issue with other social conflicts and injustices (structural, social, cultural, economic and ecological). In doing so, we argue that the HDK comes to see the Kurdish issue as one particular *expression of violence* emanating from a social order that has reconfigured over time space, under the contemporary form of neo-liberal capitalism, authoritarian nationalism and patriarchy.

By interconnecting the Kurdish conflict with the other social injustices (economic, social, cultural, ecological and gendered), understood as different expressions of conflict emanating from the same hegemonic power, the HDK interconnects various struggles for recognition, redistribution, representation and reconciliation, and unifies diverse social actors (feminist,

LGBTQ, labour and political parties, ethnic and religious groups) on the basis of a common goal: finding a '*peaceful solution to Kurdish conflict*', understood as an integral part of the process of building an alternative Democratic Turkey.

As peaceful transformation of the Kurdish issue becomes an important part of democracy, emancipation, justice, freedom and equality. Finding a peaceful solution to ongoing conflict becomes *sine quo non* for the HDK, an important political commitment highlighted in its founding principles:

Our Congress, which approaches the fundamental rights and freedoms of the Kurdish people within the framework of this principal attitude, defends and struggles for a peaceful democratic and equal rights solution to the Kurdish problem, which has been subjected to a deadlock since the foundation of the Republic (HDK, 2012b).

This importance is reflected by almost all of our research participants (regardless of their identity and political orientations), defining the Kurdish issue as a '*Litmus paper of democracy*', '*bleeding wound of Turkey's democracy*' and '*an ultimate road map to democracy*'. Indeed, linking and interrelating the Kurdish issue with other social conflicts portrays peace as an important common good that is crucial not just for Kurdish people but for everyone (Political party vs Congress, Workshop 5; The Struggle in Difficult Times and Future Perspectives, Workshop 3).

The prime focus of this radical conceptualisation of peace is to (re)create and reinvent new alternative social structures that can reconfigure power and power relations in ways that '*removes causes of wars and offer alternatives to war in situation where war may occur*' (Galtung, 1976: 297-298).

As such, the HDK's radical prefigurative politics of peace involves a comprehensive, multi-dimensional practice (*doing peace*) in order to address the multi-dimensional and interrelated conflicts, and create the conditions for reconstituting an alternative peaceful society.

This involves the adoption of a radical democratic approach which is often referred to by HDK members as '*democratic politics*' or '*politics of peace*'. The HDK adopts a horizontal, decentralised and non-hierarchical political structures in order to foster direct, bottom-up participation. This radical democracy is realised through various new practices and forms in order to reconstruct a new societal democracy, beyond the limitations of representational

democracy in which politics is reduced to parliamentary politics. This approach also reconstitutes a new radical subject whose agency is crucial for generating new realities.

In contrast to the singular, homogenous, and monolithic society that operates through the unequal distribution of power, and which elevates certain subjects, identities (gender, sexual, ethnic) and knowledges at the expense of others, the HDK imagines society as an inclusive, diverse and plural space in which diverse bodies/communities share power equally, regardless of their differentiated subject positions (gender, class, religious and sexuality). The HDK defends '*the existence of all identities with their differences*' and '*accepts that they have the right to live in equal and free citizenship as a basic principle*'. And states itself to be '*against the monist, denial, assimilationist system of sovereignty that goes against the social and historical fabric of all peoples living in these lands*': the HDK struggles for '*the equal, free and voluntary coexistence of all peoples, identities, languages, cultures*' (HDK brochure, 2011). Practices such as equal representation (50% quote system) and co-power sharing are integral to this new democratic politics, not as an end in themselves but in order to facilitate the emergence of gender equality-based realities which recognise the role and agency of women in bringing new peaceful realities into existence.

As injustices and violence is also linked to economic and ecological injustices, this radical *doing* of peace also struggles for an equal redistribution of economic power that recognises not only the needs and demands of labour, but also contains an ecological politics that seeks to redefine our relationship with the natural world

The HDK's focus on creating alternative democratic structures and practices stems from a recognition of the importance of democracy in unleashing the potential and agency of individuals/communities, and the importance of individual/collective identities for the realisation of a genuinely democratic society in which '*different cultural, ethnic and religious forms of life to coexist and interact on equal terms within the same political community*' (Habermas, 2002: 117-118). One HDK member emphasises the importance of democracy as a means for generating new alternative power: '*When democracy belongs to society, it can become the power of society. We call this democratization of politics*' (The Struggle in Difficult Times and Future Perspectives, Workshop 3).

A similar point was made by other HDK members in drawing attention to the link between the creation of bottom-up democracy and the reconstruction of democratic society:

It is built by experiencing democracy in the society and by putting it into practice. It is transformed into culture. You cannot democratize people or society by law. You cannot do it with a social engineering from above. No society in this way transforms democracy into a culture and turns into a democratic society: this must be experienced in practice (Political party vs Congress, Workshop 5).

Central to this process is the proposal of a new ‘social pact’ within Turkey’s diverse society, as a way to create inclusive and pluralist social relations. For the HDK, the ways in which society interacts, communicates and communes is seen as fundamental to ‘*the kind of societal peace*’ and ‘*peaceful world*’ can be sought. Hence the HDK seeks to construct a new form sociability and relationality between diverse bodies/collectives, both between each other and within broader society.

However, the formation of this alternative relationality and sociability does not emerge inevitably or organically from the mere imposition of these democratic practices. It requires a collective labour that involves constant work and caring, on the basis of common values, in order produce alternative values that can redefine the ways in which society relates to each other, communicates and communes in peaceful ways. Central to the HDK’s proposal of a new social pact is the creation of a new form of solidarity, not only between its members but also within wider society. As the hegemonic sovereign power operates through marginalisation, polarisation and fragmentation of society, creating a new alternative form of solidarity becomes crucial for constituting a new relationality and sociability that provides a basis for the ‘alternative social pact’ necessary for peaceful retransformation of society.

It is in this redefining of the concept of ‘we’ and ‘them’ on the basis of common values between diverse social actors that the HDK comes to engage in what we call ‘commoning solidarity’ and ‘commoning memory’, two processes that are fundamental for the struggle for an alternative peaceful Turkey. We argue that this can also be understood as a bottom-up reconciliation process.

### *Commoning Solidarity*

Hard and Negri (2009: 22-41) in their book Commonwealth describe the crucial role of ‘commoning’ which is described as the ‘*biopolitical reproduction of social life*’ for the reconstruction of alternatives futures. They argue that today’s social movements’ success depends not only upon their engagement in the production of common material goods, but also in the ‘*biopolitical reproduction*’ of intangible common goods which we rely on socially,

culturally and emotionally, such as solidarity, wisdom, knowledge and memory, and which define our identity, sense of belonging and togetherness within society.

Central to this process of commoning is ‘commoning solidarity’ which we have developed during our research to understand the HDK’s work. ‘Commoning solidarity’ refers to a radical reconceptualization of solidarity, in which solidarity becomes more than a question of coming together against an external adversary on a temporary basis at times of contestation. Rather, it is defined as a long term ‘political act’ and ‘process’ that comes to redefine radical ways of *being* together not just for a short while, but for a long struggle to alter existing societal relationship. This includes the generation of alternative ways of communication and commoning necessary for the emergence of alternatives futures. This process of communing solidarity is rooted in constant care and work to create unity between diverse bodies within the HDK, but also beyond in wider society though a constant reworking of what commons are and what defines us as community.

As expressed by most research participants, the unity and solidarity under the common spaces of the HDK have resulted from the necessity to extend short term and conjunctural solidarities beyond the spaces of politics (contestation) to other spaces (private, public, personal and collective) so that we can create new peaceful co-existence between diverse bodies. (see Yates, 2015, Breines, 1989). Thus, extending the solidarity commoning to other spaces and within wider society, through the creation of relational networks; and the strengthening of already existing relations and solidarity spaces between wider communities, are seen as crucial for constituting a new relationality and sociability that contrast sharply to those produced by the top down sovereign power through the polarisation of society.<sup>41</sup> Thus, defining solidarity as a necessary common good means involving oneself in the social reproduction of it in ways that can alter existing forms of relationality and sociability, but also redefine our individual/collective care and responsibility for creating a better peaceful world free of conflicts.

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<sup>41</sup> [https://halklarindemokratikkongresi.net/haber/kurucu-bir-arayis-olarak-demokrasi-ittifikasi/2804?fbclid=IwAR0geSS5DAyHI4eFDQ44dfRMjVJfEkVKuIGlzOFwE3F31EVYF7zmKvy0zPE#.XsFtXp\\_eCh](https://halklarindemokratikkongresi.net/haber/kurucu-bir-arayis-olarak-demokrasi-ittifikasi/2804?fbclid=IwAR0geSS5DAyHI4eFDQ44dfRMjVJfEkVKuIGlzOFwE3F31EVYF7zmKvy0zPE#.XsFtXp_eCh) Z.facebook Kurucu Bir Arayış Olarak Demokrasi İttifikasi Eşsözcümüz Sedat Şenoğlu HDK 16.05.2020 Democracy Alliance As a founding Quest.

### *Commoning Memory*

Walter Benjamin in '*Theses on the Philosophy of History*' (1968) talks about how sovereign power through the hegemonic process of 'historiography' (especially in an authoritarian context) manages to conceal the relationship between the present and the past under the messiness of present temporality by conceptualising our past (histories, memories, knowledges and experiences etc) as something 'done' and 'gone' in its attempt to make society believe the present temporality as 'homogeneous, empty time' somehow detached from past lived experiences. According to Benjamin, this particular conception of time and space is neither inevitable nor accidental, but one that emerges as a result of deliberate action to give present temporality a totalising and universal character through homogeneity and singularity (of identity, knowledge, memory and history). While this the hegemonic power '*evade[s] the grip of forms*' (Lefebvre 1971: 182), we come to believe that our past experiences have no bearing on our present time. According to Benjamin (1968) it is through this particular conceptualisation of the past (our memory, knowledge and history) as something already done (which we cannot do anything about it) that hegemonic power gains legitimacy and control over our collective memories and histories in a way that prevents alternative possibilities from emerging, while at the same time concealing its own responsibility for past injustices. This controlling and monitoring the meaning of the past (the gone), he argues, is fundamental for disciplining and governing of the present temporality (the doing) therefore preventing of the future possibilities under a homogenous and total history.

Similarly, John Holloway (2010) talks about how contemporary forms of power seeks to freeze the link between the past, present and future through a double process of 'alienation', making us believe that the past is done/gone and nothing we can do to change it and 'reification' of certain past (histories, knowledges, memories) at the expense of marginalisation and exclusion of the others. This particular conceptualisation of the past as something discrete and frozen and double process of 'reification' and 'alienation' come to convey our history into series of events whose meaning, and sources can only be understood and analysed by only those special people that are defined as historian experts.

As the top-down hegemonic historiography is fundamentally built upon the denial of diversity and difference (of identity, knowledge, memories and histories), the central and crucial task then, according to Benjamin, (1968), is to construct a counter -hegemonic historiography that

rejects this particular understanding of present temporality described as an inevitable, given, universal and singular. Such a process should create a new reality that allows us to de-homogenise, un-singular and de-totalise the present, and create a pluralist, inclusive future society that recognises the diversity of subjects and the multiplicity of memories, knowledges and histories. Memory plays an essential role in the construction of such a counter hegemonic histography, as it allows us to reorganise/reconfigure the relationship between the past (done) and the present (doing) and reproduce a new meaning of our subject and intersubjective relations.

The essential role of the reconciliation process for the generation of societal peace (Novelli, et al, 2015) and the central role of memory (identity, knowledge and wisdom) within such processes is widely recognised (Halbwachs, 1992). Yet, the unsuccessful examples of peace processes in various geographies around the world reveal the complexity and contested nature of reconciliation processes (see for instance Boesak and De Young Boesak, 2012 for reconciliation process after the post- Apartheid South Africa, Bar-Tal & Bennink 2004).

Based on the HDK's praxis of collective memory, we argue that, as well as 'commoning solidarity', the movement also engages in processes of '*commoning memory*', whereby memory is defined as an essential common good '*convening and experimenting with the implications of the past in the present and extrapolating new collective futures*' (Haiven, 2011: 66).

Defining memory as a 'common good' is particularly significant in an increasingly authoritarian context such as that of Turkey, where the diversity of memories, knowledges and histories of many communities (Kurdish and Armenian) are silenced, denied and marginalised and deemed as 'irrational' 'dangerous' 'backward' in order to create a homogenous society under what Ünlü (2018) calls 'Turkishness Contract'.

Hence memory becomes more than a question of the recovery of past memories, histories and knowledges of marginalised and silenced individuals/communities through 'personal recollection' of their individual/collective stories. It becomes a process whereby collective memories are recovered and reconceptualised as a powerful common source to reorganise societal relations in new ways that prevent future social injustices and violence to take place. While each individual/collective memory is recognised as important, forming a unity between these diverse memories is seen as essential to the creation of an alternative future. In this

radical reconceptualization, collective memory becomes as an essential resource for creating an alternative future in the present. Rather than seeing it as static or given (something that happened in the past), memory is defined as a relational and social concept, and an active resource that allows us to reconfigure an alternative relationship between the past (our action of done), the present (our action of doing) and the future (our action of becoming), '*where the past become[s] citable in all its moments*' (Benjamin, 1968: 254).

A bottom up societal reconciliation necessarily involves a historical journey into the roots of conflict (its histories and knowledge). Memory in that sense becomes a critical 'means', a 'strategy' for an alternative 'genealogical inquiry' (in Foucauldian sense) into the past as we attempt to create alternative futures. Indeed, this alternative 'genealogical inquiry' becomes more crucial in an authoritarian context like Turkey, where top-down, centralised hegemonic power seeks to portray past memories (and knowledges) as '*discrete and frozen moments with mappable causal connections to its past and future*' (Haiven, 2011: 66) in order to justify/legitimize/maintain its power, control and discipline over past memories, histories and knowledge the process of the hegemonic 'historiography' (Benjamin, 1968).

Seeing reconciliation as a complex, nonlinear and drawn out process, whose outcome is hard to predict and can change over time, the HDK's praxis of 'commoning memory' fundamentality rests on the recognition of diversity of memories, histories and knowledges amongst its members; forming a unity and solidarity between silenced and marginalised individuals, groupings and communities; and the recognition of their individual/collective struggles as a common struggle for all and the right to self-defence and determination (whatever forms it takes) against any attack and violence. It also creates a dialogical space to talk about/share their individual stories and narratives with the hope that their hard and painful conversations and reflexive dialogue reveal the diversity of intersubjective meaning of past memories, and contribute to the generation of a new caring values that are necessary for a sustainable peace process.

It is important to note that at the centre of the HDK's praxis of 'commoning memory' lies a critique and rejection of the top-down, prescribed, essentialist and universalist conceptions of peace and reconciliation. Rather than accepting hegemonic liberal peace models that propose the same sort of model for all (Duffield, 2007), the HDK's praxis emerges from the search for endogenous solutions through the collective agency of those who have already paid

a heavy price in the conflict. More importantly, this is not just an attempt to provide an alternative epistemological and methodological approach to peace, but rather to fundamentally constitute a new ontological peace above and beyond the state.

### *Spaces of Hope*

Davina Cooper (2014) points to a relationship between creating ‘Everyday Utopias’ in the here/now, and the question of ‘hope’. She argues that activists create collective hope as they get together around common ideas and values in order to bring ‘everyday utopias’ into reality at the present time. While this process is far from straightforward, when an impossible phenomenon (future utopia) becomes a present time possibility, people feel hopeful and do their best to bring those future dreams into reality. Cooper’s argument seems to be shared by many of the HDK activists we spoke to. Indeed, when peace is defined as a multi social phenomena and as a ‘common good’ that can benefit all, peace (and the politics of peace) come to resonate not only with those individuals/communities in conflict, but with everyone. Thus, when creating a future peaceful society becomes the responsibility of everyone, then people actively engage in creating a bottom-up peace process which is seen an integral process of building an ‘alternative peaceful society’, a future goal shared by members of the HDK. When the *‘possibility of peace arises, when peace is no longer a dream of tomorrow, people are prepared to do more’* says one prominent HDK member who played an active role in the peace process between 2013-2015. Talking about the space created by the HDK, one representative from the Armenian community refers to what the HDK means for him:

It was something else for us, the politics is different for everyone else, for us; it is actually a space for us where we can describe our existence and our social inclination. Thus, this goes beyond just making politics, taking part in politics, a politics that involves understanding the sensitivity of others like us.. both me and other representatives from other ethnic communities have come a long way in this (Individual Interview, T46).

One can suggest that the increased societal demand for a peaceful solution to the Kurdish issue by a range of social actors (ranging from trade unions, feminist, progressive Islamic groups, academics etc) can be seen as a result of this radical hope, as peace gained an immanence and became a real possibility. Whilst we should be wary of drawing a direct correlation or causal relations between the HDK and the Academics for Peace movement, the timing of those events suggests the importance of peace as a process that can create new alternatives, hopes and future utopias. Talking about how this radical reconceptualization and

active engagement in creating ‘everyday utopias’ and ‘radical societal hope’ affected Academics for Peace signing a peace declaration to demand peace and social justice, one HDK academic activist argues:

there is a Kurdish labour behind all this which started with the peace process and continues until today. Beyond it is an irrational Kurdish work, Kurdish will and Kurdish stubbornness in that. What do I mean? I know that some of those two thousand signatures were invited by the Kurdish people to take part in a congress, a conference or something else or some of them asked to write an article for a magazine. In other words, Kurdish people have spent lots of effort on connecting with those individuals. HDK has expanded this space of engagement even more and made it possible for these individual and their efforts to take part and recognised (...) (Individual Interview, T52).

HDK has managed to expand this radical hope beyond its members to wider society through its ability to use various media and communications, especially during the low conflict context between 2012-2015 when peace talks were taken place. Indeed, the HDP’s election campaign and the success of June 2015 expanded this radical hope for an alternative politics of peace and peaceful co-existence even further, as it has come to resonate with everyone who dreams of an alternative Turkey.

#### *Defending peace during conflict*

The radical hope for peace came under attack following the June 2015 election. With this shift in the context, the increased violence and criminalisation process was now aimed not only against Kurdish movement, but all those who had come together in the struggle to defend and creating a peaceful reality. This violence and repression has significantly affected the activities and projects of the HDK. The HDK’s alternative peace-building work has been impeded by this shift which has meant criminalising HDK members along with any other social actor for demanding peace; closing down spaces for collective struggle for peace; limiting practices which seek to build grassroots peace; and attacking the common solidarity and unity that was created by the HDK.

#### *Tensions*

However, the HDK’s radical prefigurative peace spaces and peace politics are not free of tensions or power dynamics. As activists engage in building peaceful future utopias in the present temporality, they themselves (and their activities) are constantly being reshaped by processes taking place at various spaces (locally, nationally, regionally and globally). Unable

to fully predict the outcomes of their practices and actions, making radical demands and engaging in actively transforming their lives, activists are subjected to various challenges. As noted by Juris (2008: 266) when activists engage in creating alternatives in the ‘here’ and ‘now’, they are faced with the dilemma of having to *‘strike a balance between prefigurative politics and their more instrumental goals’*.

This, we argue, was the case for the HDK during the peace process. According to activists, during the peace process the HDK did not act in accordance with its radical politics of peace. Whilst it is one thing to have a radical discourse about peace, often putting this radical politics into practice is more complex. Reflecting on the lessons of this period, some HDK members talked about the movement’s inability to socialise the peace process despite its claim of seeing peace as a societal issue. One prominent HDK member talks about this:

There is no excuse for those who struggle for peace. If this is an excuse, we could have found ways and procedures to overcome it, but we couldn't do it! (...) we had not managed to socialise peace... our power was not enough! This was a matter of intention, desire and power... our intention was peace, our power was not enough, our possibilities were limited. This is a matter of intention and power: our intention was sincere, but our power was not enough to do so (Individual Interview, T28).

Upon reflecting on the peace process (and the HDK role therein), another HDK activist makes similar point:

We should have turned this into a social demand. It should have been converted into Turkey's demand beyond being only demands of those PKK, Ocalan or the Kurds that have been exhausted from the war... we should have demonstrated the importance and urgency of this demand in front of the thousands... Yes, we organised several peace conferences during this time, while they were important and valuable, they could not protect us from war today. We could not create a social response and struggle that could prevent the war (Individual Interview, T53).

## Prefigurative Politics

The concept of prefigurative politics has been increasingly used by scholars and activists in recent years to describe a mode of organising which seeks to bring about a desired future in the present. While the idea of prefigurative politics dates back to anarchism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (see Springer, 2014), the struggle of new social movements in the 1990s and 2000s (Zapatistas Movement, alter globalisation movements, world social forums, the Occupy Movement, The Arab Spring, Gezi Park Protest, feminist movement) brought

prefigurative politics to the centre of discussions around struggles for social change in the context of increased global inequalities, crisis of capitalism, patriarchy and increased authoritarianism (Halversen, 2017; Maeckelbergh, 2011, 2012; Graeber, 2009, 2013; Juris, 2008, 2012; Polletta, 2002; Breines, 1982; Yates, 2014; Gibson-Graham, 2006). These diverse social movements collectively come to constitute what Paul Chatterton and Jenny Pickerill (2010: 730) call as ‘autonomous geographies’ whereby *‘people desire to constitute non-capitalist, egalitarian and solidaristic forms of political, social, and economic organisation through a combination of resistance and creation’* on the basis of variations of radical praxis that are often characterised as ‘asking we walk -preguntando caminamos”, ‘another world is possible’ ‘be the change want to see’ .

This rich knowledge and experience of diverse social movement struggles across globe have facilitated an important debate on prefigurative politics both in academy and beyond. While some have come to see prefigurative policies as naïve and unable to transform the existing power systems and relations, others argue that such an approach remains the best option to challenge injustices and inequalities emanating from contemporary forms of political and economic power, while simultaneously working towards creating a new future world in our everyday struggles rather than waiting for it to be materialised in the distance future as an inevitable outcome of a larger social transformation (Maeckelbergh, 2012; Gibson-Graham, 2006; Greaber, 2009, 2013; Halloway, 2010).

Emerged as a critique of overly structural and economic deterministic views of social change which were characteristic of the struggles of social movements in the 1960s and 1970s, the term prefigurative politics was first used by Sociologist Carl Boggs (1977: 100) to refer to the *‘the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture and human experience that are the ultimate goal’*. The term has since come to be used more widely by various social movements across the world. Broadly, prefigurative politics refers to a praxis through which activists ‘live the ideals world that you seek to create in the here and now’ (Graeber, 2009: 210, 527). For this to happen, activists are required to adopt new politics and practices in their struggle, and create new institutions (non-hierarchical, horizontal, inclusive and democratic) that can facilitate the emergence of new ways of being, acting and doing that embody the desired transformation (Brienes, 1980, 1982; Louisiana, 2017). Hence much importance is given to the everyday acts

and practices in the process of bringing new future realities into existence rather than as an abstract, distant principle (Boggs, 1977).

John Holloway (2010) argues that there are always ‘new cracks’ emerging within the contemporary form of capitalism which provide activists with opportunities. The crucial task of creating alternative worlds and futures depends upon our collective ability to act upon these ‘cracks’, no matter how small, in order that these ‘cracks’ become spaces of hope.

It is within this need to create egalitarian, democratic, peaceful Turkey within those ‘cracks’ that the HDK was created as a new political form with a radical prefigurative politics. This radical prefigurative politics involves a new way of thinking (theory) and acting/doing (practice) aimed at the reconstitution a society and social relations through undoing hegemonic modes of thinking and doing; whilst simultaneously engaging in challenging /critiquing hegemonic system of powers. Thus, at the centre of HDK’s prefigurative politics lies a strong commitment to the constitution new subjects, norms and values in line with the desired future in the present temporality. It is on this basis that the HDK has adopted new organisational structure politics and practices (discursive and non-discursive) in its struggle against the various form of oppression and dominations under contemporary neoliberal capitalism, authoritarian nationalisms and patriarchy.

With the HDK’s embodied ways of ‘thinking’ (theory) and doing (practices) in the ‘here and now’, the movement seeks to challenge and critique the existing hegemonic construction of identities (gender, class, religion, ethnicity, sexuality etc); our sense of belonging and relationship one each other; while at the same time creating a new way of being, sociability, and solidarity for the constitution of a new Turkey. As mentioned above, it was largely due to this radical prefigurative politics that the HDK managed to capture imaginations of a range of political organisations, groupings, trade unions, feminist women organisations and individuals and unite them under one umbrella.

The HDK’s radical prefigurative politics differs significantly from more conventional ways of thinking/doing struggle for social change. Firstly, this prefigurative politics is conceived as a process that allows us to bring our desired world into being by making it an ‘achievable’ reality in the course of our everyday ‘means’ and struggles (Maeckelbergh, 2009:94; see also Sitkin, 2006). Octavia Butler (2012:2) argues *‘all that you touch you change, and all that you change changes you’*. This re-focus on the temporality of social change in a pursuit of making new

realities through everyday actions in the ‘here and now’ contrasts sharply to abstract theories of social change that ‘*first analyse the current global political landscape, develops an alternative model in the form of a predetermined goal, and then sets out a five-year plan for changing the existing landscape into that predetermined goal*’ (Maeckelbergh, 2011: 3). By removing ‘*the temporal distinction between the struggle in the present toward a goal in the future*’ and instead focusing on ‘*the struggle and the goal, the real and the ideal, become one in the present*’ (Maeckelbergh, 2009: 67), the HDK’s prefigurative politics connects and interlinks means and ends, in which rather than the ‘*ends justifying the means, the means reflect, or are somehow equivalent to, the ends*’ (Yates, 2015: 3). By this conception, the means and the ends affect each other profoundly, and are constantly reformulated, revalued and retested during the course of the experiment of bringing the impossible into the realm of possibility within our struggle (Yates, 2015:3). Thirdly, the experimental nature of social action/practices as we engage in struggle in various fields of power relations and processes make it highly difficult for activists to determine and predict the outcome of their actions a priori. The characteristics of the HDK’s prefigurative politics stand in opposition to a linear, homogenising and universal understanding of social change in which change is often expected as an inevitable outcome of broader social transformation (such as revolution).The HDK’s praxis focusses on creating a plural, diverse everyday futures that requires constant works in order to achieve the desired outcomes, which are themselves hard to predict, as this alternative future is being built from various social struggle..

The HDK’s praxis of radical democracy, bottom up and horizontal form of organisation and consensus decision making, rooted in the recognition of diversity (ethnic, religious and sexual orientation) as a source of strength, demonstrates that the HDK has adopted a prefigurative social movement programme and politics. The radical discourse that is reflected within its programme, together with the adoption of various mechanisms for the realisation of these radical prefigurative discourses into concrete reality, are aimed at constituting a new form of power, and new subject relations. These prefigurative policies are particularly significant in the case of those subjects whose agency is often regarded as secondary, such as women and minorities groups such as LGBTQ communities. By implementing prefigurative politics and practices as a priority in the present, not only does this increase the agency and self-esteem of these actors, but it also allows a new subjectification process and form of power based on

gender-based equality. We describe this as **Women'tality**, a praxis with a strong commitment to the freedom and emancipation of subjects. The elements of the HDK's practice mentioned above, as well as the practices and mechanisms for the functioning of internal democracy such as self-criticism, recognition of differences etc, are the backbone of the movement's prefigurative politics.

#### *Creating everyday utopias (Past, Present and Future)*

While prefigurative politics focuses on 'here' and 'now', it is fundamentally linked to future as its prime focus is to bring about those imagined/desired futures what Cooper calls as 'everyday utopias' (Cooper, 2014; Brown, 2017) that we have not yet experienced while we navigate ourselves in the messiness and challenges of everyday struggles (Butler, 2012). Eduardo Galeano describes this process as 'Walking towards the horizon' (quoted in Notes from Nowhere, 2003b: 499). Thus, prefigurative politics come to alter significantly our meaning of 'utopia' whereby our everyday utopias are no longer seen as a distant future oriented goals but rather as an everyday possibility 'by creating the change they wish to encounter, building and forging new ways of experiencing social and political life' rather than through focusing on 'campaigning or advocacy' and 'putting energy on pressuring mainstream institutions to change, on winning votes, or on taking over dominant social structures' (Cooper, 2014: 2).

Our analysis shows the HDK imagined utopia is far from being a singular, homogenising utopia, but rather can be understood as plural utopias that can co-exist alongside each other in an alternative Turkey. Activists described how, despite all the tensions and challenges, the fact that the HDK continues to retain so many members is down to what the HDK 'means' and 'what it continues to offer' for their future:

(...) if there are stills so many people here at the HDK, it means the HDK still promises something for people... Nobody would want to continue in this struggle if the HDK was not offering something different (...) Perhaps this is the reason why we keep going under these extremely difficult conditions. For this reason, I think, the HDK still remains a projector for our future and a future hope that we hold onto (...) But this hope is not such a romantic foolishness, even in these dark times. It is rather a radical hope that gives an emergence to a radical bottom-up movement. It is this radical hope that gives a new direction to this new bottom-up movement (...) the kind of hope that I am referring to here is not just something that is related to optimism or about being optimistic in every situation. But this hope refers to a particular mindset that makes us think that there is

always another way no matter what and asks us to act upon this thinking despite the fear and repression. Thus, this hope is not just a matter of courage, but rather a life potency (power), political drive that acts as a driving force and leverage for organisations and mobilisation. I think, HDK still signifies this hope and that is why it is still a home for many of us standing here under these conditions (Individual Interview, T3).

This ‘radical hope’ that carries the possibility of a better future becomes more crucial in the present temporality in which activists and their institutions have been subjected to increased violence and repression. The importance of this radical hope is fundamentally linked to the future: knowing that what we do now has an important effect on our future. Thus, social movement activists’ determination to keep going is based on the continuous refusal to allow others to shape their future. It is preciously carrying on struggling without knowing what future holds makes them even more ready and equipped for whatever they may face in the future. Talking about the significant value of hope in times of extreme difficulties, one activist notes:

Now you will ask what is the equivalent of this (hope) in society? It seems like there is not a direct equivalent at this particular moment. But this hope can only be turned into a potency that opens up new channels for our future struggle when it is kept alive at the core of our struggle that seems to be weakened and narrowed at this particular time. It only then becomes instrumental for emergence of new possibilities, new exits and new beginnings. It is not my intention to say that this will inevitably happen or establish a direct causation. But what I am rather trying to say it will open new possibilities and new channels for us and that what we do now at times when we are less powerful, when we are at survival mode has an important dimension for our future (Individual Interview, T3).

Crucial for the emergence to these plural ‘future utopias’ at ‘here’ and ‘now’ is our past (histories, memories knowledges, experiences) and developing a radical reconceptualising of the past that allows us to establish a link between our past, present and future which then allow us “take control over the reproduction” of our past (histories and memories) and challenge the hegemonic domination of the doing (our present) by the past (the done), but also simultaneously bring about new alternative futures:

The struggle now, as before, is the struggle for an absolute present, in which existence does not become separated from constitution [in other words, where the social how of doing is unfettered and humans can collectively constitute their world], a time-as-such where every moment is a moment of self-determination, a tabula rasa free from determination by the past—filled no doubt with dreams of the past, with the past not-yet redeemed in the present, but freed of the nightmare of [a scripted ‘done’] history. (Holloway, 2010: 244).

As Benjamin notes, since the struggles, desires, and hopes of the past ‘have a claim’ on our present temporality, the past should not be ‘settled cheaply’ (1968: 254). Thus, our effort to ‘articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was.’ It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger’ (*ibid*:55). In this reconceptualization of the relationship between our past, the present and the future, the collective memory becomes ‘an active resource’, (Haiven, 2011: 66) as essential component of our resistance and struggle to create new futures in the present.

To this extent, the aforementioned diverse repertoires of the HDK on (re)focusing on histories, stories, memories, knowledges and experiences of each of its communities be seen a challenge to the homogeneous, universal and singular hegemonic national ‘histography’ which has excluded and marginalised other histories and knowledges. The HDK has rebuilt a bottom-up, alternative ‘histography’ by vindicating each of these diverse histories and knowledges and uniting these diverse memories/knowledges under common collective memories, without reducing them to each other. Through reconnecting the past with the present and future, the HDK converts the suffering and pain of its constituent parts into building blocks for the creation of an alternative future.

#### *Emerging tensions in the prefigurative spaces of the HDK*

As Graeber (2002:72) notes ‘*It’s one thing to say, ‘Another world is possible’. It’s another to experience it, however momentarily.*’ This becomes even more challenging in the context of Turkey where demands for an alternative being, thinking and doing are challenged with extreme violence.

Our analysis show that, despite the pressure and attacks on the HDK (especially since 2015), it remains committed to the future horizons which it seeks to create through its daily struggle. However, the pressure and violence has had a significant effect upon the HDK’s political will and commitment to this prefigurative politics, as it has pushed the HDK to refrain from some practices, and hence turned them into ‘utopic’ practices/politics to be realised in the future rather than ‘now’. Reflecting upon this point, one of the leading HDK activists and former co-spokesperson of the movement at our focus group on gender talked about the importance of insisting upon such policies and practices despite the extreme pressures:

(...) It is very clear that our unproductiveness and regression goes hand to hand with the regression of the social struggles, they are not independent

from each other. So ultimately, the idea of congress as political form is very new in our geographies. Both the congress type and the politics that the congress encompasses describe and envisage our ultimate dream of reaching Nirvana. We have come to a place where are so close to our dream, but we are stuck, we are weak and languished, we are trying to hold onto what we have created (Women, Gender and Social Change, Focus Group 2).

Lefebvre (1971: 37) talks about the importance of a moment in social retransformation as '*a power concealed in everyday life's apparent banality, a depth beneath its triviality, something extraordinary in its very ordinariness*'. Thus, he sees a moment not as an isolated or separated phenomena in time but rather one that interrelates and '*weaves itself into the fabric of the everyday and transforms it*' (Lefebvre 2002: 346) constantly and dialectically between the moments of "*possible – impossible*" (ibid:347). However, he argues that turning these everyday moments that are imbued with '*impossible possibility*' (2002:347) into a '*total realisation of a possibility*' (2002:348) depends upon the adaptation of new kind of politics/practices that can create a balance between '*the demands of daily life and those of political life*' (1969: 52). Creating this balance between the demands of everyday life and those of the future is one of the important dimensions of prefigurative politics. But as our data shows, it is an extremely difficult one to sustain the authoritarian context of Turkey, where the reality of the struggle throws new challenges at you, and in order to meet these emerging challenges, you may come to push aside those practices that you once created. One activist talks about how the current authoritarian context in Turkey has made it difficult for the HDK to balance between its prefigurative politics and practices, and those of '*the demands of daily life*' (Lefebvre, 1969:52) which ultimately pushed the movement back into old ways of thinking and doing politics:

Although we are dreaming of a social revolution and aiming to bring about social transformation, we have remained occupied in the demands of daily life, daily politics and daily achievement. Thus, rather than focusing and insisting on our radical prefigurative politics and practices, we fall back to the type of conventional politics and practices we are used to. So, we turn ourselves to 'his' (the hegemonic) parliamentary system, his deputy, his party as best viable option for politics. Somehow, we say ok and that is good for us. As both the form and type of politics is familiar, we began to move away from our dream of creating future goals at the time of present or give up those long-term goals (Women, Gender and Social Change, Focus Group 2).

The above quote highlights the limitations and challenges that the HDK faces in the

implementation of its radical prefigurative politics, as the repressive context reduces the possibility of implementing them. Another activist notes:

While the HDK politics is discursively radical and progressive, in practice we seem to be failing to implement these politics. I can see that we are operating and acting upon more acceptable and realisable measures in our daily practice. We are proposing so many new things in a different forms and ways that have never been thought and acted before. For instance, the congress type of political form and horizontal organisational form as opposed to the party type form is very new in our land.... Imagining a new future where society is stronger than the state, where people are seen important subjects for creating their future, control and govern their lives directly rather than through representatives still remain an important dream for us. While the fascism we are living through today has thrown our dream to a future far away date, our radical collective dream has been fermented deeply within our society. Undoubtedly, this dream no doubt will blossom one day. We just have to keep going in our struggle to strengthen this possibility here and around the world (Women, Gender and Social Change, Focus Group 2).

Most HDK activists noted that what seems to happen in the time of conflict and violence (post 2015), is that each component member appear to prioritise their own political views and demands at the expense of the HDK's common politics, hence significantly reducing the diversity and inclusivity of the HDK as the manifestation of the '*socialisation and institutionalisation of radical politics/practice takes such a long time, determination and political will needs constant effort as what we are trying to do to bring about something that has not yet been done before and this is not easy and cannot be done immediately.... Especially in our country where we fall back so easy to the norms and values we are used to...because it is simply easier*' (Struggle in Difficult Times and Future Perspectives, Workshop 3).

Reflecting upon this issue, another activist notes:

...a collective and common style of politics that is not based on a pure ideology does not survive in our geography. Because politics in our country is based on two things. First, in terms of hegemonic politics, it rests on money and power and in terms of oppositional politics it rests on great effort and dedication. And this determination is often sustained on the basis of a pure ideology whereby society is expected to have the same determination on the basis of this abstract ideas. But this is not right. Thus, with the HDK we wanted to create something different, saying to people that you can be a subject of your life and decide yourself, you do not need representatives. This is not something that can be built from today to tomorrow.... For people to do something for themselves and for society requires also political consciousness and a political

enlightenment. Therefore, what we are trying to do in this geography is a completely different and very difficult thing. Of course, we cannot expect everyone in the society to be devoted to the same degree. What can we need to do then? We need to create mechanisms to involve them. While we cannot expect everyone to pay the same price, we can make sure that we create an environment where people can do things for them and in doing so for the society. Beside adopting mechanisms of inclusion, what is also needed is a new political mentality and political consciousness. What we are trying to do in this geography is really something never done or tried before, something that is very difficult. This is not something that can be installed from today to tomorrow. Because you say to people; You, can be a subject and play an important role in your own live, you do not need representatives. But people are used to a type of politics where they transfer their power to someone or some political form and organisations for years. By transferring their power, you are actually avoiding responsibility. This also gives such comfort. Imagine that the state of the country is getting worse for millions now, but nobody is responsible for it, only the AKP is responsible for it. In other words, with the parliamentary politics a system that based on the election, people hand over their responsibility to their representatives that they elected by vote. Therefore, it is necessary to organise a mind that will literally assume her/his own responsibility in this (take on responsibility). We are also responsible for any wrong doings taking place in our names. We have to show people how by voting, not opposing and taking a stand against practices and politics of the state we allow these things happen. To be frank, we have been inaugurated here. In brief, I want to say this: the status quo and existing state of politics in Turkey has shaped society, our habits and behaviours deeply and de facto normalised a common sense within society. The hegemonic common sense also has turned how to do politics in society into a particular form. The idea of congress as a political form contrast sharply from this and differs from this common sense politics and political structure. Yet, putting this idea into practice, its acceptance by wider society, its socialisation and institutionalisation takes time and also requires lots of effort It is not something that can be done immediately. We have not yet been able to internalise this new way of thinking and doing within our own organisation and within our components. We have not yet fully internalised and understood what the idea of HDK means in our daily lives. Thus, we still have a long way to go. Reaching out to wider society is not easy and remains the biggest challenge. We can say that it was our biggest failure not to being able to reach wider society during the peace process (Individual Interview, T53).

According to some activists, the move away from some aspects of the practice of the HDK's prefigurative politics/practices is the main reason for the HDK's inability to form local assemblies. Some HDK activists come to question whether prefigurative politics are the right policies in the current context of Turkey, where the authoritarian state has manifested

increased violence against the HDK, blocking all the spaces and possibilities for such policies to materialise. This draws attention to the particularities of the social, political and cultural context within which such policies are carried out, and the importance of the role of the state and state power therein. For instance, whilst many HDK activists conceive the female-led Rojava revolution in Syria as a social revolution driven by prefigurative politics, the majority argued the impossibility of a similar revolution taking place in the context of Turkey. The words of one of HDK activist who represents the Yeni Yasam İçin Çağrı (Call for New Life) political journal, summarize this perspective:

There is a programme and a statute that was agreed at the founding conference of the HDK. In fact, we say that this programme is utopia. We say this is utopia because with this programme we say that we can create our own assemblies and councils and form our own governance and establish our own democracy beyond the state, without overthrowing the state or taking control of the state power.... This can only happen under certain conditions. What are these conditions; the state ceases to be a state, becomes inoperable, so you can create it only under those conditions. As a matter of fact, I am telling you because there are many examples in Rojava. But there is something that is overlooked in Rojava. There is no state there. There is no Syrian state. The state has ceased to be the state, and of course the PYD (Democratic Union Party) did something very smart and filled that gap. The PYD established cantons and created its own governing bodies. However, there was a similar attempt in the North (of Turkey) but it did not succeed. This is because; unfortunately, there is a state that prevented this from happening in the North. There is a state that operates with very deep traditions. It was showed in practice the impossibility of implementation of similar prefigurative policies under the conditions where the state functions fully with all its power... we have previously criticised the HDK programme and statutes and suggested an alternative one. So, in our opinion, instead of establishing its own assemblies and own form of governing bodies as an alternative governance to the state, HDK need to focus on those urgent burning issues of today' (Individual Interview, T18).

We believe that this tension, which we witnessed during individual interviews, focus groups and workshops as well as during the general congress, assembly meetings and public events organised by the HDK, reflects a common crisis shared by many social movements that operate on the basis of prefigurative politics. In the eyes of many HDK activists, as a new political *ethos* is tested through our everyday practices and struggle, real life challenges and tensions, it transforms itself from something that can be realised now to a distant future dream that can only be realised when the conditions are ready in a foreseeable future. In

observing the HDK's failure to create its local assemblies, and its concentration of power at the centre rather than locally, we can see that the HDK's prefigurative politics and programme (which has not yet been realised in practice and remains at the level of an idea) has increasingly been defined as a utopian future mode (tense). Some of activists' hesitations and emerging criticisms of the HDK and its programme are reflected in sentences such as '*society is not ready for this*', '*the HDK's project of the future*', '*I have no objection to the HDK project, but ...*' (Writing the History of HDK Together, Workshop 1).

The rapid move away from the HDK's prefigurative politics and practices constitutes an important area of crisis in the case of HDK. This crisis is reflected not only in the HDK but also beyond within the broader social movement, where similar tensions and issues can be identified. The hostile attacks by the state on a very fragile and young prefigurative political culture and structure (gains and advances); and the dissatisfaction and criticism towards prefigurative politics expressed by HDK members who have not yet renounced the sexist, masculine and power-laden tendencies, appear to be two most important indicators of such tensions. When difficult times arrived, it seems that the prefigurative politics and practices that pave the way to a new life are problematized and questioned, and regarded by many as 'utopic practices' that either cannot be implemented in the present conditions or meet the demands/needs of today lives. As a result, it is not surprising that in the time of increased violence and crisis, the first areas which seemed to be sacrificed were women and LGBTQ issues and priorities. However, at times when state violence and oppression is reduced, channels for democratic expression and discussion open up and creates the space for such a prefigurative politics.

Thus, the question of how to sustain diversity and inclusivity whilst also maintaining the common unity of these diverse social forces of the HDK becomes an important issue specially when the movement is under attack. As we highlighted in other sections, the HDK's prefigurative political spaces, despite their radical organisational structure, are far from being free of tensions and uneven power relations. In the process of experimenting a new alternative future, while the HDK's prefigurative politics come to provide more possibilities to those women, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ communities, over time especially after the 2015 with the increased conflict, it is precisely these most vulnerable section of society (women and LGBTQ communities) who have come under increased attacked not just by the state but also

within the movement, thus limiting the ability of these communities to shape the struggle alongside their needs and priorities.

This section has demonstrated that, due to various challenges and difficulties, the HDK's prefigurative politics has not been fully implemented in practice. As such, its radical prefigurative politics/practices which aimed to bring a new horizontal, non-hierarchical organisational structure and participatory, inclusive and democratic political culture are yet to be materialised. However, as a multiplicity (multitude) of movements, the HDK has developed a new understanding of commoning far beyond any previous experience of social movement alliances formed in Turkey's history. This new political culture is based on a perspective that does not see class and identity struggles in opposition to each other; builds a radical democracy through democratic participation and decision-making processes from below; and recognises difference and diversity as a source of strength rather than a hindrance. As former HDK co-spokesperson put it: '*while it may be true that we see our desired goals are postponed to a future time and move to a faraway distance under the contemporary fascism we are experiencing now, our idea of creating an alternative new world is being fermented from the bottom, independent of us. This is what we are witnessing in the world, here in Turkey. It is imperative that we make effort to advance this* (Women, Gender & Social Change, Focus Group 2).

### **Knowledge-Making in Prefigurative Gendered Spaces**

My story is the story of women: it is the story that firstly begins with us breaking those self-closed doors and those doors that were closed upon us at home, on streets, neighbourhood and the society one after the other...Some of these stories are funny, some tragic. Some of them are exemplary, some are enviable. Each of us has a separate story of joining the woman's march. But we were like those little streams that continued to flow with all their stubbornness to find their stream beds while dealing with millions of obstacles in their land. When we began to meet and join each other, we became an enormous river. We are all now pouring into this magnificent sea of freedom (Selma Irmak, 2018:283 ).

In the previous chapter on learning, we talked of various forms of learning processes taking place in relation to gender. We argued that the HDK's autonomous women spaces have become new pedagogical spaces for learning, and the new institutional and political practices (such as co-presidency, Equal representation and the Quota system) have become pedagogical means for the constitution of new subject positions, new relationality and

sociability not only within these autonomous spaces but also in wider movement. In this section we will argue that these gendered pedagogical spaces are also spaces of knowledge production. The diverse interactions/encounters, critical reflections and difficult conversations taking place in these pedagogical spaces (both in autonomous gendered spaces and in the mixed struggle spaces of the HDK) create new knowledge about gender identities, subject positions and gender roles. In this section, reflecting critically on these experiential learning processes we ask: what new knowledges have these learning processes produced on gender? How is gender imagined/prefigured? What new vocabulary and concepts emerge in these spaces and how do these knowledges on gender challenge/alter gender identities and gender politics?

We argue that the HDK's radical prefigurative gender politics/practice were inspired by and emerged out of lessons learned and knowledge produced by the rich and diverse praxis of multiple women's organisations, groupings, individuals and the LGBTQ communities prior to the HDK. The HDK's radical gender politics/practices can be understood as a necessary response to capture both the diversity and facilitate the participation of these newly emergent political subjects of social change and create a common/autonomous space for these diverse women in which they can develop and strengthen their power. Before we move on to explain what this radical gender politics involves, what kind of knowledge is being produced through the praxis of women in the common spaces of the HDK, and how this new radical politics has come to (re)shape existing gender identities, subject positions and spaces, it is important briefly to outline the historical context within which the HDK's gender politics emerged.

#### *History at a glance*

Gender and gender politics in Turkey have been fundamentally shaped by a top-down modernity project aimed at (re)creating a new homogeneous and singular society by the Kemalist elite in 1923, as well as the diverse bottom-up feminist struggles/challenges which have taken place against this form of modernity. This top-down modernity project, which imagines society as unified and homogenous under the Turk- Islam synthesis and western centric modernization, had profound effects upon women and womanhood and existing gender roles within society (Kandiyoti, 1991; Müftüler-Bac, 1999; Yüksel 2006), changing the diversity, form and nature of women's struggle dramatically. In line with the new socio-spatial imaginaries and needs of the sovereign power, women were defined as 'modern'

'westernized' 'educated' 'Turkish' and 'secular' as opposed to 'traditional' 'backward' 'religious' 'non-Turkish'. By this conception, women's roles as 'mother' and 'wives' were fundamental to bring a new generation of modern secular Republicans that could sustain the ideas and visions of this new modernity (nationalism, secularism etc.) (Kancı, 2007; Sirman, 1990).

While the new sovereign state implemented certain reforms and legislations to allow women to have similar rights as men (in the areas of educations and political representation), this new articulation of women and womanhood came to radically alter how women should look, behave and act, and stripped their femininity by reducing them to mothers and wives. This particular definition of women and their roles confined women primarily to the private space (home), and the strict separation of public (political) from private space (home) has come to secure and maintain the state's domination and repression over women in public spaces and male domination over women in private space. In this way, the state and men were given prime authority to define their personal and public demands over the bodies of women, leaving women to serve what is demanded of them in private and public spaces under the newly formed Republican patriarchy, capitalism and nationalism (Arat, 1994, 2000). Of course, the modernity project also increased the visibility and opportunities for some women, but this came at the expense of exclusions and marginalisation of other women, and prevented any possibility of a critical feminist voice that could organise and pose a threat to the new republican elite (Kandiyoti 1987; 1991).

However, the new patriarchal system that was institutionalised under the process of nationalism and westernisation, coupled with capitalist restructuring of the economy in the coming decades, further exacerbated structural conditions of women and cemented gender roles in society. The three consecutive military coups in 1960, 1971 and 1980 were all used to maintain those hegemonic gender roles, while also disciplining and controlling the radical female bodies and souls who were deemed as threat. The 1980 military coup had a detrimental effect upon women and the women's struggle in two ways: firstly, by crushing the collective hope of radical transformation, imprisoning, torturing, killing radical women alongside their male counterparts and closing all public spaces for them. Secondly, through the introduction of Turkey's first neoliberal policies in the absence of any political resistance, with the aim of overcoming the social, political and economic crisis resulting from the state-

organised mixed economy and state-centred modernisation process developed by the Kemalist Elite (Kandiyoti, 2011).

A new constitution was drawn up by the military dictatorship, increasing the power of the state over women (society), giving the military a significant role and legitimacy to control and discipline those gendered bodies who dared to defy hegemonic gender norms and roles under the rubric of unity, nation and national integrity. This new re-structuring/reorganisation of the economy, society and politics under neoliberal capital and nationalism, increased militarisation and authoritarianism on gender spaces (defining new identity, femininity and gender roles), resulting in gender violence in all aspects of social life and defining new working conditions that came to restrict and constrain identity and politics (Al-Ali and Pratt 2009; 2011; Cockburn 1998; Enloe, 2000; Harders, 2015; Yuval-Davis, 2003). As result of these, increased numbers of women found themselves under varied forms of repression by the state, the patriarchal system of the state and capitalist development.

While this new top-down modernity provided some opportunities for women (especially in the areas of education and representational politics) in line with the needs and demands of the newly established Republic, it fundamentally left out many women who did not accept these newly defined gender subjectivities due to their situated positioning and identities (ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion etc). Thus, right from the onset this new top-down modernity was challenged by women who challenged the injustices and oppression manifested upon their bodies (and their communities).

Whilst in the early decades of the Republic, radical feminist voices and women's struggles were eliminated by '*gendered continuum violence*'<sup>42</sup> (for instance those non-Muslim women minorities e.g Armenian, Greek and Jewish). It was only after 1960 that women from diverse backgrounds (ethnic, religious, sexuality, class), inspired by the anti-imperialist movement, student movement of 1960s and ideals of socialism, began to form a collective struggle against

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<sup>42</sup> The concept of '*gendered continuum violence*' is used by feminist scholars working on war and peace to draw attention to the relationship between violence experienced by women in the domestic sphere and through war and conflict. The main argument of these scholars is to show the strong continuity between 'what happened during wars' and 'the nature of gender relations in society prior to armed conflicts' (Pankhurst, 2008: 1-6) and that these violent experiences are in fact linked by gender along with a 'continuum of violence' (Cockburn, 2001: 37).

the various forms of repression by joining radical left Marxist/socialist political parties in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. They held a strong belief and hope for radical transformation through the take over the state power, which they viewed as the panacea to their multiple situated forms of gendered injustices.

Kurdish women, like their male counterparts, were initially organised within Marxist/Socialist parties. After the establishment of the PKK in 1978, most Kurdish women carried on their struggle based on their identity and the needs of their communities. The political gains made by these women during this period, as well as their experiences, transformed not only these women and their communities (political parties etc) but also wider society. While one can be critical about the limitation of their overarching theory of social change that was seen as the solution to the injustices and repressions within society, it is important to note that the collective struggles of these women shaped the future women/feminist movement in the coming decades, through knowledges and practices about anti-imperialism, colonialism and nationalism in general, and gender identities and politics in particular. These knowledges were produced in the struggle, a point that is often overlooked/silenced by many scholars and political analysts, including the new generation of feminist activists.

While engaging in these various struggles, they were often seen as ‘sexless militants’, with gender being understood as a ‘secondary subject’ within the revolution. However, it was during these struggles that women came to understand the structural conditions of their marginalisation and repression, and to see the importance of their own subjectivity (agency) in transforming them. They also learned that those safer and free spaces of resistance are not free of unequal relations of power despite the discourses of their parties pledging that ‘*women own half of the sky*’ or/and ‘*without freedom of women, no society will be free*’. Seeing the existing contradictions and discrepancies between the discursive articulation and material practices of their parties, and witnessing first-hand unequal ownership of leadership knowledge in favour of their male counterparts, they began to develop a complex understanding of their female identity, as well as a framework for a collective action to overcome not only the injustices and domination existent in wider society but also within their political collectives. In the context of the Kurdish liberation movement, considering the patriarchal nature of Kurdish women’s oppression, women began to ask ‘difficult questions’ in their encounters in the armed resistance to destabilise those internalised existing gender

roles and power relations. This questioning would provide the basis of the knowledge and methodology for the Kurdish women's movement's revival in the coming decades (Çağlayan, 2012).

In the late 1980 and 1990s, with the return of democracy, influenced by the western feminist movement, as a critique of Marxist ideology on gender (and silence on gender identities and unequal power relations), women began to form new independent, autonomous collectives and institutions. Women began to organise their resistance and talk about body politics, focusing on the everyday repression and injustices taking place in private spaces such as domestic violence, honour killings and rape, and bringing issues that were often considered private into the public domain under the idea the famous Western feminist slogan '*the Personal is Political*'. After gaining momentum, they formed female initiatives, organisations (shelters and advice centres), published journals and magazines covering a range of women's issues, and held demonstrations and meetings and lobbying activities. The feminist struggle in the 1990s, by drawing attention to the interrelationship between the 'personal' and the 'political', made significant contribution to body and body politics. The collective effort of diverse feminist women made their issues more visible in public spaces, encouraging women to talk freely on issues related their bodies that were considered taboo (even by women themselves), and pushed governments to implement new reforms and legislation to address existing gender inequality. The knowledge produced through their praxis transformed gender knowledge and practices across diverse spaces, even for women who carried on their struggles in the mixed gender environment. However, despite all these positive changes and impacts, their framework and strategies for struggle did not transform the structural causes and social conditions of the issues and injustices facing women.

In the context of globalisation, the end of the Cold war and the increased importance of identity politics, Turkey witnessed increased mobilisation of women from marginalised communities. In particular, Kurdish women, Islamic women and LGBTQ communities came to pose a significant challenge not only to hegemonic gender identities, norms and values, but also to progressive feminisms for their ignorance and lack of recognition of diversity and the situated nature of their struggles. The expansion and development of the Kurdish women's struggle which emanated from the mountains and prisons, and expanded to public and political democratic spaces came to create new political institutions, new gender politics

(jineology) and practices (quota system and co-presidency), and new radical female subjects that would shake up and transform themselves and their political communities (but also the broader feminist movement in Turkey). They did so often in an extremely hostile environment, where Kurdish women have faced many obstacles not just from the sovereign state but also within their communities (especially from male members) (Kışanak, 2018). Kurdish women's long term political struggle across multiple spaces has not only challenged the unequal gendered power relations within their political communities, but also pushed their political parties to reformulate a politics that incorporates women at the centre of the struggle for social transformation as equal subjects (Al-Ali and Tas, 2017).

These diverse women's organisations (socialist, left, Kurds), feminist individuals and groups, and LBGTs communities of the most marginalised communities have been at the forefront of the struggle, seeking to transform the conditions creates their marginalisation. Involved in struggles (peace, democracy, sexuality, body politics, politics of the everyday) at different spaces (mountains, streets, cultural space, political parties, prisons, trade unions , factories, communities and private spaces –homes), they have collectively produced a significant body of knowledge that has reshaped our understanding of body, subject positions, and gender politics while also providing the new generations of feminist movement (and social movements) with new technologies for resistance, solidarity and hope.

Through this hard and painful journey, women have come change the structural conditions of their situated bodies; push their communities (organisations and parties) to adopt new politics/practices that recognise their diverse subject positions (both singular and communities); reshaped internalised gender roles; and formed new solidarity spaces, alliances and communication between various women in which they share, learn from each other and develop collective responses.

#### *HDK as radical prefigurative gender space*

For the first time in the history of Turkey, a political movement (the HDK) has been able to transcend differences between wide-ranging array of women's movements, groupings and individual feminists, and unify them under one umbrella organisation. While increased encounters and relations between these diverse women in previous decades had generated a new form of sociability, relationality, and solidarity between them, and constituted new

gendered subjects,<sup>43</sup> who strongly pushed for realisation of unity amongst women, it was only under the HDK that this unity was realised. This, we argue, was due to the HDK's radical prefigurative politics that centres gender equality, and which locates the crucial role/agency of gendered bodies in the struggle for social change. We call this new gender politics *Radical Prefigurative Gender Politics* (though we may also refer to it as radical gender politics) for our analysis of what new Knowledges are being produced in the prefigured gender spaces of the HDK.

### *Gender Matters*

Inspired and shaped by the accumulated knowledges produced by the rich and diverse women's praxis (past and present) briefly outlined above, the HDK's radical prefigurative gender politics involves a new radical *thinking and doing* in relation to gender identities. It aims to constitute new subjects, structures, and relationality both within the HDK and beyond, during the course of struggle. Central to this radical gender politics is a political understanding which locates gender equality at the centre of the struggle for social change in the 'here and now', rather than as something to be achieved at some point in the future (after power has been won). Thus, by elevating gender and recognising it as an integral resource for social change right from the beginning rather than as an afterthought, this radical political approach strongly recognises the crucial role and agency of women in bringing about a new equal, just democratic society not just for women and all gendered bodies, but for the whole of society.

Gender is a contested terrain, being pushed and pulled by many social actors (state and non-state) in different directions, each with their own view on what gender is (women, man, trans women), what womanhood entails and what femininity is. The HDK is amongst various political institutions that adopt a radical new gender politics that defines the movement's gender positions, identities and roles. Through this approach, the HDK seeks to create a new gender equality-based future society, in which women are seen as essential architects right from the beginning.

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<sup>43</sup> Almost everyone we talked during the research talked about the important role of Sabahat Tuncel and Gültan Kışanak, two prominent Kurdish feminist women leaders in creating spaces to discuss with other women. Most expressed that the role of both Sabahat and Gültan was fundamental in pushing this unity, against all efforts to prevent it.

This radical reconceptualization of the issue of gender equality as an integral part of the struggle for social change (that is- gender equality within the struggle), and seeing women as the main architectures of a new future life for all contrasts sharply with most systems of hegemonic power (even those considered to be progressive). These hegemonic approaches tend to be primarily constituted on the power of men, leaving out women and gendered bodies, and only came to include women in the process once the whole system of power had been established, so that women's inclusion could not disturb the existing balance of power.

The issue of gender equality, we argue, in most liberal societies, has been approached not with an intention to share power equally, but rather to recognise and grant equal rights to women within an unequal system of power. This radical gender politics is also a critique of progressive theories and practice of social change (past and present) where women are seen as secondary 'sexless' militants, and their identities as women are denied for the sake of the 'greater good' of the revolution, which is primarily seen as a male endeavour. This important shift in gender politics from the years where in the words of Gültan Kışanak, the prominent Kurdish Feminist, '*women were not considered as subjects of politics, but rather as issues of politics*' (Kisinak, 2018:5).

Defining women as an equal subject to their male counterparts (recognition of their equal subject position), and recognising their crucial role, means making women equal partners within structures of power. Such an approach fundamentally challenges hegemonic constructions of differentiated gendered identities and roles. In the context of Turkey, the hegemonic system of power created differentiated gender subjectivities primarily based around male needs, with women defined as 'wife' and 'mother', and as always ready to fulfil the needs of man (sexual pleasure) and the nation, producing a new generation of homogenous modern Turkish subjects. The separation of private from public secured male (state) domination and control in both of these realms, not just over women's bodies but also their souls.

This approach to gender has seen the HDK has come to attract diverse feminists (individuals, groupings and organisations, even some individual feminists who were not willing to carry on their struggle in a mixed environment). Talking about what the HDK's gender radical politics means to her, one feminist activist with Kurdish and Alevi identity notes how for the first time

her female identity was recognised alongside the multiple identities she embodies (Kurdish and Alevi).

The HDK won me to myself. I am saying that because even the society where I come from, which appears to be more egalitarian due to its recognition of women's equality, is just a local prototype of the existing system in practice. For many years, I carried out my struggle in Alevis organisations, often being the only woman member of their executive committees alongside with other 6 men. It was the same situation when I went to the Confederation of Alevis: amongst the 21 'strong' male executives, I was the only woman... The HDK has crowned my multiple identities. It has legitimized each of my diverse identities even further as it has revealed the uniqueness of each. I think, for this it has also become a model (...) Thus, the HDK brought me in to myself as it made me even stronger as woman. And, most importantly, it brought something new in me: while it strengthens my own identities, it also made me aware of other identities, as I see all those other identities developing in myself, one that goes beyond my care and love of my family, friends and those like me. As I get to know them, I began to feel I am also Armenian, Assyrian, Circassian and Pomak... This is an amazing feeling which the HDK gave it to me. You are talking to me now as an individual, but in fact I am one subject that embodies many identities alongside each other in our land today. Thus, the HDK has formed a multi-plural identity, multilingual, multicultural woman (Individual Interview, T22).

In defining gender roles and politics, intersectionality is used an important strategy. There are multiple ways in which intersectionality is being implemented within the prefigurative gender spaces of the HDK. Below we will analyse how this has been done.

### *Intersectional identities*

The concept of intersectionality emerged out of the black feminist struggle to draw attention to simultaneity of forms of social structures and conditions (class, ethnicity, race, age and religion etc) in constituting diverse and differentiated identities (Kimberlé Crenshaw, 1989).<sup>44</sup> Despite its misuse, distortion and overgeneralisation, intersectionality remains an important strategy and framework for many feminist scholars and activists, as it offers a critical lens that goes beyond a '*single axis framework*' for an analysis of multiple form of power and social conditions in the formation of new subjectivities (ibid:137-138), and allows us to

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<sup>44</sup> Black legal scholar Crenshaw first conceptualised the term 'intersectionality' in her most inspiring essay in 1989 which was titled as 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.'

conceptualise how intersecting identities of race and gender shape experiences of discrimination and subordination (Crenshaw, 1989: 137-138, see also Crenshaw, 1991).

While increased number of scholars have focused on how intersectionality is manifested in various social movements (Chun et al., 2013; Gökarıksel & Smith, 2017; Moss & Maddrell, 2017; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2017), there remains a gap in the literature on how intersectional praxis plays out in prefigurative collective spaces. (Laperrière & Lépinard, 2016). We hope this analysis will reduce this theoretical gap, and in doing so contribute to already existing debates on these areas.

### *Gender as diverse and relational*

The HDK defines gender holistically as a diverse and plural phenomenon that is (re)made by multiple intersected dynamics (sexuality, culture, political and social), interacting simultaneously and constantly to define who we are. Thus, rather than understanding gender as being singular, static, given and homogenous, this political approach sees gender as relational, heterogenous and collective characteristic which is remade and reworked by multiple contingent social structures over time and space. This challenges conceptualisations of gender (body) as an isolated phenomenon and locates gender (body) within its all diversity, (social, political, cultural and emotional structures (human and non-human)) that define and gives meaning to the body. Thus, understanding gender (body) requires an understanding of what makes that body and what it relies on for its existence, which should not be taken for granted (Ferederici, 2020). Similarly, Shahvisi argues (2018: 9) '*one cannot infer the intersection of two identities from their singular incarnations, no matter how sophisticated the calculations; rather, these intersections tend to be generative of unique experiences of their own. When exploring the experiences of those situated at the intersections, one must therefore rely on first-hand experiences rather than suppositions about the outcomes of particular combinations.*

However, these diverse and intersected structures shape our bodies in uneven and unequal ways. Judith Butler (2016:19) in *Vulnerability and Resistance* talks about how the body is located within multiple social structures that both support and constraint it. Nonetheless, we are dependent upon those structures for various conflictual reasons (even though they may create conditions for our vulnerability):

We cannot talk about a body without knowing what supports that body, and what its relation to that support – or lack of support – might be. In this way, the body is less an entity than a relation, and it cannot be fully dissociated from the infrastructural and environmental conditions of its living. Thus, the dependency on human and other creatures on infrastructural support exposes a specific vulnerability that we have when we are unsupported, when those infrastructural conditions start to decompose, or when we find ourselves radically unsupported in conditions of precarity or under explicit conditions of threat (Butler 2016:19).

This conceptualisation of gender as heterogenous' rather than 'homogenous' recognises the body in all diversity, including culture, wisdom, memory, history and knowledge. It is the mutual intersection of these varied qualities that produce body both '*different, even opposed, but still legitimate perspectives on the situation*' (Sherry Orther, 1995: 175). In this understanding, diversity is defined as a 'positive resource' in the making of the subject formation and social reproduction of a new society. Thus, we should seek elevate and vindicate diversity rather than eliminate it. Moreover, each of these diverse bodies and their multiple struggles are recognised as distinct but also as a 'common struggle' under the notion of unity. As stated in the HDK bulletin (page 3):

Our Congress sees the spaces of struggle of all democratic oppositional forces as a common space of struggle and draws its strength from that. Our Congress is the common struggle space for all those oppressed and exploited; workers, laborers, immigrants, women, peasants, youth, retired people, disabled people, LGBTQ individuals; all those excluded and ignored ethnic minorities and faith communities as well as those people whose living spaces are being destroyed (HDK Brochure, p. 3).<sup>45</sup>

We argue that this approach goes beyond the recognition of diversity subject under the term of 'irreducibility', in which diversity is used as a justification for further division between different subject positions. The HDK's radical gender politics seeks to create unity between those diverse actors in a way that both recognises their autonomy and representation, but that also sees their collective power. It is this conceptualisation of gender that has resonated with the many women who have generated unity within the common spaces of the HDK.

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<sup>45</sup> Halklarin Demokatik Kongres Nedir, HDK Brosur (What is People Democratic Congress)  
<https://www.halklarindemokratikkongresi.net/Images/UserFiles/Documents/Editor/HDKBROSUR.pdf>

By seeing our gender identities as multiple and diverse, and embodying multiple histories, feelings, memories and knowledge, the HDK's radical gender politics differs significantly from those feminist approaches that define gender as a social construct or a discourse. It can also be seen as a critical challenge to existing processes of hegemonic and non-hegemonic 'epistemological domination' and 'injustices' within Turkey's feminist history (including those progressive ones), which have marginalised and silenced the voices and struggles of women though describing them as 'irrational' 'backward' or 'traditional' under the 'universalization' of one particular standpoint experiences (Al-Ali and Tas, 2017, See also Mignolo, 2012). Boaventura de Sousa Santos describes this process as 'epistemicide', in which forms of domination have eliminated multiple subjects as well as destroyed their wisdom, dreams, memories, culture and ancestral links (Santos, 2014). The ongoing historical marginalisation and exclusion of Kurdish women, Islamic women, LGBTQ communities and other minority women has been increasingly noted by scholars (See Zengin, 2016). In fact, the emergence of Kurdish Feminism (*Jineoloji*) is an epistemological critique of these universalising, western feminist epistemologies and methodologies (Öcalan 2013; Al-Ali and Tas, 2017, 2018). Talking about these epistemological injustices and domination, Graeber and Öğünç (2014) note:

It never occurs to [those in the West] that people in Kurdistan might be reading Judith Butler too. [...] It just doesn't seem to occur to them they might be taking these things way further than 'Western standards' ever have; that they might genuinely believe in the principles that Western states only profess.<sup>46</sup>

This situated intersectional analysis of gender is attentive to diverse epistemologies of '*situated gazes of particular people in relation to their own social locations and social well-being*' (Yuval-Davis, 2015: 97) and to this extent it can be seen as an attempt to create '*a sociology of absences*' to both recover what is being missed, silenced, marginalised and eliminated and vindicate the diversity (Ontological and epistemological) of subject, voices, stories and histories (de Sousa Santos, 2014), with an aim to form an '*Ecology of Knowledges*' (Santos, 2007) based on a new form of sociability and solidarity between these diverse bodies and knowledges. Such an ecology, by recognising and vindicating the richness of the diversity of the Others, takes us beyond the dominant colonial and western-centric '*abyssal thinking*'

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<sup>46</sup> Graeber, D., Öğünç, P. 2014. 'No. This is a Genuine Revolution' *Z Net*. <https://zcomm.org/znetarticle/no-this-is-a-genuine-revolution/> (last accessed March 2020).

that has favoured particular bodies, knowledge and histories over the others under all-encompassing notion of universalism (Santos, 2014). Santos (2018:2) argues that the epistemologies of the South, should '*identify and valorize that which often does not even appear as knowledge in the light of the dominant epistemologies, that which emerges instead as part of the struggles of resistance against oppression and against the knowledge that legitimates such oppression. Many such ways of knowing are not thought of as knowledges but rather lived knowledges. The epistemologies of the South occupy the concept of epistemology in order to resignify it as an instrument for interrupting the dominant politics of knowledge. They are experiential epistemologies.*'

#### *Intersectional Gendered Dominations and Injustices*

Just as gender is being conceptualised as a holistic concept, so is the concept of power. Intersectional political feminism, while recognizing their distinct forms, defines patriarchy, capitalism, nationalism, religion, authoritarianism as interrelated and mutually inclusive form of domination rather than as separated. As stated in the HDK Bulletin, 'Our congress recognises that the male-dominated system (patriarchy) is a systematic form of domination that is touted in all spaces of society. It believes that male sovereignty (patriarchy), against all other forms of domination and exploitation (class, national, faith) is a specific form of oppression and exploitation (HDK Brochure: p.3).<sup>47</sup>

In a recent conversation with Katy Steinmetz (2020), Kimberlé Crenshaw<sup>48</sup> tells us that intersectionality is not '*identity politics on steroids*' or '*a mechanism to turn white men into the new pariahs*', but rather a critical '*prism*' that allows us to see how various '*forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other*'.<sup>48</sup> Rather than seeing the multiple dimensions inequalities and repressions as separate from one each other (whether it is on gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality or religious), she argues that intersectionality focuses on how women are subjected to all of these, and '*the experience is not just the sum of its parts*' (ibid). She goes to note that '*intersectionality is simply about how certain aspects of who you are will increase your access to the good things or your exposure to the bad things in life*' (ibid).

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<sup>47</sup> HDK Broşürü, available online

<https://www.halklarindemokratikkongresi.net/Images/UserFiles/Documents/Editor/HDKBROSUR.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> Steinmetz, K. (2020), 'She Coined the Term 'Intersectionality' Over 30 Years Ago. Here's What It Means to Her Today' in *Time*, 20 February 2020, online news, available at <https://time.com/5786710/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality/> (last accessed June 2021).

For Crenshaw (1989), various forms of injustices and oppression (such as racism, sexism or classism) do not manifest themselves with clear boundaries, but rather in combined, complex and contradictory ways, all acting simultaneously. Thus, the crucial task for her not just describing or identifying the multiple dimensions of power as problem areas (class, race, ethnicity, age or sexuality), but rather a critical and rigorous analysis of gender, asking what happens to people who embody multiple identities at once and how these shape their identity and politics?

The HDK's radical gender politics draws attention to the diverse social structures and powers at play shaping and reconfiguring our bodies in complex and profound ways (see Federici, 2020). Thus, identifying these '*interlocking system of dominations*' that always '*produce a new reality*' (hooks, 1990:11, 59) is crucial for any analysis of gender. In line with the above argument, the HDK's approach argues there are various forms of social, political, cultural and economic power (capitalism, religion, nationalism, family etc) which operate simultaneously and situate each of us in uneven and differentiated subject positions. Thus, our differentiated positions are not 'a priori', 'static' or 'given', but rather are constituted by various discursive and non-discursive practices and technologies that locate us in a particular position while both constraining and providing opportunities (Butler, 2015). However, it also recognised that the unevenness and differentiated nature of this positioning means that some of us are more constrained and restricted than others, and the opportunity of some is always at the expense of others' lack of opportunity.

These various power structures create and produce multiple ontological and epistemological injustices, repression and dominations. Thus, it is important to identify these forms of 'axis of domination' that come to create various forms of subject and subject positions. Seeing this various 'matrix of domination' as interrelated, the HDK's radical gender politics looks at how the processes of patriarchy, nationalism, religion, contemporary neoliberal capitalism affects women (especially those marginalised) more than other subjects. Under the increased state repression and conflict, women pay heavier prices and are subjected to the most violent forms of oppression. It also argues the restructuring of economic space under neoliberal global capitalism left women in a more precarious situation, and at the bottom of the pile in terms of poverty. Trapped between these various forms of injustice and domination, women are subjected all sorts of sexist, racist, transphobic unequal power relations (Zengin, 2016).

Unlike liberal feminism, HDK's radical gender politics does not view women's oppression and domination as an individual matter emanating primarily from a male subject. While recognising the specificity of this form of power over women, the HDK's gender approach objects to the 'individualisation' of this patriarchal domination and injustice and locates the male body within the broader social structures that allows him to behave the way he does. Thus, male domination is seen as a result of various intersecting forms of power, ie, capitalism, nationalism, religion and sexuality. This collective conceptualisation of domination locates the individual incident within a broader context and seeks to transform the social conditions in order to alter the form of domination emanating from one individual or group. In doing so, it challenges those approaches to feminism that define the source of injustices against women simply in cultural terms. Instead, it argues that the broader social conditions produce various cultural differences. Under this complex form of power, institutions and infrastructure have been created in order to sustain these differentiated subject positions, as well as the very nature of this power. Thus, the differentiated subject formations and the meaning attributed to those subjects are not created in isolation from other domains (and processes), but rather they are interrelated. As our difference is not created solely by culture, but rather by a complex set of social structures (which culture is part of), we argue that our analysis should pay attention to how interaction between those various structures comes to define who we are, what practices and social infrastructure allows/constraints us to perform (not perform), and the outcome of my identity. Failing to do this may lead to cultural relativism, or blaming one's problems upon the shortcoming of culture rather than the social conditions that shapes it. (See Caha, 2011; Özcan 2011)

This particular conceptualisation of gender fundamentally challenges those feminisms that fail to recognise these multiple intersecting forms of dominations at play in constituting marginalisation and exclusion. This blindspot justified the repression of certain women (non-western, non-urban, non-Turk, non-secular) under the logic of modernity and coloniality (Mignolo, 1995) and needed also to be challenged.

#### *Intersectional Struggle: Towards a new gender based equality*

Intersectionality is not just seen as a framework for identifying/analysing the 'matrix of domination' (Collins, 1990); a '*mechanism for revealing that power works in uneven and differentiated ways*' (Chun et al., 2013: 922) or analysing diverse dimensions of our

intersectional identities, but also an '*emancipatory political framework*' (Jordan-Zachery, 2007: 261) and '*... an indispensable tool for creating new democratic institutions, identities, and practices*' (*ibid*: 924)' necessary for social reproduction of a new life under a new modernity.

Beside drawing attention to intersectionality of our situated diverse gender identities (class, ethnicity, race, religion and sex etc) and intersectionality of various sources/structures of domination and injustice (capitalism, nationalism and patriarchy), the HDK's radical gender politics draws attention to the intersectionality of our diverse struggles as the key factor for retransformation of new subjects, organisations and society. This is done through connecting the diverse feminist praxis and women struggles (recognising their diversity- class, ethic, sexuality, religion-based struggle), and linking these diverse women's struggles to other forms of struggle, based on a shared idea to create an equal, free and democratic society.

Thus, at the centre of 'intersectional emancipatory political framework' lies a strong commitment to bring about a new gender-based equality that is an important component of broader social emancipation and transformations. The horizontal institutional form, adopting new practices of inclusion and equality (such as co-presidency and the quota system), including adopt and creating new autonomous women-only spaces, are all seen as means to unleash the radical potential of this emancipatory political framework. These distinct and *autonomous spaces* for collective action (such as women's assemblies, women's commission and women's congress) are seen as crucial mechanisms that provide spaces where women can engage and practice democracy, and utilise their equal rights to develop a new politics. All of these practices are aimed at inclusion and equal representation of the most marginalised voices in the decision-making process in a horizontal and diffused form of power, providing spaces to allow women to develop their own mechanisms of power that provide real security, protection, defence and prosperity not just for them but also for their communities.

It is important to note to note that these diverse practices emerged out of the Kurdish women's struggle. Kurdish women have fought very hard for the adoption and institutionalisation of these practices, not just against the state but also against their male comrades who were often the first to challenge and resist. Gültan Kışanak's book's '*Purple Colour of Kurdish Women's Struggle*' (2018) contains of multiple women's stories on their experiences in the struggle for democracy and freedom in the political spaces of the struggle,

and is great testimony to the long, hard struggle of women. The HDK's implementation of these in their organisational form was also seen as a recognition of the influence, role and power of these women. While the necessity of these autonomous spaces may not be understood in other contexts (especially in the western context), given the Turkish/Kurdish context of a highly patriarchal society, these spaces create a safe and secure space for the most marginalised subjects so that 'the Subaltern Can Speak' (Spivak, 1994).

Many female activists talked about the crucial importance of these practices and of having their own distinct and autonomous political spaces, which have allowed them to talk about their particular and distinct issues as well as other broader issues and make decisions away from 'male gaze'. Elsewhere this was called as a positive boundary making process (Taylor & Whittier, 1992). However '*intentional autonomous political spaces*' are not just places of 'democracy in action' but also 'emotional spaces', 'spaces of new subject formation' 'spaces of freedom' 'spaces of solidarity' 'spaces of learning' 'spaces of knowledge production' (as our participant noted over and over); where multiple encounters take place, where women touch each other in a different ways, where they develop new concepts and knowledges, where they share, learn and built, but also experience all sort of emotion (hope, happiness, sadness, failure). Talking about the multiple dimensions of these autonomous political spaces, one female activist described them as '*our space of freedom, our field of sovereignty, a space where we were confident that we would not experience anything that we may experience in mixed environment. Of course, women coming from social organisations had some concerns. But after a while, once we have known each other, we began to trust each other*' (Woman, Gender and Change, Focus Group 2)

These measures were also incorporated in the political form and politics of the HDP, which made it the only political party that included gender-based equality politics from its inception, rather than including women later in order make up the equal numbers. This is particularly important given the context of political parties and that representational politics are gendered spaces, where women's role is seen as secondary and often as a 'showcase' for gaining wider women's support in elections. Electoral politics has also been an exclusionary space in which women with diverse backgrounds have been marginalised.

In the election of June 2015, under these practices, 32 women were elected and sent to the parliament out of 80 HDP members of the parliament. This not only changed the proportion

of women representation in parliament, where historically women's representation has been very low, but also diversified those long exclusionary spaces of electoral politics that have historically left out women, particularly those women from the most marginalised communities.

The impact of the HDP's female members of parliament has been significant. They began to form their own autonomous groups and had equal representation on every other mixed parliamentary groups formed on particular issues. This secured women's role in debates and the decision-making processes not only on the issues related to women but also broader societal issues (such as education, health, security etc). It was also the first time in Turkish history that marginalised women had taken centre stage in political spaces and debates, in all of their diversity (of colour, ethnicity, religion, vision), bringing their histories and experiences to the public fore and making themselves and their communities more visible. In doing so, they also challenged the conceptions of women and gender roles at the heart of hegemonic political power, and proposed an alternative politics that not only seeks to change the conditions in which women live, but for their entire communities. In the process they are not only creating new subjects, but also changing public perceptions and stereotypes which portray them as 'uneducated', 'traditional', 'backward', and as a 'threat'. In this way they have provided hope to many women whose own lives resonated with the experience of these diverse women.

The notion of constituting a new gendered subject is central to this emancipatory framework. This new subject is imagined as radical, willing to organise and 'resist', rather than a passive 'recipient', and whom 'demands' the impossible against all the odds' (Individual Interview, T53). Therefore, the task for this radical subject is to take a central role in transforming the conditions of their vulnerability as women and also bringing about a better/just future not just for themselves but also for their communities.

Talking about vulnerability as an integral part of resistance, Judith Butler argues that: '*To say that any of us are vulnerable beings*' ultimately '*is to mark our radical dependency not only on others, but on a sustaining and sustainable world*'. (Butler, 2015:150). bell hooks makes a similar point (1991: 149-50): '*marginality [is] much more than a site of deprivation. . . . It is also the site of radical possibility . . . for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives. . . . It offers . . . the*

*possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds’.*

In this this importance that the HDK sees resistance (struggle) an important strategy to develop women’s power, constituting of these imagined new subject and new culture. It is argued that it is only though the medium of struggle that women can become ‘self-confident’, and be empowered to form enduring social structures that can *destabilise* ‘deep-seated patriarchal patterns’ (Cemgil and Hoffmann 2016:64); reconfigure the existing ‘historic imbalance of power’ between men and women (Gupta 2017); and transform the multiple forms of domination and injustice to create a new society. Creating such enduring social structures, given that women are working within and between highly hierachal forms of power, can only be sustained by a ‘*double axis of struggle*’; an internal struggle against all forms of existing (patriarchal) domination and injustices within ‘safe space’ of the HDK; and an external against the various hegemonic power configurations and injustices in society. It is only thorough this intersected double strategy that one can destabilize and challenge those embedded and internalized patriarchal forms of domination under the hegemonic form of *men’tality* and create a new form of *women’tality*<sup>49</sup> (female way of life gained through situated philosophy of praxis of women) that allows women to remove all those ‘*enslaving emotions, needs and desires for their husband, father, lover, brother, friends*’ (Öcalan, 2013: 52).

Gender equality and women’s empowerment thus is linked to the equality of the commons. The central aim here is not just to empower individual women and increase gender equality, but also to generate and reproduce the collective power of women power, whose role is seen crucial for emergence of a new alternative world against and beyond hegemonic power (Federici, 2012). Thus, gender equality and freedom is not just seen as an aim, but an important strategy that can be practiced in ‘the fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life’ (Katz, 2001: 711): not something to be achieved in a democracy, but rather a democracy which is being realised through the collective action of diverse women. Since the

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<sup>49</sup> The concept of *women’tality* refers to a new radical way of thinking about social reality and self that fundamentally challenges the conventional and hegemonic paternalistic ‘*men’tality*’ (way of thinking). The concept seeks to break down binary understanding of men and women and provide an alternative perspective that is non-binary and non-gender specific.

body is seen as a collective entity, it combines ‘body politics’ with the ‘politics of the commons’. Rejecting the unnecessary divisions between private and public, and individual and collective, this framework combines the struggle of the ‘personal is private’ with that of ‘*struggle for equality, representation, recognition and justice*’ in order to create the spaces and necessary conditions for bodies to live, act and perform free from any and all forms of domination. This approach requires a radical rapture and a total transformation of the existing social structures for a body to function with her diverse qualities, rather than reforming such structures. This approach differs with most feminist analysis which tends to separate the politics of the body from that of the commons, and hence which tend to see the body as an individual subject of rights, rather than in its collective, economic and social character. Thus, for the HDK gender equality is not seen as a political end itself but rather as a mechanism of change through which new subjects are being constituted, along with new senses of belonging, relationally and solidarity, under a new social pact where humans and non-humans can live differently.

Talking about expanding a politics of the body beyond our own bodies, Silvia Federici (2020: 5) states:

for what it finds, in going beyond the periphery of the skin, is not a culinary paradise but a magical continuity with the other living organisms that populate the earth: the bodies of human and the non-humans, the trees, the rivers, the sea, the stars. This is the image of a body that reunites what capitalism is divided, a body no longer constituted as a Leibnizian monad, without windows and without doors, but moving instead in harmony with cosmos, in a world where diversity is wealth for all and a ground for communing rather than a source of divisions and antagonisms

Thus, the freedom and equality of women is tied to the freedom of their communities, just as we are related and interrelated to the human and non-human worlds in multiple ways, hence have a duty of care and responsibility for one to another and the world around us. Judith Butler argues that family may be a source of vulnerability, but also a source of love, protection and care (2016). This is truer nowhere than in the context of Kurdish and other marginalised communities, for whom families are at the centre of care, protection and love for children and communities under extreme form of state violence. The HDK seeks to create a new sociability and relationality based on love, care and equal responsibility.

Within this approach, the horizontal mode of power being shared equally and collective decision-making contrasts to conventional political party structures in which power is often embodied in one person or a group of people, and decision tends to be centralised. Within the HDK's approach, emphasis is given to a co-responsibility and commitment in order to create a genuinely participant democracy and empower people to be involved in the decisions that affect every aspect of their lives. These positive discriminatory strategies that aimed at securing equal representation and power sharing between man and women are crucial given the context of the political parties in Turkey, in which the issue of leadership and power is dominated by men. As Gültan Kışanak argues '*when there were many chairs, men liked to share them with women, but when there was one chair, they did not want to give that to a woman*' (Kışanak, 2018:38).

This alternative intersectional gender politics and framework action has profoundly affected women and society (which we will discuss in detail in the next chapter). Through it, the HDK has constituted new radical revolutionary subjects who have dared to demand impossible against all the odds, but also making the impossibility into reality. In doing so, it has not just made visible the marginalised, hidden and silenced women (their histories, wisdom knowledge memories), but has also created a new solidarity and relationality between women; and provided a framework of hope/resistance for those women in similar situation. It has also provided a challenge/critique to hegemonic conceptions of woman, womanhood and femininity, and provided a valuable counter-hegemonic gender politics that can not only challenge and critique, but also point the way to an alternative new society.

#### *Tensions and contestations at intersectional prefigurative gender spaces*

Recently, a number of scholars have highlighted multiple tensions and challenges that exist in prefigurative collective spaces by drawing attention to how women have come to reproduce power dynamics and exacerbated already existing ones, creating new hierarchies based on exclusion and marginalisation while engaging in prefigurative politics and practices (Cf. Athanasiou, 2014; Campbell, 2011; Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2015; Gamez Fuentes, 2015; Potuoglu-Cook, 2015; Ishkanian & Ali 2018; May, 2015).

The intersectional prefigurative gender spaces of the HDK are neither 'pure', nor free of conflict and power, despite their horizontal political forms and politics of diversity and inclusivity. Whilst it is one thing to maintain such a politics discursively, the practical

application of such politics and policies are far more difficult, given the difficulty in negating and reconciling diverse situated gendered bodies. Thus, during the process of engaging in '*a moment of counter-space*' time and experimenting and improvising a new way of being, doing and acting (the social production of everyday life) (Halverson, 2015; Graeber 2013), these embodied activities and practices can generate tensions and challenges within and between these autonomous spaces, as well as with the HDK's mixed spaces of struggle.

At the centre of these tensions and challenges is the issue of power, and the question of how power operates differently within these horizontal, inclusive, autonomous and mixed spaces of struggle, an analysis of which is crucial for our understanding of the HDK's radical gender politics and practices. Thus, it is crucial to ask questions such as: how are decisions being made within these gendered spaces? How are tensions and challenges managed? What contestation and power dynamics exist within autonomous spaces, but also between these spaces and the HDK's mixed spaces? What type of strategy is in place when women priorities/needs are under attack not just by the state but also by their male comrades at the HDK? Are there any hierarchies between the diverse needs and priorities of women? Who decides on the repertoire of actions at particular time and space? What happens to this gender politics during times of conflict?

During our fieldwork, we found multiple tensions and challenges that women have encountered during their engagement in these autonomous spaces, which have affected the participation, inclusion and representation of women, their voices, experiences and vision.

As noted by most women activists interviewed, some of these challenges/tensions emerged as a result of operating within spaces where existing and internalised hegemonic power and gender conceptions (held by both men and women) remain an issue. This makes women's labour even harder, as it involves tackling and challenging these internalised habits, norms, subject positions, as well as simultaneously creating a new subjectivity. And these processes are even more difficult in a mixed environment where women are required to be permanently 'vigilant' and 'alert' for protection / safeguarding.

Such vigilance is required in order to protect the gains which have been made in the movement, and to challenge the tendencies when things go wrong or the external situation shifts that '*women are the first one to blame*', or '*those gender sensitive policies are the one to put aside, overseen and ditched*' (Women, Gender & Social Change, Focus Group 2). Talking

about the difficulty of carrying the ‘double axis’ of struggle in the mixed political space, despite the HDK’s women friendly politics and practices, one female activist notes that *‘Just because we have these women only spaces and women friendly practices it does not mean we do not have any tensions within us, women and between women and men’* (Women, Gender & Social Change, Focus Group 2):

We established a women's council, we are trying to exist, but ultimately the HDK is a mixed organisation. Women tried to work and exist in these autonomous women spaces, but they could not do it, they came to face many difficulties one by one. While some women left due to these difficulties as they were becoming more destructive, those of us who are remaining are doing our jobs in a extremely difficult environment. I believe, sadly, this is the case for both the HDK and HDP. But of course, we will not just give up and leave. We are trying to talk, discuss how to change these situations and how to overcome/manage these existing tensions and difficulties. I remember, for example our conversion on LGBTQ communities and their rights, it was a very difficult and tense discussion (Women, Gender & Social Change, Focus Group 2).

While the strength of the HDK lies in its politics of unity in diversity and multiplicity of women’s voices, negotiating between these diverse actors and reconciling their differences (which may clash and overlap at some points) at all times can be a very challenging task. This process can create lots of tensions and challenges, which in turn may affect their commitment and desire to work collectively.

Between the realities and demands of everyday life and the challenge of producing a new social life, along with the needs and demands of their movements and communities, women are often left to make controversial choices that may be in conflict with their gender identities and politics. Reflecting on this, one prominent female activist talks about how women often go along with the general politics of their movement, thus failing to grasp and challenge the existing *men’tality* and male power within the HDK which, according to her, prevents women advancing in their struggles:

I think we could have been in a more advanced position in terms of the women's struggle. The reason for this, I believe, is the existing and internalised male-dominated men’tality and women’s inadequacy in not fully conceptualising and understanding the power of this mentality. For example, at the first congress, we came to an agreement to form a women's council after long hours of discussion between us, we were unable to form this council then and there...But I think we missed a great important opportunity in not forming a women’s assembly there at the

HDK's general congress even though women were very high in numbers. When we wanted to carry on this from where we left, lots of women did not come or take this very seriously. Thus, the process of women to realise the potential power of their own subject positions remains as a challenging task in our movement. One that I think of as an important learning moment. So, wherever we realise something needs doing. It is important that we take a step forward and just dare... Maybe that step is an imaginary step, but one that needs to be taken somehow. As soon as we take that first step, we become stronger. The fact that we, women, did not embrace our women's councils, gave our male fellow fighters, the chance to move more comfortably in those spaces. We really couldn't create a force, a pressure to change this (Individual Interview, T53).

Despite recognising the intersectionality of various dimensions in the making of gender identity and gendered subject positions and forms of domination and injustice, sustaining a balanced focus on these dimensions is a challenging task for the HDK, especially at times when the daily needs of their movement's may require a different set of priorities. Hence, our research evidenced certain situations which saw the prioritisation of certain dimension of identity over others (ethnic identify over class or sexuality or vis versa), and certain forms of domination and injustice over others (for instance those emanating from nationalism over those from neoliberal capitalism). This also reflects a tension and challenge in the intersectional political framework, where women are often pushed to focus on one dimension of struggle, for instance representational politics, whilst leaving other dimensions of struggle as secondary, for instance the struggle for equality, redistribution and recognition. Between the needs of everyday realities and long terms aims of the movement, people choose not to '*go deep into analysing the background conditions that shape violence and domination. We are only making a few superficial sentences about the social infrastructure that creates this violence and when we talk about forms of violence and oppression women face, as talking in this manner seems to serve our interest at that time better*'. (Women, Gender & Social Change, Focus Group 2)

Another area of tension was the prioritization and substitution of representational politics over radical prefigurative politics, especially since the HDP gained more power and visibility following its electoral success in 2015. While some female activists recognised the important role of the HDP in increasing the visibility of women and their demands in public spaces, others talked about how the HDP has affected the balance between different intersectional struggles (equality, redistribution, recognition and representation), tilting the scale towards

representational parliamentary politics over others. This, they argue, has generated multiple adverse effects on the relationship between diverse subjects and their unity (within the party, between the HDK and HDP, and between women at the HDK), as well as upon the radical claims made by the women.

Some argue that the HDP seems to '*canalise the creative and emancipatory and transformative power of women on streets to domain of representational politics*' (Women, Gender & Social Change, Focus Group 2), in which women's role has been reduced to '*finding the solutions to women's demands*' (*ibid*) within existing systems of power, rather than transforming the social structures and power systems that cause their problems in the first place. Affected and limited by hegemonic power structures, subjects may also fall into behaving like conventional subjects and shift their aims towards demands for reform rather than transformation, as many of our participants highlighted. For instance, talking about the tension emerging in the context of the HDP's increased popularity following the June 2015 election and consequently the increased state violence and repression of the HDK, the power dynamic between the HDK-HDP shifted resulting in an increasingly party-like structure and mentalities over horizontal forms of organising. Talking about this tension, one female participant notes:

For me, the HDK is essential. That is why I joined the HDK, and I saw the HDP only as an electoral Party. But when the elections came one after the other, we arrived at a completely different place. We did not know the spirit of time, the action of time, the idea of time, and we could not face what we did not know. When we do not take time to reflect and confront with our past history, it is normal that we have come to experience a number of inaccuracies or shortcomings in our struggle. I believe that women were the ones that are affected by these more than anyone else (Women, Gender & Social Change, Focus Group 2).

Failing to sustain an equal balance between different and diverse priorities and sensitivities (temporal, spatial, and conjunctural) provided a great source of tensions between women within the HDK, and also between those women that are affiliated to a political organisation and those non-affiliated individual feminist women within the HDK.

Of course, tensions and moments of tensions are by no means all negative. They can also offer opportunities for social actors to reflect on their politics and practices. The challenging task is how to address, manage and overcome these tensions when they emerge. Judith Butler (1993: 219) reminds us that the lack of 'the failure of identification' in the collective spaces may

become the '*point of departure for a more democratizing affirmation of internal difference*'. This failure could also push people to reserve their feelings on the assumption that nothing would make a difference, and could unintentionally lead to the creation of an internal disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977). This may impact future practices and performance of various actors (especially in individual and small groups), as well as their commitment and unity, and may result in some subjects leaving the collective or generating resentment in others.

Talking about the centrality of emotions in collective action, Jasper argues that emotions such as compassion and kindness can foster unity, solidarity and commitment between various actors, but emotions can also hinder internal cohesion, democracy and commitment (Goodwin and Jasper, 2006, Jasper, 2011, Goodwin et al, 2001) Thus what it needed is commitment of a practising a radical democratic politics which include creating new dialogical and reflective spaces to have '*uncomfortable conversations*' (Gökarıksel & Smith, 2017: 640) in which tensions and differences are addressed collectively and openly. Having horizontal and diffused forms of political power itself it not sufficient enough for creating equal power relations or guaranteeing tension-free spaces. Thus, what is required is the invention of mechanisms that can sustain internal democracy. Otherwise, these gendered spaces may produce new configurations of unequal power relations and hierarchies in their attempt for inclusiveness and diversity of voices and histories.

Despite all these tensions and intensified state violence, the women of the HDK are at the forefront of the struggle against contemporary forms of power of capital and state, as well as internalised patriarchal forms of power. Women are aware that 'change' is an essential must for their future, and the future of their communities' and that without embracing the 'unknowable messiness' of everyday life, neither women (nor their communities) will survive, nor will they eliminate the violence that women face (Butler, 2012). It is through these practices and institutions that women are challenging the patriarchal culture and internalised norms '*as gap between tactical obedience and pragmatic evasion, obedezco pero no cumple (I obey but do no comply)*' (Rowe and Schelling, 1991: 23). Brick by brick, falling down and getting up gradually but surely, they are not only disturbing hegemonic power though their courage to talk about silences and marginalisation, but they are also creating new subject, new forms and a new ontological world.

### *Conflict and violence against women*

The HDK's new gender politics is not just conducive to creating a new epistemological understanding, but also an ontological one: in pointing the way to a new world beyond the existing system of powers. This scale of political ambition has seen the women at the HDK-HDP come under intense attack and extreme violence, especially since 2013, following the Gezi Protest, and since the election of 2015.

During its initial two period of being in power (2002-2008), the AKP reconstituted women's subject positions and roles with reference to the west and western institutions in line with its application for membership of the European Union. The AKP government adopted a series of reforms and legislation in order to meet the growing demands of women movements and address existing gender inequality. At the same time, it introduced new flexible labour conditions for women in order to further consolidate the neoliberal economy. This affected women dramatically, leaving them in precarious working conditions, and invariably at the bottom of the pay scales as '*secondary cheap labour*' (Cosar and Onbasi, 2008).

However, after 2008, and especially from 2012 onwards, the AKP shifted its reference point from West to East as it began to reconstitute its gender approach along the lines of its emergent socio-spatial imaginaries of its version of new Turkey. It is within these contexts that the AKP came to increase its control over women's bodies and choices. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan repeatedly stated that 'every woman has to have at least three children' without which a woman's life is 'incomplete', and that '*rejecting motherhood means giving up on humanity*' (Dailymail, 6 June 2016).<sup>50</sup> The AKP has come to curtailed and rolled back gains and advances made by the hard work of women and prevent women from utilising their equal rights, repealing legislative changes withdrawing from international conventions (for instance

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<sup>50</sup> President Erdogan urges Turkish women to have at least three children and tells them their lives are 'incomplete' without babies, President Speech at the opening of the Newbuilding of Turkey's Women's and Democracy Association (KADEM), Dailymail, online 6 June 2016 available at <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3627087/President-Erdogan-urges-Turkish-women-three-children-tells-lives-incomplete-without-babies.html>

the Istanbul Convention)<sup>51</sup>, while at the same time describing birth control as ‘treason’, and abortions as ‘murder’<sup>52</sup>.

The increase criminalisation, delegitimization and attack on women at the HDK since 2015 can be better analysed within this context. It demonstrates that the HDK women approach to gender is seen a real challenge and threat to the AKP’s gender imaginaries and practices, particularly as they have come to resonate with increased numbers of women who have long been at the margins of society.

Of course, the socio-political developments in the Middle East, the Syrian War and female led Rojava revolution was formed in the midst of the regional crisis, has come to inspire the women of the HDK and beyond, increasing their hope of creating a new reality to end the historical injustices and domination of women under capitalism, nationalism and patriarchy. This is an important factor which influenced the AKP’s sudden shift to authoritarianism in order to prevent this possibility being fully materialised within Turkey.

The state’s anger towards these newly imagined women roles, and women daring to take to the streets, was most evident during the Gezi Park Protest when Erdogan openly directed his anger towards radical women, by fabricating an incident that did not take place: "They entered Dolmabahçe Mosque with their beer bottles and their shoes on. They have insulted my headscarf-wearing daughters and sisters' (Hurriyet Newspaper, 10.06.2013).<sup>53</sup> This portraying of veiled women as his daughters/sisters comes to define him as a father (the state)

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<sup>51</sup> The Istanbul Convention was signed in 2011 by Turkey to tackle and end violence against Women. In summer 2020 Turkey withdrew from the convention, which caused a great deal of anger amongst women (organisations) which manifested itself in mass mobilisation across Turkey that create tensions and divisions even within the AKP itself.

<sup>52</sup> President Erdogan in 2012 compared abortion to the Uludere/Roboski massacre by saying that ‘every abortion is like an Uludere’. Uludere massacre (Uludere Is Turkish name for Roboski) refers to the killing of 33 civilian mostly children by the Turkish military in the name of preventing the smuggling commodity between borders deemed as illegal in December 2011 near the Iraqi border. BBC News online By Arash Ahmadi, BBC Monitoring, 1 June 2012.

<sup>53</sup>Hurriyet Newspaper, 10.06.2013 Erdoğan 'camiye içkiyle girdiler' iddiasını tekrarladı, available online <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/erdogan-camiye-ickiyle-girdiler-iddiasini-tekrarladı-23468860>, For english version of this news see Dailynews, 10.06.2013 ‘PM Erdoğan repeats previously denied reports of protesters entering mosque with shoes on’ at <https://www.hurriyettailynews.com/pm-erdogan-repeats-previously-denied-reports-of-protesters-entering-mosque-with-shoes-on--48520>

who has the right to defend and control those vulnerable women. Creating this division between ‘we- my veiled, religious girls’ and ‘they, the secular, western, terrorist’ is a discursive mechanism which is increasingly been used to reconstitute new hegemonic notion of womanhood under the green colour of Islam and increased authoritarianism.

Seeing their radical gender politics as a significant threat, the AKP intensified its attack and violence on all women working at the HDK/HDP (especially in the Kurdish region), under the false pretext of terrorism. In this context, the autonomous women spaces and women only institutions that were created by the women of the HDK under extremely difficult situations have become not only spaces of struggle but also ‘safe’ spaces of ‘support’ and ‘solidarity’ for many of the women, especially those who have suffered violence and other extreme forms of repression.

As a result of this violence many female activists (including mayors, member of parliament, grassroots members, representatives of civil society organisations and political parties) were arrested, imprisoned or sent to force exile. Most of the autonomous women’s institutions were closed down, and those elected local representatives (mayors, councillors) were replaced by a special appointee, described by the movement as ‘colonial administrators’ under emergency decrees passed after the failed military coup of 2016. One female activist in Diyarbakir notes:

When special appointees arrived at the municipalities, the first thing they did was to close down all the women's institutions. Then they move on to those cultural spaces created by women for women. This has shown us the state's realisation of the significance of these spaces and institutions for us and for our struggle. They came with a list of threats that was drawn up by a fascist and authoritarian state. It was clear from their first actions that we (women) and our collective spaces (women institutions and spaces) were the first threats at the top of their list. Of course, defining our culture and cultural spaces as the second treat tells also a lot and speaks a volume (...) (Socializing the struggle from DTK to HDK, Workshop 4).

As stated by another female activist at our workshop in Amed (Diyarbakir in Turkish), *‘during a period when fascism is on the rise, it is women who have the most difficulty in working. The patriarchal system makes itself felt more on women. We see this more clearly in recent years in our experience in the Kurdish Region’*. Her quote highlights the significant effects of closing down women’s institutions and autonomous spaces (shelters, culture centres etc), especially

for the most vulnerable women. Female activists in Amed reported that increased numbers of women came forward and talked about how they are being threatened by their husbands, fathers, or other male family members in the absence of these women institutions and spaces, the male subjects come to think '*I can hit you, do whatever I want to you, go and find a women's institution that can help you*' (Socialising the Struggle: From DTK to HDK, Workshop 4).

The violence and attacks also negatively impacted the HDK's radical practices and procedures for creating equal subjects and spaces (quota system, co-presidency). Most activists noted that these radical practices were also threatened by men within the HDK (and wider movement), who on occasion used the violence and tensions as justifications for abandoning /breaking these radical politics and practices with statements like '*it is not just right time to talk about*' and '*look our people are not ready for such policies, let's talk once this is over*' or stating these practices as the reason for '*violence*' or even for the '*failure*' of their struggle (Socialising the Struggle: From DTK to HDK, Workshop 4). As a result of this, gender issues have been pushed down the movement's agenda, and the power of these marginalised communities have been limited within the HDK (especially individual women actors and LGBTQ communities), which then resulted either in becoming passive or withdrawing completely from the movement.

The violence and oppression also affect relationships between women. The criminalisation and delegitimatisation of the diverse women's struggles and politics comes to 'target' and 'break' wider and broader women's solidarity processes in which the HDK played a significant part. In this way, violence and the fear of violence is being used as a threat to punish and discipline those gender bodies that openly and willingly support newly defined 'dangerous' bodies and communities. Furthermore, violent attacks and imprisonment of gendered bodies affects the collective memories and experiences embodied in those subjects as tacit knowledge, preventing it from being passed on to future generations.

Despite the increased violence against radical gendered bodies and politics, women (both at the HDK/HDP and beyond) remain at the front of the struggle against the multiple sources of power that manifest themselves as the authoritarian sovereign power in Turkey, and to refuse to comply with the hegemonic rules set by a heteronormative and masculine society <sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Increased numbers of women being targeted by various hate crimes and attacks in recent years shows this vulnerability. The state is seen overtly supporting these hate crimes against cis women, providing legal and

## Conclusions

By analysing what knowledges are being produced in the context of the HDK social movement struggles, we begin to see the ways in which this knowledge is produced and how it intervenes, ‘troubles’, and disturbs uneven hegemonic power systems, including those internalised/normalised power dynamics within the movement itself. Mapping out what knowledges produced by the HDK also provides us with an alternative for different social imaginaries, knowledge and dialogue. The stories and experiences that have been narrated in the HDK’s diverse spaces, and the knowledge produced in these extremely rich ‘pedagogical spaces’, come to re-narrate new ways of being, acting and feeling that embody a different sociability and relationality which provide as glimpse of the possibility of a better future. As we have illustrated throughout this work, the radical heterogenous and horizontal spaces of the HDK are rich sites of tensions and contradictions that manifest themselves alongside the identity, politics, ideas and imaginaries of the protagonists and their embodied engagement in these spaces. However, they are also sites full of opportunities and hope, offering new inclusive practices that shape the subjects involved as well as their dreams for a new Turkey<sup>55</sup>.

Most importantly, the stories and narratives of each of the activists involved, often working in extremely trying conditions and paying high prices (emotional, social, political and economic), illuminates the abject beauty of the culture, wisdom, knowledge and courage of peoples whose voices have long been marginalised, silenced ‘unwanted’ and ‘undesired’. These ‘insurrectionary’ knowledges are engaged in working out, from the bottom up, and through a politics of action, the huge challenges of building a mass, diverse and representative movement; straddling parliamentary and extra-parliamentary politics of resistance; coping with massive state repression in periods of overt and covert conflict, imagining a brighter and fairer future and laying the foundations for such a future in the present; and ensuring that a radical gender politics permeates everything the movement does. In doing so they are finding workable solutions and new strategic directions, emergent out of a complex dialogical process

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social infrastructures that ensure that perpetrators receive lesser punishments on the grounds of ‘undue provocation’ (*haksız tahrik*). In the case of murdered cis women, some trials from 2008 and 2009 provide evidence of how even the most trivial issues could constitute undue provocation and thereby win judicial approval as adequate reasons for men to kill their wives: ‘She flirtatiously asked a man for the time,’ ‘She wore jeans and tights,’ ‘She cooked only pasta for a month,’ and ‘She didn’t want to have sex with me and pushed me out of the bed’ (Isci Cephesi, 2011).

<sup>55</sup> Akin to Lefebvre’s everyone ‘right to the city’ (Lefebvre, 1991).

of acting and thinking, which seeks to hold together the radical dreams of a more equal future and give it impetus through the day-to-day struggles of the present.

## 5. Impacts of knowledge production and learning on HDK

Within the existing literature on social change, it is often assumed that political, social, cultural and economic changes are directed from above (top-down) by the actions of powerful elites and dominant structures, and that these changes are inevitable and pre-given. This reductionist analysis either ignores the important role, agency and subjectivity of social actors in social change, or marginalises and downplays their significance. Yet we know from history that social movements play a crucial role, from below, in influencing and shaping these processes, whilst at the same time being shaped by those very same processes. Our aim in this chapter is to evidence the way that social movements play a major role in social change, and to demonstrate that social movements' subjectivity – personal and collective - in social transformation is an extremely important dimension.

Human beings have throughout history sought to understand, investigate, and question the situations they are faced with, in order to change and transform them for the better, for themselves and their communities. These struggles affect not only people engaged directly in struggles, but also the broader society where this is taking place. Of course, the individual and societal effects of these struggles and resistance differ significantly from one place to another. These social struggles take place in particular social, political, economic and cultural contexts which both enable and restrict the forms and effects of struggles. Therefore, it is widely accepted that the struggle of social movements to transform their society depends on a range of factors (Zinn, 1970). As Karl Marx wrote in *the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.

In other words, the areas and forms of struggle of social movements, their visions, discourses and practices emerge under the influence of knowledge gained from past and present experiences, and the social structures which they interact with (family, state, religion, education, etc.). This understanding ultimately challenges viewpoints that see social change as 'inevitable' and 'given' under all circumstances. While social movements proceed with their own political agendas, they cannot fully know the outcomes of their actions a-priori. The future imaginary that they are dreaming about, longing for and seeking to build, are tested

through struggle and everyday practices and experiences, a process that produces both intended and unintended consequences.

While the question of the effects of social movements' is closely related to how they can manage these divergent processes and navigate emerging tensions and challenges, they are also related to the environment in which struggles take place, the balance of power and the attitude of hegemonic forces (such as the state) towards these social movement. In some cases, state-led violence can seriously diminish the effects of movements, destroy or undo the positive changes/gains they have achieved, and even completely dismantle their collective power. In this sense, violence and oppression are important variables which need to be taken seriously when analysing the effects of social movements on social life.

As we noted in previous chapters, the learning and knowledge-making processes within the HDK demonstrate us that social movements are potent 'pedagogical spaces' (Tarlau, 2014). Furthermore, the new knowledge and learning acquired in these pedagogical spaces not only provides social movements with an 'oppositional language' (Giroux, 2001) and a social, cultural, economic, mobilization framework for future struggles, but also has the potential to play a significant role in changing society. Certain social movement practices can be understood as manifestations of this potential for societal change, including the establishment of new political institutions; creating new language and awareness; constituting new subjectivities and new forms of relationality amongst society (human and non-human); and creating new repertoires of action and common memory.

In this chapter, we will analyse how and in which ways the learning and knowledge produced by the struggle of the HDK has changed society, by focusing on its effects at the levels of individuals, institutions and society. Our classification of the movement's effects in this way is done for analytical clarity, allowing us to look at changes on the micro-meso-macro levels. However, we recognise that these three areas are intertwined, interrelated and occur simultaneously. Furthermore, while these interrelated, multifaceted effects have their own distinct/unique spatial, temporal and geographical dimensions, they are connected with past historical, socio-political and economic processes. Therefore, we cannot approach the discussion of the temporal, geographical and spatial dimensions of the HDK's effects separately from the political and economic context the movement finds itself in. We cannot reduce the effects of the HDK to the knowledge and learning experiences it generates, as

important as these are. We instead must consider the HDK's multifaceted effects as an output of the past and present struggles of various individuals and communities within or outside of the HDK, but also within a larger network of social movements, of which the HDK is an important component.

Another important point to mention regarding the effects of the HDK's knowledge production and learning is that we do not seek to analyse these multifaceted/multidimensional effects within a narrow understanding of what constitutes success and failure. To analyse the effects of social movements within these narrow dichotomies would be to approach the struggle for social change as a zero-sum game in which the winners take all whilst the losers are blamed for their individual lack of capacity. Instead, we understand struggle as a process, and ask activists to reflect critically (both individually/collectively) on 'the past' and 'the present' in order to analyse how the HDK process has come to affect them, their institutions and communities. In particular, we asked how the knowledge and learning produced within the HDK has affected participants (relationships, perspectives towards each other, togetherness); what kind of new sociability and relationality it has produced; what new discourses and organisational forms it has created; and how has this affected our present life compared to the past. Furthermore, we are convinced that the emotional dimension of these effects is not a secondary factor, or by-product, but on the contrary is a major factor mobilizing activists towards participating in the construction of the 'new life' the HDK seeks to generate (Goodwin and Jasper, 2004).

In this era of information technology era, society has speeded up and *presentism* becomes the horizon of expectation (Hartog, 2003). For that reason, we often expect change to be 'rapid' and 'spectacular', which might lead us to draw negative conclusions due to the fact that the effect of social movements' struggles for change might takes longer than expected to become apparent. Sometimes, the expectations for large-scale change prevent us from noticing important changes that are occurring at the micro-scale every single day.

Another important point is that activists, when analysing the effects of social movements, somehow often seem to detach themselves from that history and/or remove themselves from the whole experience. This point of view, which ignores the crucial role of agency of activists, on the one hand, may stem from the prevailing understanding of social change as a top-down

process; and may on the other hand be down to activists' reluctance to take responsibility for undesirable consequences/effects/results.

Finally, the effects of social movements can lead to increased state violence and repression, especially when movements come to pose a serious challenge to the hegemonic status quo. For example, the HDK's crucial role in creating the conditions for the Gezi Park resistance and inspiring the peace declaration signed by the Academics for Peace (BAK), the wider societal acceptance of its alternative 'new life' (demonstrated with the 2015 electoral success), all posed a significant challenge to the AKP. This brought with it increased violence and repression against the HDK, which following the failed coup attempt in July 2016 turned into a total war against all oppositional forces by the AKP led government.

As a result, in our analysis of the HDK's effects we need to address the question of how this increased state violence and oppression has come to disturb the effects generated by the HDK's struggle, and undermine the collective memory and togetherness established by the HDK. The HDK's most significant effect was the capacity to build unity, solidarity and opposition amongst the plural identities (individuals and communities) which conform it. The state's violence and oppression has been directed to undermine these achievements. We believe that the main reason why there is such a disproportionate use of violence and power is in fact directly linked to all those accumulated effects created by the broader social movement of which HDK is an important component.

### **Changing common sense – creating good sense**

Before we move on to analyse how the learning and knowledge produced by the HDK has affected its members, their communities and broader society, we would like to briefly discuss some of its broader general effects. HDK is engaged in the process of building a counter-hegemonic movement based on a new egalitarian ethos of a 'new life' that fundamentally rejects all hierarchical forms of power relations. This politics challenges the notion of *political Turkishness*, created around the monist ethos of Sunnite Turks and commonly referred to as '*one nation, one flag, one religion*'. Against the Monist 'Denialist *Habitus*' (Suciyan, 2015) formed by political Turkishness, the HDK seeks to build a counter hegemonic bloc from below through processes of constituting new subjectivities, and re-defining societal relations and structures. This means going beyond the level of criticism of the existing situation, and actively taking a lead in the struggle for creating a new 'good sense' amongst the society. The HDK

seeks to create this new ‘good sense’ not through coercion and oppression at the moral and cultural level, as Gramsci says (Gramsci, 1971), but rather through constructing common consent among divergent social actors with an aim of creating a new counter hegemonic alternative. As a congress form of organisation, the HDK not only recognises and revindicates diversity as a resource, but also seeks to create a new ethos that can unite and bring divergent identities together.

The HDK rejects Western-Northern-centric epistemological dominance, as well as its universalist categories (HDK Brochure). HDK takes seriously the historical accumulation of heritage of the local and different forms of knowledge production of Turkey’s diverse populations, each of which are understood to their own unique richness and value. HDK combines this unique richness, in the spirit of other epistemologies of the South resisting capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy in different parts of the world, and seeks to produce knowledge for ‘good sense’ based on these rich and embedded experiences.

HDK has created a new horizontal and participatory form of political organisation that challenged the dominant centralized and hierachal structure of the party form in Turkey. This new form not only brought together diverse social actors that were previously unable unite, but also provided it with a system that democratizes the internal structure of the organisation and set up an egalitarian decision-making mechanism, as wells as a process based on an equilibrium between identity and class. By doing so, the HDK has managed to bring all those social groups that were hitherto excluded, ignored and marginalised to public spaces and made their demands, rights and issues visible. The recognition and affirmation of the ‘differences’ of these excluded and oppressed groups, and their increased visibility via the HDK, has had a significant effect in exposing nationalist, religious, and structural violence that these groups have been subjected to throughout the history of the Republic of Turkey.

The HDK’s programme is based on a radical critical pedagogy of ‘the epistemologies of the South’, and seeks to create a democratic and egalitarian modernity to replace capitalist modernity; a democratic confederal life based on the people’s right of self-determination against colonialism (and its dominant form of the sovereign nation-state); and gender equality based on a new equal life against the male-dominated patriarchal system by bringing together the Jineology perspective (science of women) of the Kurdish women’s liberation movement women (see Ocalan, 2020: 165) and other feminist movements. On this basis, gender

constitutes one of the top priority agendas of the HDK. Thus, the movement's principle aim is to build an intersectional feminism that focusses on multiple dynamics (class, identity, religion and sexuality), as discussed at length in the previous chapter. That this political approach has become a fundamental benchmarking/principle both for the HDK and amongst the Kurdish freedom movement is a significant achievements of the women's freedom struggle against the patriarchal order.

The HDK not only seek to build an alternative new life against/beyond the capitalist, colonial and patriarchal system materialized in the model of the nation-state but also pushes those left movements within its own political structure towards critical self-reflection and transformation. These new political strategies such as new organisational forms, the egalitarian approach in decision and representation mechanisms, the bringing together of all these diverse identities and classes and uniting/mobilising them on the basis of shared common values/goals has turned the HDK into a present time laboratory and a prefigurative experiential space where a new future life begins to blossom.

HDK remains aloof from the 'based on national' narrative built on political Turkishness (Michel, 2015) and seeks to build a new common radical consciousness which struggles against inequality and injustice faced by the oppressed communities cast out of this unity narrative (Mansbridge, 2001: 5). As Morris and Braine stated (2001:25), '*one of the most important cultural forces working against a hegemonic culture is the oppositional consciousness of oppressed groups*'.

In the following section of this chapter, we will analyse the effect of the knowledge and learning experiences produced by the HDK. We will do this by focusing on how the new knowledge and learning experiences produced by the present struggles of the movement affects the activists, their communities and society as they put to the test their previous accumulated learning experiences and knowledges. Considering these effects at individual, organisational and societal level, we hope, will provide a more detailed and extensive mapping of the broader effects of the HDK.

## **Impacts at individual level**

Let us start with the following reminder. The level and nature of the effect on the HDK's individual activists is fundamentally linked to variables such as individual/component, woman/man or LGBTIQ, central/local etc. That is why we need to take into consideration both the individual characteristics of HDK activists— including their pre-HDK experiences- and the time, place, duration and context of their involvement with HDK. Each of these variables influences both the activists' perception of HDK, and their narrative about how their experience within HDK impacted them.

As elaborated in the previous chapter, knowledge production and learning processes within the HDK have been most effective in semi-structured or unstructured areas, where learning takes place implicitly and spontaneously (in other words through struggle). These spaces are also those in which activists are most impacted at the individual level, and where their subjectivity undergoes major transformations. According to our research findings, concrete impacts at the individual level within the HDK are mainly observed amongst women and gender-oriented activities, and during reading workshops or field activities, or in places such as the Peoples and Beliefs Commission where ethnic, religious and cultural identities have come into interaction.

The diversity of ideologies, identities and experiences that is developed by all those diverse individual/component members of the HDK allows movement activists to learn from each other. For instance, moments of confrontation related to misinformation, prejudice, and implicit/internalized discrimination against any minority groups (ethnic, religious and different sexual orientations) emerges especially during assembly and commissions activities/meetings where activists meet each other on a regular basis. These moments of encounters create a learning process whereby activists develop a self-reflective disposition allowing them to rethink and unlearn their own (mis)representation of others. Encountering the individuals from LGBTQ community in everyday struggles and hearing their stories directly, not only allows movement activists to learn about these individuals but also allows them to rethink their interests, attitudes, prejudices and perceptions and can understand that, for example, '*there is such a thing as sexual orientation*' (Togetherness & Unity in Diversity, Workshop 2).

As for other impacts at individual level, the HDK's prefigurative praxis allows activists to get to know each other, recognise and feel themselves as political subjects, and increase their

capacity to develop their solidarity spirit, learn and share their experience. Activists also learn to be disciplined on addressing gender, hate speech and discrimination as they get to break down old prejudices between the individual and the components. Those who ‘normally’ would not or could not interact each other will come together and witness the positive repercussions of their interaction. This allows the activists to experience ‘coexistence with differences’ and increase their possibilities of constituting their identities on the basis of pluralism and allowing them to represent themselves freely.

We will now examine range of the impacts of the learning and knowledge production within the HDK at individual level through examining certain thematic areas.

#### *Transformation of subjectivity*

Activists who are part of HDK, undergo important experiences during this process which impacts and transforms them and their individual subjectivity. Social movements have their own repertoire of actions, discourse, political perspectives and their own approach for relations between people and organisations which creates a substantial interaction zone transforming activists’ subjectivity.

A female activist active within Peoples and Beliefs Commission describes the effect of the experience as follows:

HDK made me notice my own worth. I say ‘my own worth’ because the society where I come from, although it seems to be an egalitarian society for women, in practice it is the local prototype of the system. For many years I have been part of the executive committees of Alevi organisations. The committee had seven members and as a woman I was myself part of these committees, I struggled for many years being the only woman among six men. It was the same when we had the confederation. There were executive committees of 21 and again I found myself struggling being the only woman among 20 others. It legitimized and revealed even more Alevi woman identity. I think this had been a role model. (...) HDK made me notice my own worth. A stronger woman came out of this process. And most importantly I gained this, I mean, I had already for my family I mean for my society, all my interest, my love, my worries, I say this as a comment, HDK gave me all these identities. I feel myself as an Armenian, a Syriac or a Circassian or a Pomak, in other words HDK gave me a lot. You have one person in front of you talking to you but in fact this person that you are talking to here, embodies in herself all the existing and extinct identities of this society on this land. HDK created out of me a multi-identity, multilingual, multi-cultural woman (Individual Interview, T22).

The HDK also created new hope for collective struggle and played a major role of regenerating belief following previous negative experiences. Another female activist who was part of the establishment of the political party ÖDP describes the effect HDK had on her:

HDK reinforced my belief. Because after ÖDP, I thought that we would never be able to move together. As a matter of fact, HDK corresponded exactly to what I was imagining in my youth. This was the place to stand together, act together, understand and touch together. My beliefs were refreshed so to say (Togetherness & Unity in Diversity, Workshop 2).

A female activist who had been long part of organised struggle emphasized the importance of the democratic freedom of expression that the congress model provides:

As I have been a member of an organisation since I was 16, HDK led to things I would never have expected. As I was part of organised struggle before even the establishment of HDK, let me tell you how things evolved for me; first of all, I realised that even if I didn't agree with the ideas of other people and vice versa even if they didn't agree with me, wherever I'd go in this country I wouldn't be alone; I'd be able to find someone there or someone would be finding me. I felt that. That's what I felt about unity and solidarity...Despite all life experiences, I mean all the things that happened to me I was able to dream again. This is something I wasn't able to get from the small organisation and environment I was part of. Here, I was able to dream (Togetherness & Unity in Diversity, Workshop 2).

HDK's broad ideological approach brings together a young generation of activists with 'old hand' revolutionaries in the same settings, in which important learning emerges. Younger activists seem to learn a lot from the older generation about their individual experiences. For instance, a young feminist activist recounts the determination of left organisations and how she benefited from these experiences:

I have known about the left organisations there and I respect their struggle. I am aware they are only a bunch of organisations and yes, they are hurt. They have been and I say it in quotation marks 'unsuccessful'. Forcing things, owning it, dedicating your life to it and being knowledgeable about it, contributing just like this, knowing both politics and history, knowing strategy and some tactics. These were the elements that really excited me. Even if I am politicized through the Kurdish movement, I would be crossing lines if I'd adopt the Kurdish National Movement, but maybe I should call it 'standing with them as an act of solidarity'. I was very excited to see it for myself, witness their contribution to the texts and this really transformed me. Those contacts transformed me a lot. Because I had the opportunity to work with the Liberation Movement, with many old revolutionaries in these

commissions. This was really a priceless period of time for me. As a matter of fact, it still continues (Individual Interview, T7).

Many interviewers touched on how the establishment of the HDK in 2011 influenced them deeply. One activist who works in academia, one of the first co-spokespersons of the HDK, describes that enthusiasm as follows:

The enthusiasm and excitement I enjoyed at the establishment congress is at the top of the exciting moments of my life. (...) In the end I was giving lectures on mother tongue language and defending education in the mother tongue, I was working for socialist magazines, feminist magazines, I mean I knew those movements, but I should say that it was really fulfilling to be able to come together with people who were part of these movements. (...) I already knew the region and what was going on there; but being together, cooperating and even being harassed together [Sinop] was unforgettable. (...) This richness is really priceless. And it has impacted people I knew, my students, half of my doctorate students attended the Education Council. And nobody made a special effort to make them come there, they just came by themselves. That dynamism was just created (Togetherness & Unity in Diversity, Workshop 2).

Another HDK activist describes how the diversity within the HDK and the richness of the learning which emerged from this diversity impacted her:

HDK to me is a process where we all learn from one and other. Some people learned about LGBTQ, others communities etc. This is valid for me too. I already knew about the genocides they suffered but it was at the HDK's platform that I was able to touch and reach them. This was of great importance to me. I might say that this congress contributed greatly and allowed me to shift my attention even more to the genocides. I describe myself as a socialist. Kurdish people have their struggle for freedom. I believe that Kurdish people's struggle for freedom should be supported within the scope of nations' right to self-determination. During all this HDK process I also learned about the nuances and jargon of the Kurdish Liberation Movement. I might say that during this process I became a fellow sufferer of the Kurdish Liberation Movement. I started to think like them in particular points. And finally, I made great friends and comrades. It is HDK that created this process, and it is of great importance for me (Togetherness & Unity in Diversity, Workshop 2).

Another senior activist, member of the HDK's Culture and Art Commission, explains how within the HDK she learned about the problems that exist, and the multiple struggles to end those problems:

HDK taught me a lot. HDK is a platform for multifaceted thinking and understanding of issues of social transformation. I can say this loud and

clear. You see different areas of society. Normally you see these things but when you are part of the HDK, you see for yourself the important role culture and art production can play within the social organisation of the HDK. Or the role of ecology... we may have previous experiences about it, be aware of it, but the HDK creates a perspective horizon allowing us to witness it de facto, to develop multifaceted thinking about the existing knowledge, to anticipate a multidimensional social organisation or to develop a local approach and notice its power and energy (Individual Interview, T3).

#### *The impacts activists have on family and environment*

Many HDK activists transmit their knowledge and learning experiences to their families and friends. This process can be very positive, but it can also create tensions and conflicting consequences too. We have many testimonials of HDK activists of how they shared the impacts of movement's multicultural, gender-sensitive position against homophobia, hate speech and discrimination, and how this effect was then expanded to family members and other people in their own environment. For example, the conflicts a young female activist had with her own parents after she got involved in the HDK, and the transformation of her mother during that process, demonstrates the important dimensions of this dynamic:

At the beginning we had serious disputes with my mom, we had big fights. We had big fights with my dad too. My father might well be from Mardin, but he is Arab and kept saying 'this is not my cause'. I mean, he kept saying 'if I am murdered or dead and if you cherish my cause so I would be proud of you even six feet under. But this one is not our cause. Arabs don't have such a thing'. He didn't understand and my mom was the child of a policeman and grew up surrounded with police, I myself lived until I was nine in a compound for police. She had continuously been exposed to power perceptions, and she hated me for it. 'What are you doing at those meetings?' she would ask me. I would say things like 'Mom, we open up the map and we say the east part of Ankara belongs to us' (she laughs) 'there is no such thing' I said to her and continued 'what on earth do you think we do at those meetings', 'We have a lot of concerns. We have discussions about women, there are rapes, harassment, violence, I mean a lot of issues' I would tell her. Then I said, 'Imagine a council where people suffering from social issues get together'. We were having huge fights; I'd say to her: 'You cannot stand idle before those horrifying issues'. She would then ask me if we had guns or stuff. 'How could you ask such questions, how can such ideas come to your mind, is it that simple, is it what you think' would be my response to her. I said to her 'You would attend a meeting and sit there with a gun on the table, wouldn't that be nice, but only MHP (Nationalist Movement Party) members would do such a thing and also policemen but we, we don't do it. They would burst the guns on our heads. Do you even listen to yourself' that's how I would

shout at her. Then I had a revelation, I said to myself she is one of the many women of this society. She isn't your mom, don't approach her with those sentiments, that was my revelation. But my mom didn't stop pressuring me. Whenever I tried to have a quiet conversation with her, she would show me videos of JITEM, JÖH, PÖH from YouTube, what they were doing to leftists. She was perpetrating psychological violence. She kept saying 'they will do the same to you too'. I would beg her, 'Mom please let go of me'. (...) I had a breaking point with my mom when Taybet Ana was murdered.<sup>56</sup> I went to Kurdistan right after the end of curfews. I visited one by one all the houses. What I have lived with Taybet Ana was in fact my first direct encounter with oppression. It was the first time up until now that I encountered all the atrocities during those curfew moments, the slogans on the city walls, but also the police, how they behaved, they did the body search and harass you while doing it, how they provoke you, it was a first for me. But those people showed an incredible resistance to it. I have seen that too. Taybet Ana occupies a special place in my heart. Because I was raised by my maternal grandmother. When she passed away, just before going to bed, we noticed we had forgotten an earring on one of her ears. We wanted to take it out, but I said that she would hurt, I asked them to leave it like that. As you see I was in a state of shock. Leaving Taybet Ana agonizing like that for nine hours, letting her stay there for seven days was the worst of all the psychological violence the government in power could do. It doesn't matter whether you are from the south-north-east or west, seeing Taybet Ana agonizing there for nine hours, seeing her husband trying to save her, her brother had a heart attack and died in the garden, her son tried to prevent animals devour her body. I saw Taybet Ana's body just before her burial, when I was talking to her daughter in law... When I got back to Istanbul two-three weeks later, I couldn't eat, drink or talk at all. And my mom, she talked non-stop, a continuous humming. 'I am leaving home mom' I said to her. 'Thank you very much for all your efforts all those years but we have to go on our separate ways. I don't want to be under the same roof with a family who prefers to stay away emotionally or look aside this situation.' I said it that clear. I said to my mom, 'when her mom died, we couldn't even dare to take the earring for three hours thinking that we would hurt her. Taybet Ana is a mom too, she is your mom. That clear, Taybet Ana is your mom too.' I said it. The government in power had perpetrated a horrible psychological violence in Silopi. Not in the form of a direct conflict but psychological violence. Miray Bebek, Cemile, Sultan, Taybet Ana... In Silopi there was a violent psychological war. This was one of the special war tactics. That day was our breaking point. When I told my mom about Taybet Ana, what happened there we hugged each other and cried. And I said to her 'no matter what happens in my life, there is no such burden of humanity I can carry on; no matter what goes on my life, I will never be collecting the pieces of my daughter on my skirt'

like Ceylan Onkol's mom did.' This was our reality. I wouldn't even get near the suffering and oppression they endured. Let aside the new life vision we have, it is the least you can do, you need to be able to see this even if you have the minimum level of humanity. If you are insensible to this then you are nothing, but a concrete jungle and you should question your level of humanity. If you see the death of baby Miray as the death of a child of a terrorist and if you see in her a terrorist, I mean at the minimum level, if you are insensible to it then you need to question your humanity. That day we had a huge breaking point; I mean my mom used to say in the old days, 'Ataturk did a good job in Tunceli, he did a good thing hitting them, we killed the Armenians and such like', this is how my mom used to talk. But now she asks me questions about the Dersim massacre; 'Where can I read about Dersim massacre, about rebellions or why was there an explosion here, what happened in Uludere?' She still doesn't say Roboski and calls it Uludere. This was our breaking point, but it was step by step.

I asked my mom what scared her, and she said she was afraid of a separation in the country. So, I asked her, 'what scares you in case of a separation', she said things like 'will I have to go to Mardin with a passport'. I said 'Mom, because you have this attitude of a countess, thousands of people died.' I mean we had little things and we started to talk about. I explained why we wanted a democratic society, why we wanted to live together, and that I wasn't a separatist, that I defended the idea of coexistence, of a new life and it started to mean something to her. And now she is the one telling me that I should be organising a workshop, that we don't have a clue about what organisation is. The mission is done. If my mom was not married and didn't have children, she could have been a dedicated militant, but by mistake she was born into a police family (Individual Interview, T17).

HDK is a space where vulnerable minority groups in Turkey can have their voices heard and make themselves known in broader society. A young Armenian activist from Nor Zartonk group, a component of the HDK, talks about the tension and the breaking point they had with their family and the Armenian community due to their work within HDK:

It hasn't been easy in my family either. I mean all my relatives put me in a different place within the society. Because I am not the type who plays to the crowd nor uses sweet talk. I talk, I say what I know and think, and it has always been like that. In fact, we all are like this. But as for my case, I am one of the rare ones talking too much, so many people around me avoid me. That was hard at the beginning. Can you imagine, people you grew up with are afraid of you. It was hard to see them unfriend you on Facebook just because they didn't want to see what you shared. They cut the relation they have with you well let's say this is the price you pay. Because the society is not used to this at all. At a certain point, you know my father is old, for example at a demonstration in Kadikoy, we were

attacked by the police right in front of my father. My mom is in her seventies, my father is 80 years old. This was hard to digest. But even so, no matter what it costs, this is the most honourable thing I have ever done in my life. I have never ever doubted it (Individual Interview, T46).

As can be seen with these testimonies, the HDK develops the capacity of activists to transform their environment; empowers activists to produce discourse and argument; and can generate tensions with individuals who are loyal to the given nation-unity narrative. These tensions have an important influence upon people's subjectivities.

#### *Encounter and interaction*

The HDK is a dynamic learning platform where activists are transformed via encounters and interaction. It is especially a platform where different ethnic, religious and sexual identities come together and dismantle existing prejudices and stereotypes. Many interviewers told us how the word 'people' came up in the HDK's spaces, and what it meant to them. For example, a Yezidi activist, also member of Peoples and Beliefs Commission relates the effect of their activism done within the council:

I have been part of the Peoples and Beliefs Commission thanks to HDK. They pushed me towards it, they oriented me. With Heidegger's terms, I was 'thrown'. I was really impressed there. I met people I have never known about before. For instance, I had no idea on who were the Pomaks. Or Terekeme people? They are Azerbaijani and I had no clue, well because I was busy with my own suffering. I noticed I excluded Circassians when I was talking about ancestral peoples. And then my reaction was 'oh my god'. Being ancestral was for me something bigger, I questioned the fact that being ancient had nothing to do with the land or being settled but with the place where you lived continuously. I mean I noticed I had problematic issues. The commission allowed me to change this. Actually, all the small incidents you had on your path lead you to that platform. If I may say so, the commission tells you to get your act together. We have been through these things. Not only me but all of us. There are some examples, let me share one or two with you. One day someone said to me with the best of intentions something like 'I know, when we say god you feel offended, because you guys you don't have god'; what made you think that? I asked back. 'That's how I read it' he said. So, I said, 'don't just read like that, listen to me or let's talk'. He thinks that Yezidis are godless. I mean no problem for me, because anyway existence of god is an ontological matter and that's none of my business. But when it is said for the Yezidis, that's the reason of the massacre, of the enactment, I mean when he says that even if it was with the best of intentions, he gives his blessing to all the massacres. When I told this to him, he was shocked. He said later on that he hadn't been able to sleep for days. He kept saying 'what was I doing'. This is what HDK did, putting us inside something they

were creating, a kind of a creative workshop, and by pushing us they taught us to make mistakes and learn from our mistakes. That's one. Second example, I had a Muslim friend. I mean someone from that wing. She was trying to be an academic, she was young, talented. She was doing a PhD in a European country; she is a friend of mine. Her head, well she is veiled but I mean she is modern. When we were all embracing each other, I kissed her too. She was shocked and then she said how come you kiss me, and then I said I have a heart too. I mean she wanted to say she had a heart and feelings. She said, I can fall in love, I can have friends, and I can kiss. The person who said that was Alevi. Then she noticed she made a mistake. Because she had this perception, she wouldn't put out a hand or do that thing. But she forgot that a veiled person could have a heart. HDK reminded her that, and I say it really from the bottom of my heart, it's not propaganda. These are simple things but had an impact on me. (...) HDK kind of resuscitated us. 'Pull yourself together', that's what they told us actually (Individual Interview, T34).

A young woman activist who was part of the work of HDK's Peoples and Beliefs Commission, and is also part of the Democratic Islam Congress, tells us about her experiences during the activities organised by the commission for International Mother Language Day:

International Mother Language Day was a beautiful day for me. Because I was born in Batman, I have never travelled outside of the country. I have only been to Istanbul. And to be honest I haven't met any Syriacs in Istanbul either. Nor have I listened to a song from an Armenian friend. I didn't even have any curiosity for such things. I asked myself why I didn't have that curiosity. Because you don't even think about it. As I said before, the state has one religion, and you think that that's just the way it is. You do not see the diversity. Because we don't see it but also because you don't see it in life either. There are many things preventing you to see that diversity. That day was a special day for me. I was particularly touched by the lament of an Alevi mother. It was about the massacre of Maraş. Besides Alevis have a life full of massacres unfortunately. Probably the lament was about a relative she lost. I was really touched. Actually, I didn't understand what she was saying but it was very powerful. The same goes for others, like the performance of Syriacs. A Kurdish person read a poem, same impressions. We are no stranger to this but somehow it is different when all the cultures get together. You just sit there, and your friends do those things in front of you. It was really very powerful for me (Individual Interview, T13).

HDK is also a major interaction and learning platform where for the first time Turkey's revolutionary left and the Kurdish liberation movement has formed a long-term strategic struggle partnership. In that respect, the representatives of the left component underlined that they got the opportunity to know the Kurdish liberation movement better. And likewise,

people from KÖH (Kurdish liberation movement) reported that they had the opportunity to know and understand Turkey's revolutionary movements better, thanks to the ideological colourfulness present in the HDK. Seen from that angle, the HDK is a space where different social opposition movements in Turkey can interact, learn from each other and build up a new network of struggle. An activist from the socialist magazine Theory and Politics, a component of HDK, recounts his encounter with the Kurdish liberation movement:

During that process, we made a lot of friends from the Kurdish liberation movement. We saw how individuals acquired a certain level of maturity thanks to the movement, how they managed to overcome their limitations stemming from their socio-cultural backgrounds. We have noticed that this was possible due to the existing dynamics within the movement, and that was important for us. Those militants, I mean those who learned the hard way, had a maturity and this was a new horizon to us. Because in Turkey's Left Movement we are usually more doctrinaire, we were used to being surrounded by people who were trying to understand the world through books. That is why we were very reactive. But then, we saw something different. It was very instructive. Let me say this, the main reason for becoming part of the HDK is indeed the Kurdistan Freedom Movement who played the prime role in the formation of the HDK and the presence of Kurdish militants of the Kurdish liberation movement. Those militants all have a great story to share. I met for example a militant whose big brother who was sentenced to life imprisonment and had been in prison for 15-16 years. He is also a militant like his brother and had been detained for months, as well as his wife and he has children. That's who they are and they continue their work confidently. This was eye-opening for us, very instructive. Individuals brought up by revolutionary history are very precious to us and those who are polluted by the failure of the revolution are dramatic. I say this with regards to Turkey's Left Movement. These are in fact bad lessons for us. Of course, we have learned a lot from this (Individual Interview, T44).

One academic who signed the '*We will not be a party to this crime*' (Academics for Peace) petition (founding member of the HDK) notes that the main reason the petition process started was the interaction of academics with the Kurdish movement, and emphasises the role the HDK played in this interaction:

I really believe this; I mean there is a Kurdish effort in this that started with the peace process and continued up to now. An incredible Kurdish effort, Kurdish will and Kurdish determination. What do I mean by that? Many of the two thousand signatories of this petition were called by Kurds to a congress or a conference or another event or were asked to contribute to an article or a magazine. In short, it is clear that the Kurds

made an effort for those people. It is the HDK that opened up that path and allowed those efforts to take place (Individual Interview, T52).

For activists within the Kurdish movement, it was an extremely new experience to come together with components coming from many different traditions to continue their struggle under the umbrella of HDK:

I worked in various areas of the Kurdish liberation movement. It was an important experience for me to come to the HDK and to come together with diversities for the first time to work together. I should say that we are still trying to work together and learn from each other. I worked in the geography of Kurdistan; it was important for me to be among all the diversity for the first time and perform my work. Another thing that impressed me in the HDK is that the meetings of the central structures are meetings where you can have very strong theoretical discussions. (Writing the history of the HDK together workshop)

Before that, I was mostly operating in Kurdistan. And since I have been working as an academic for a very long time, I can't possibly feel like an outsider. In its ideological structuring, you talk of a democratic nation and you say that you are an alternative to nation state with this democratic nation. And you talk of pluralism as opposed to the monist approach. In fact, most of these were only theories on paper. My first encounter in HDK was with those diversities. The dimension of encountering diversity was a little bit, how should I say, well it is actually a dimension that excites you. Because you know, instead of meeting people coming from the same traditions, you meet with people who come from different traditions but think the same way. This pluralist structure was a first for me (Individual Interview, T1).

Another activist from the Kurdish movement comments on the experience of this diversity of the HDK, and notes how the urgency and priority he gave to his identity as a Kurd could be different for other members:

Our urgent needs and priorities are all based on identity, but having to work with many components requires you to see that they have their own urgent needs and priorities too. Noticing it and tolerating it allowed me to mature. You become much more mature in HDK, and also more flexible (Togetherness & Unity in Diversity, Workshop 2).

Our interviews demonstrated that components and individuals from different ideologies came to the HDK with their own baggage and preconceptions, often loaded with prejudice, or even hostility and conflicts, and that this baggage becomes lighter as they work together, as opportunities for new dialogues among groups emerge; and mutual learning occurs when they get to know each other better.

Being together under the roof of the HDK is like, you know, even if you come from different political backgrounds, under the same roof you meet at certain intervals, get the chance to know each other etc. In that sense it is a positive thing. And when you run into each other on the street you greet, you sit somewhere and talk. Let me give you an example, in May, we, three groups coming from Kaypakkaya traditions, us, Özgür Gelecek, Halkın Günlüğü, we organised a symposium there in Taksim. ESP was one of the speakers there. HDP was also present, as well as Revolutionary Party. I don't think they would have come if it wasn't a project of HDK, especially ESP. But there had been no problem and they all came. In that sense, it is very positive (Individual Interview, T18).

HDK is also a platform where diversities and differences are acknowledged and where individuals confront their prejudices in order to overcome them. For instance, a young HDK activist who is also a member of the Democratic Islam Congress recounts her first encounter with an LGBTQ member of HDK:

Once I attended a meeting, until then I had never seen an LGBTQ individual in my life. I have seen there a person called K.. I was pleasantly surprised (she laughs) We were at the same meeting. As a woman I was filled with admiration, and I absolutely adored his speech. I remember thinking and saying 'Well, they are just like us' to myself. In that sense HDK really transforms people, breaks down prejudices (Individual Interview, T13).

I had some hesitations as for working with diversity and creating together before joining HDK. The HDK allowed me to overcome this. Let me explain; I understood that all these are sources of richness, pluralism is a source of richness, that's what I learned there and that was important to me. Working with diversity and reaching common decisions were important. Another point is that during all the time I spent with the HDK, being closer to people and reaching common decisions on a local level were positive things (Writing the History of the HDK Together, Workshop 1).

Here at the HDK, there is something that improves the culture of being together despite all the different identities and different political views. I don't think all these different identities and groups would get together if only for HDK. I don't have much tolerance for people who have thoughts contrary to mine, but I listen to them when I am under HDK's roof and I can tolerate them, I feel compelled to do so. You say to yourself 'well that's also a point of view, an opinion' and you listen to them. That's positive. When you notice the togetherness and the joint effort you become, you know, less square-minded compared to your old thoughts and ideas. There are so many different thoughts and opposite poles in the society. Our society has such a problem. We don't tolerate diversity. We cannot tolerate thoughts that are contrary to ours; as a matter of fact,

democracy per se requires tolerating diversity and different thoughts. In that sense I believe HDK has very positive impacts (Togetherness & Unity in Diversity, Workshop 2).

The HDK's scope for respect for diversity, and celebration of difference, enables interactions and exchange between individuals and movements, and at the same time offers a possibility of transformation. An HDK activist, member of the Peoples and Beliefs Commission, shares his experience:

What the HDK is doing is a different reading. They did something we have never witnessed before. For instance, the moment I say I am feminist, or I am leftist, it would mean a denial of all other identities. I am not trying to redraft what I've said in the past nor doing opportunism, but what the HDK did was really something different. By giving a very large space to all identities, the HDK gave all those silenced identities a chance to speak up and continues to do so. (...) Therefore, the HDK did this, it said, let the Yezidi talk and made them to do the right thing. As for Alevis, the HDK noticed that candles didn't go out [in their presence], saw that Yezidis didn't worship the devil. HDK allowed us to see that Armenians were not greedy nor money-minded, and it allowed us to have different relations with Jews. Therefore, intercultural communication was established on a very solid and reliable ground. The HDK allowed us to see through the eyes and words of the people coming from those communities and cultures. That's a whole new reading. The HDK did a kind of reverse-dialectic (Individual Interview, T34).

#### *A new gender policy*

The fact that identities which were previously swept under the carpet are for the HDK considered source of wealth has enabled vulnerable ethnic, religious and gender-oriented communities to become stronger. The congress tries to eliminate the stigmatization of vulnerable groups, and promotes respect for diversity and freedom of expression. Enforcing the quota system is one of the HDK's tools for enabling this consolidation, and guaranteeing the representation of vulnerable groups. For instance, the gender parity quota and the independent-autonomous women's assembly within the HDK play a crucial role in women's empowerment and in shaping the movement's responses on issues such as gender.

Below, another activist talks about how working with other women at the HDK has affected her. This activist came from the Islamic tradition and joined the Democratic Islam Congress and the HDK's Peoples and Beliefs Commission. She notes:

I met today at the HDK with the Women's Council which continues to grow stronger and bring together all different woman structures within it.

This is one of the examples that had an impact on me, both politically and socially. It is very local and small; in the past I had been in charge of projects where I was a founder and president of an association; but here it is really different; here you see women from so many different backgrounds under the same roof. Women's councils are authentic and autonomous, independent; the decisions that are taken here are not debatable, you see here women's self-confidence, power and freedom (...) I went to such a meeting once, the Middle East Women's Conference, this was way before HDP. It was organised by Kurdish women. After that meeting when I got back to Istanbul I remember having discussed with my women friends, member of our women's movement in Istanbul, we said to each other 'we have always looked at and talked to the women's movement in Europe and so, but we haven't even noticed the movement which was right under our noses'. This was really striking. There are so many steps that develop them and bring them to maturity (Individual Interview, T41)

Another female activist underlines the importance of the autonomous and separate structure of HDK's council:

For instance, I know very well now that I should not take any decisions about women in a mixed structure. In other words, following the journey with women and not letting any women's competences be discussed. We have witnessed this a lot at all levels of the HDK. Women's competences are subject to discussion while men's competences are never put on the table. I can discuss any matter related to women with even a woman whose opinions differ from mine but can never do so with men. I had this experience thanks to HDK (Women, Gender & Social Change, Focus Group 2).

Another female activist emphasizes the dimension that made it meaningful for her to be engaged in a politics that spares her from 'androcentric state policy':

From my point of view, I can say that HDK pulled me from dry and shallow politics and put me in a place where politics have a meaning, something deep. And I am not talking about political depth, it is more about human and conscientious depth. You can learn political depth from books, here and there. HDK allowed me to wipe myself clean of all this androcentric state policy and opt for a more social one. (Women, Gender & Social Change, Focus Group 2).

The existence of LGBTQ within the HDK and their visibility, politics and demands in the HDK's large component organisations is an important dimension that has had an effect on many activists:

First, the HDK involving the LGBTQ movement is really awesome. I mean they couldn't prevent it, stop it. Although there was some resistance, it

didn't happen. Because the Gezi Park protests had already happened, the LGBTQ was, I say it in quotation marks, Gezi's hero. The LGBTQ movement had established themselves and pride parades were going on smoothly. Therefore, there was the HDK and the HDP's LGBTQ Commission. For instance, that commission organised a meeting together with Sabahat Tuncel. I'll never forget that meeting. It's engraved in my mind. There at that meeting I saw Kurdish brothers with their beards and stuff, you'd never believe that they were gay, and they made demands. They said to Sabahat Tuncel; 'I want to see an Ahmet Turk talking about queer politics', 'I want to see at the Parliament a Selahattin Demirtas who is talking about gay rights' they said stuff like that. This was radical for me, you know, addressing those things to the representatives of Kurdish Movement. I remember his face but I don't know who he was or which movement he belonged to. But that was important. (...) There was another congress of the HDK in Ankara. A trans friend, also a member of the General Assembly, said out loud from the lectern 'Where are you darling? Here I am darling'. And then he said 'I see you all from here and can see who didn't chant the slogan' and repeated once again compelling the protocol to do the same. The fact that LGBTQ chanted the slogan and that everybody joined was important to me (Individual Interview, T8).

Another woman activist explains how being together with the Kurdish movement, and leading a women's struggle, made her stronger:

I was politicized at university over the Kurdish issue. I was reading and doing studies on Kurdish issues. I was at that time following the BDP. I wasn't part of a feminist organisation, but I would describe myself as a feminist. Therefore, the HDK was the only organisation that I was part of, and I like that feeling of being part an organisation. It's something to do with the sense of belonging. Here I defend people's right to self-determination and for that reason I am together with the Kurds. I had thought on many issues before too, but the HDK is where I noticed it, if there is a struggle for labor, ecology, if there is an issue on people's right to self-determination well, it is here, at the HDK, that I noticed I was part of it. I would sound arrogant if I said I support them, instead I prefer saying that I am a subject who is leading a struggle there with them. In other words, I am a subject, a part of this struggle for peace. When I joined them, I wasn't that young nor part of an organisation. I noticed that here women are very strong, for some time there were a lot of crisis and problems. I got kind of depressed, and I remember crying in a woman's room. Then a woman approached me and said to me that 'if we cried each time, we faced a problem we wouldn't be able to have all those achievements.' She was angry with me, she said, 'come with me' and took me out of that room. That's just one souvenir, we have many more like this. I noticed there that we, women, are part and partner of this organisation. We are the founders, the subjects. We have, or at least I have learned from women colleagues of Kurdish Movement that we

cannot leave the positions to men each time there is a negative situation (Togetherness & Unity in Diversity, Workshop 2).

HDK's gender-based policies not only affect its organisational form and the subjective transformations of its own activists. It has also contributed to the creation of new organisations, participation and decision-making mechanisms within the women's struggle and LGBTQ struggle in Turkey.

#### *Reflexivity and linguistic discipline*

Waging a struggle within the HDK is not only restricted to demands for transformation of the state and society, it is also a learning process where activists recreate their own languages and styles within the organisation; get rid of sexist, discriminatory, and hate-based speech. In other words, as one activist described it, it is a process through which they 'discipline' their own language. The 'new life' ideal that shapes the programme and statutes of the HDK is being constructed through a series of prefigurative policies. These policies tear down the hegemony of discriminatory and sexist language, created by the given social norms of daily life.

A female activist from the HDK Women's Council (representative of the Democratic Alevi Association (DAD) which is one of the active components of the HDK and the Peoples and Beliefs Commission) explains this linguistic 'discipline':

One of the first things I noticed when I joined the HDK was how problematic our language was. The sentences we made. To give you an example, women used the word 'child bride' for many years and they were against it. Can there be a bride from a child? Those words make it look like something sympathetic and that's not the right approach. I also remember other previous debates on women, like the women's shelter. I refused to use that word; why a shelter? This is a word that tends to show women as powerless. But when we were debating with friends, I admitted it, yes, we take shelter, we take shelter to flee violence and abuse, let's make it clear. We had serious language problems. I used words and sentences that seemed to me quite normal in the daily flow of life that hurt LGBTQ individuals, or whenever we said diabolic, our Yezidi friends pointed it out, they disciplined us. They told us what that word meant...I think we've been well disciplined in terms of language use. When we met there, at the Peoples and Beliefs Commission, we understood how important language was and we've been well disciplined in that sense (Individual interview, T12).

Another female activist emphasises the sensitivity that was generated within the HDK, and how this contributed to developing more thoughtful and elaborate modes of linguistic expression:

Meetings were done at the HDK, we were all coming together. I went there with my own jargon, my own language and style. In fact, they all had their own language, style deriving from their world, philosophy, ideology and you are all around the same table trying to produce something. It came up a couple of times, for instance you have a written statement and I remember saying 'it would be better if we say it with these words instead of those', because we have internalised those patterns, and they still come out from time to time. This language marginalises religious people or those who have conservative sensibilities. This isn't our aim; we try to avoid it. To the contrary we try to embrace them, but we should ensure not to marginalise them unwittingly with our language, our decisions or our press statements. Because we really need to explain and present to people this point of view, this philosophy. So, it's during that process that I've learned to confront myself and control my wording, you know, things that I've noticed or someone else noticed while I was talking. Now I get to criticise other people and tell them to use another word, but what about the language I use, doesn't the language I brought from my own world marginalise others? HDK taught us to discipline our language, to think carefully before saying any word. I had the feeling that I was part of a different discipline process too. I mean, those environments showed us how to discipline our languages mutually, in order not to hurt each other (Individual Interview, T41).

An LGBTQ activist from the HDK, referring to a speech she gave at the HDK's General Assembly, argues that language should not only get rid of the sexist and discriminative elements, but also should be simplified and made more intelligible:

I know that even if I am part of HDK, the language I will use inside is very important. Because they don't master well the literature of the language we use. Even though we say that we are together all the time, that we are used to this situation, that we are in solidarity with many and that we become friends, you have so much more within HDK and you are appalled. Because you are not used to it and you need to use a totally different language with these people so they can understand you. What you have to say should not be misinterpreted. That's why you need to explain it well in order to avoid any question marks later on. I tried to create a new language. But it was very tiring for me to use this new language. When I was saying heterosexual, I was stopping and waiting to see if they understood or not. Heterosexuality and heterosexism are very close yet so different things; so I was thinking, 'do they think I speak ill of them?'; it's normal to think like that, because they might think of a denigration. (...) The more you have a simple, unsophisticated language the more you reach people, even the most homophobic ones, this is possible through the communication we establish. I don't think I'd be that considerate, but this process made me realise this. I was able to think and learn how to use a simple, unsophisticated language. That was the striking point for me. Of

everything, the hope that the HDK instilled in me made me feel more energised. I am more than ever determined as I witnessed the transformation when I went there. I felt that from the energy I got, the applauses and smiles. I was informed later; a male speaker took the floor after me and said things like we need to be self-critical, I am on your side etc. It's really awesome hearing a man saying this. This means we have conquered one castle. That's the day I decided that I would be ready to continue the struggle in HDK wherever they wanted me to (Individual Interview, T47).

An academic who actively participated in the establishment of the HDK, and who subsequently was exiled to Germany after being involved in the Academics for Peace (BAK) process, explains:

Well, if it is all about learning then I should say it's done. After this process it is difficult for anybody who went through it to produce a male-dominant and human-centered thing in their documents. That's the one thing people mainly learned. Huda Kaya's presence there and his encounter with the communists was amazing. Because at the end, Huda Kaya's discourse is based mostly on compassion, help, embrace and conscience. The leftist discourse on the other hand is very provocative for Huda Kaya and vice versa. But they have learned they needed to show respect to Huda Kaya. We really wanted the representation of an Islamist group there. They tried to push it through DIK (Revolutionary Workers Committee). There was an atmosphere where all enjoyed the pluralism, that I can say (Individual Interview, T52).

#### *The multiplicity of identity*

A significant number of HDK activists indicate that they used to introduce themselves with identities such as 'leftist', 'socialist' or 'feminist', keeping their ethnic, religious and sexual orientation identities in the background. They report that this changed when they joined the HDK, and have witnessed an important transformation since then. Activists reiterate that the HDK encouraged them to embrace their multiple identities holistically. They say that they realised that it was possible to reconcile multiple identities; the HDK showed them it was possible to be Alevi and Kurdish and leftist or Circassian and leftist and feminist all at the same time. In that sense, we might say that in a Turkey where the left had previously tried to squeeze all ethnic and religious identities into a more 'universal' leftist identity, the HDK stepped in to bring an end to this mainstream approach by creating an autonomous space where individuals could express themselves in all their diversity. Many interviewees who had long histories of struggle in the left movement, underline that the HDK increased made them value their multiple identities, and encouraged them to express these other identities in

public.

A female HDK activist considers this embracing of multiplicity of identity to hold the promise of a new world:

The HDK promises a world where a woman can live no matter what her identity is. That's the reason why I embraced HDK. It is a process where I can breathe. An umbrella where all my identities fit. Because in the past whenever I expressed my political identity, then my religious belonging would be left out, or when I was able to show my religious identity then my ethnic identity would be left out. What HDK offered is an inclusive space, embracing all; we were able to continue all the struggles all together. It is a precious space; HDK promises the world to women. You know, sometimes you know there is something missing, for instance before there was BDP. I am Kurdish. So, we had BDP and then DBP was founded. There had always been Kurdish parties, but there I wasn't able to fit in with my religious identity. There were many Alevis, at city level, local level but I couldn't find a place for my identity for which I've been struggling for so long and filed a suit against the State. I mean they weren't discarding me but as an Alevi I couldn't feel that sense of being included. This is maybe due to the fact that we've been part of the establishment [of the HDK]. Because I've written its statutes, programme etc, so I believe in it. That's how the HDK is (Individual Interview, T22).

Another activist shares his own experiences:

There are important experiences on this subject. Left-wing structures organise workshops and conferences, and they invite people from the Peoples and Beliefs Commission. I attended one of those conferences, organised by the 78'ers Foundation. A place where you'd see old-timers. Hence, they are brave enough to invite us. That's very important. Well until a couple of years ago this didn't really matter. It was considered as primitive, obsolete. Now they are the ones inviting us. That's what I call a transformation. It redefines a relation that had been started by them. But they also get our point of view, how we see the left-wing. So, you go there, you talk about the left and how the effects of left on individuals occupies a very small space in terms of identity... you see their reaction, they tell you that they weren't aware of it. It's like, you know the bag you carry on your back has so many patches and colors, but you insist on seeing it like made of one piece of fabric. And when you warn them about it there is no opposition, there is a transformation. Then you meet two-three years later and you notice that there is no more resistance; the bag of socialism is not made of one piece of fabric; you start to see things rising from the bag; all the old pieces. Alevism came out of the bag. Being from Dersim came out the bag too, or even tailoring, doctoring. They were all left in the shade you know. There is a positive transformation here, they can say openly that peoples are valuable for instance. The Kurdish liberation movement went through a transformation since its first days- and by that

I don't mean the period where it started with the typology of the Communist Party. It even had some Stalinist characteristics. But the movement broke out of its shell. As of 1990's Kurdish liberation movement had a very autonomous relation with local peoples, cultures and beliefs, and opened a living space. The movement wanted to transform the fascistic, racist concept by moving that living space to a different lane. Not like neoliberalism. Nor is it about the concept of 'think global, act local'. On the contrary, the movement wanted the local thoughts and opinions to have an effect on the global ones. Besides, the Rojava experience, Yezidi Units, Democratic Islam Congress, Federation of Alevis and its relationship with other peoples have been transferred here with all their richness. Therefore, we have all benefited. The Peoples and Beliefs Commission is accepted by all. In other words, we have a relation with the leftists but also with marginalised LGBTQs, we talk with them. I say that is a good transition (Individual Interview, T34).

### *Solidarity*

The work that is being done within the HDK provides an important infrastructure in terms of the establishment of solidarity networks amongst activists. The objective is the consolidation at a symbolic level of vulnerable groups, individuals and identities within HDK, via solidarity but also offering moral and material support through this solidarity, in order to help individuals overcome their difficulties.

The HDK's confrontation and contestation of official narratives of Turkish history over the past hundred years of history seems to have spurred the re-awakening of a counter-memory. The HDK brings together minor memories that each individual from their own identity and community. Once side by side within the HDK's, these individuals get to know each other and communicate. Most importantly, each one of those memories when shared publicly encourage other wounded memories that were silenced and trapped to speak up, to demand and call out their resistance. For instance, Circassian activists say that they started to build up their political demands ranging from mother tongue education to the Circassian genocide because they had the opportunity to witness the struggle of the Kurdish movement. Armenian and Syriac interviewees stress that the testimonial of Dersim 38, Diyarbakir prisons or on state violence in the 1990's encouraged them to air the memory of the genocide in 1915 in public. In that sense, an important ground for solidarity is established to let the silenced identities speak up in the prefigurative spaces of the HDK. Collective participation in various group commemorations; calls for confrontation with the past; activities organised by the Peoples and Beliefs Commission; and sympathy towards a multiplicity of identities are all proof of a

solid symbolic solidarity being constructed inside the HDK. An HDK activist expresses what solidarity with oppressed and marginalised identities means to him/her:

Solidarity for me is to be forged with other people and beliefs, with the oppressed. When we call it other people and other beliefs, as the name implies, it is the other. Personally, being with marginalised identities, in an open or hidden solidarity, does me good (Individual Interview, T16).

Especially in the post-2015 period, we see an increase of these solidarity networks, as well as efforts to establish new common ground. And at the individual level, these networks strengthened activists:

When I got fired with the emergency decree, we founded an association and there I saw how women's solidarity made me stronger. It was a reciprocal solidarity. I say this in quotation marks, those who weren't fired or those who wanted to help got relieved and we were relieved with their solidarity. Those solidarity relationships had a really huge impact on me (Women, Gender and Social Change, Focus Group 2).

I might say that at least I had an organisation. I come from the trade union movement, I would not say that individually I could fit in there, but I can say that I fit in here. During my work at the local level, I've made many friendships, sisters and comrades. I was in a very bad period of my life. I was expelled [from my work] and had many other problems and they didn't make me feel alone. These people were gathered around an idea. This process has had a really great meaning in my life (Togetherness & Unity in Diversity, Workshop 2).

### *Mobility*

Our field research shows that the most effective learning and influence of participation in the HDK occurred for those people and components who are part of mobility-based activities. For example, the delegations created to organise the local level during HDK's establishment, and the work they carried out in different regions of Turkey are among the most impactful experiences. In this respect, activities such as rallies, travel, delegation work, training and seminars taking place in places other than those where the activists live, provide a very important learning dynamic. Mobility not only increases the interaction of activists with different social realities, but also enhances their learning experiences on both an emotional and informational level. In particular, each visit of non-Kurdish activists to Kurdistan creates an impact that affects and transforms them:

I mean [being within the HDK] has enriched me a lot. I got acquainted with the Kurdish Movement and the struggle in Kurdistan, what it was really about, but also its place in the world's resistance history. In my opinion

the HDK has made great contributions to the conceptualization of Turkey's political life and society's transformation. That's huge. The turning point for me is the Semdinli Incidents. There was a delegation going there, a big one actually. Filmmakers, academics, people from the cultural sector, literati. Many boxes of books were sent and we went to that bookstore, there were still blood traces. We went to Van by plane. And then we took the bus from Van, friends from the bar joined us. We met local people in all the villages and settlements until Hakkari. We met with women, and what I will never ever forget in my life, the picture I can't take out of my mind is when they talked to us, those people whose husband, son, daughter were killed, they came to us with the pictures of their lost ones, killed in unidentified murders, by the military or the police under the state pressure. They said: 'If women from the West knew what's going on here, I'm sure they'd be on our side, they'd understand us and we would find a solution together.' I've heard this everywhere and it hurts so much. Because I knew it, during my college years and my life after college, people don't want to know, don't want to see. The truth there is so devastating, it is so inhuman, something we all need to stand up for, so when we know about it we need to do something and this means something bad would happen. This is in the subconscious of people even if it is not said out loud. This is valid for academics and other people too. Ordinary people didn't hear about what was happening there. Whereas those women said 'they'd react if they had heard about it'. During the reconciliation process, we have seen this clearly. I mean even the media wrote it. They went to Kurdish cities to write about the places Kurds lived. Reaching out to people, talking to them, sharing our repressed lives were very important. Indeed, those women were right, when people started to know more, they were more interested. That led to a socialization of the Kurdish issue (Individual Interview, T6).

One prominent activist, a founding member of the HDK and one of the prominent revolutionaries of the 1968 generation, describes this experience:

[HDK] has proved that one never stops learning. First of all, you face the reality about Kurdistan, you see the life there and the truth, this is an amazing richness. Actually, seeing this opens your eyes to all. You start seeing the Armenian, the Rum and then it allows you to have a new view on the Turk. Your whole perspective on life is reinvented. I can't imagine any possibility of learning greater than this one. You notice that all those moments, years of struggle where you almost gave up hope during this revolutionary process, all those efforts weren't for nothing. Not on earth would I have imagined it like that. For instance, I didn't know that those very young Kurdish children, youngster and women knew that much about the Turkish Revolutionary Movement and that they cherished it as their own achievements. It is very important to me to see that this revolution is not placed at a higher place than theirs, but they still embrace it. This wide historical standpoint occupies an important place

among these people; seeing that your efforts weren't in vain is of great importance. For instance, wherever I go in Kurdistan, everybody knows me, they are with me, I know it. And it's true that I cannot say the same thing for all Turkey but that's a fact for Kurdistan. Because a society which is in the process of revolution understands and involves other revolutionaries. When Turkey will look to its own revolution, it will start to appreciate Ocalan, they already started to learn. That's why these issues are important to me. In other words, it was important to see what it meant living in a place with multiple people, beliefs and experiences; it was also important to notice all the potential. And secondly, it was important to see that our revolutionary truth continued its existence in other languages, forms and minds. It was important knowing that we were organising this. We met with very valuable people we wouldn't have met in other circumstances and that's a great richness. And these things continue, it's not over yet. In other words, the doors of the dungeons will be opened and those people will come out and we'll be meeting again. I should say that, there hasn't been any other period in my life where I felt that everything is in the realm of possibility. Forty years ago, I was expecting to get killed by a firing squad, but now I can say I've seen it all. I've seen that those who wanted to execute you became those hoping for a solution, hoping you provide the solution. Nothing is impossible. Now I am even more convinced with my more than seventy years of existence on this earth. Just one thing, you might not live long enough to see the consequences materialise. But unfortunately, human life is too short, I wish I had seventy more years to live (Individual Interview, T45).

A female activist who is currently a member of the parliament, who has worked with organisations like Mazlum-Der, a human-rights association from an Islamic tradition, discusses the effects of mobility within the HDK-HDP process:

Because I was a journalist writing about the Kurdish movement and dramas that the Kurdish people had to endure... And also, we have fought for human rights for many years within Mazlum-Der. We had a long history as activists. So, we were acquainted with those dramas... We used to say the Kurds had been oppressed and kept using this pluperfect tense you know, but then we noticed that there was more to it. With all the conferences we attended in various towns we got to know the regions and see another face of Turkey. We noticed that Turkey didn't consist of Istanbul only (Individual Interview, T41).

### **Impacts at the Institutional Level**

Forty percent of representatives in the HDK do not have any organisational representation, they are independent individual members participating in the movement on their own behalf. The other sixty percent of representatives are composed of affiliates representing different organisations (ranging from political parties, federations, confederations, trade unions,

platforms, magazines, etc.). In this sense, the HDK encompasses a rich diversity as a congress organisation. We need to consider this diversity when discussing the impacts of the process of learning and knowledge production within the HDK on an organisational level. In other words, knowledge production has an effect not only upon the HDK as an umbrella organisation, but also on the respective component members of the congress.

Our research clearly shows that knowledge production in the HDK has various impacts at the organisational and social levels. Before moving on to some specific themes that can be identified within these impacts, we wish to mention a few basic points.

First, it is important to note that the HDK has created a new language and culture acquisition (gender, identity, class, etc.) centred on co-struggle, a collective learning environment that has become an important interactive platform, allowing components with different ideological heritages to get to know each other better and dispense with their prejudices. In terms of mutual learning and developing common normative practices (e.g. co-chair/co-spokesperson), the HDK has been a pioneer within Turkey's history of social movements.

The fact that HDK brings together movements from diverse traditions has allowed the opposition to diversify its tools for struggle, and to develop a common repertoire of struggle. This cooperation has contributed to a process of restructuring the fragmented and conflictual remembrances of past struggles in Turkey, as well as consolidating their historiography around a common collective memory.

Leading a struggle together in the HDK, where individuals and components from different ideological, ethnic, religious and sexual identities come together without prioritising their own agendas, has been an important and transformational process. The fact that each individual or organisation is involved in agendas beyond their own urgent issues, has contributed to a process of debate and of approaching problems with a more holistic vision. The multiplicity of identities mentioned above in the section on individual-level impacts, and the understanding of these as a richness, is proof of the effect that HDK has been able to have at the organisational level. This multiplicity of identities has now become integral part of the HDK's struggles.

Finally, reciprocity has been a significant element of communication between independent individual members and affiliated organisations, unlike in previous forms of organisation.

Although it has occasionally caused serious conflicts and crises, affiliated organisations recognised the need for ‘unorganised’ representation of independent individuals; they also came to see them as agents of struggle, and the negative prejudices of individuals about organisations being ‘rigid and hierarchical structures’ started to change drastically. This dimension is very important for HDK which is based on the idea that a new life can be established only through organisation and struggle.

In the post-2015 period, the establishment of new solidarity networks by individual and component members of HDK, and the establishment of alternative organisational tools, as well as the development of a common agenda and priorities, should also be seen as crucially important the impacts at the institutional level.

We will now discuss the institutional impacts of the learning and knowledge production processes of the HDK under a few thematic areas, through the analysis and testimonies of activists.

#### *Adaptability and institutional survival in difficult times*

Given the immense pressure of the practices of state repression including criminalization, detention, arrest, intimidation etc., one of the most important aspects of the HDK is that its activists have managed to continue the struggle, and its varied affiliates have stayed loyal to its programme and principles. The Kurdish liberation movement has a long history of initiatives and efforts to work with Turkey’s socialist-revolutionary movement, but the experience of the HDK is the first time that this has been achieved with so many organisations and for such a long time. This was emphasised repeatedly by activists, with many stating that this was only possible thanks to the HDKs organisational structure and social vision.

For instance, a young activist from the Kurdish liberation movement and member of the HDK’s Steering Committee, explains this situation as follows:

I mean there are some insinuations, they try to terrorise us, and name it as ‘the urban structure of KCK’ in the files. Social organisation doesn’t belong to one entity, the KCK can base itself on social organisation as much as the HDK. The fact that two entities have the same objective does not mean they are the same structure. There may be a dimension of interacting. And I think with that dimension we have achieved one thing. The fact that there is a legitimacy imposed and that we continue to exist as a social structure should be considered as a success (Individual interview, T1).

A female activist who was active within HDK's Youth and Education Councils, and currently works in the HDP's Education Commission, as well as in the HDK's local organisation in Istanbul, talks about the success of the HDK in difficult times:

HDK actually did the impossible. For instance, today is the anniversary of the Ankara Massacre (10 October 2018). The country's Labor-Democracy Movements and the Kurdish liberation movement went to Ankara Square, and 103 people died there, and we were all walking there with these people. 500 people were injured. There are still 36-37 people with permanent injuries. We tried to collect prosthetic legs etc. These were the processes, and this was impossible. Nobody believed in it. People said, 'Leftists will leave.' People said, 'Kurds will leave.' There was such insecurity among the movements. This has been greatly overcomed. Now, despite all the crises, massacres, the end of the reconciliation process, the HDK's ground, which is the HDP's main foundation, has never shifted. That programme had been debated, of course. (...) There had been a period during the establishment of the HDK where we always won. We won in Rojava, we won in Gezi. I have never seen such a period. I don't know, maybe it just happens once in a person's lifetime. There was a time when we always won, and then afterwards, we always lost. In all of this, it was the common agenda that allowed us to continue healthily, our psychology or our policy, thanks to this programme we kept thinking the same way. Because it is not easy to create a programme, you debate a lot, you argue a lot, people slamming on the table, leaving and these are all great efforts, but everyone learns also to take a step back when necessary or give some space for another. This is amazing. So, I said it after the Ankara Massacre too; you will get used to seeing Kurds and Socialists working together, you have to at this point. In fact, those massacres bring people together (Individual interview, T8).

In October 2018 we interviewed a history teacher and an activist who joined the HDK as an independent individual, worked actively in the Education Council, and co-chaired their local HDP. He was arrested in October 2019 because of his activism. Here is what he told us during the interview:

First of all, it is very precious for this wide spectrum to remain together for seven years without smashing each other's face in, and overcome many crisis moments. Even saying, 'We're together and we stand by each other, we haven't broken.' (...) they are so afraid of Kurds, leftists, Alevis and the oppressed classes coming together in Turkey. The secret of the revolution. This state is fighting to prevent this from happening. In my opinion what they massacred in 1915 was the first ever authentic revolutionary movement of this land. I mean this is not Armenian nationalism. Our Armenian comrades were weaving this land's most authentic revolutionary movement. Both Taşnak and Hınçak. These two

revolutionary comrades were both members of the International. The dream of teachers in colleges in Elazig, Erzurum was HDK. Since 1915, the state's raison d'être is for these not to come together. HDK has shown them that this togetherness was possible for a while with HDP-HDK. In that sense it is an undeniable success (Individual interview, T5).

The difficult period also represented a threat to HDK's congress model in some respects. Some interviewees pointed this out. For example, a young woman, prominent activist in HDK's Youth Assembly, tells us about the negative impacts on the HDK and especially the women's struggle of pursuing struggle during difficult times:

In the old days, when we demanded peace, we did not mean just to end the war/violence. Demanding peace in those days really meant to defend all those other existing issues all together and unite them...This meant coming together both in the pain and as well as in the memory. However, recently, we seem to be focusing more on ending the war (violence)....it seems like we have become uniform in our political style, tone and approach about how we can get there...What we have seen in recent years is that all those advances and gains made by the struggle of Kurdish women under extreme circumstances (like co-powersharing, quota system) have now been sidetracked... It seems more men (especially of certain classes) have taken centre stage while women's numbers dropped off dramatically, a fact that was revealed to us by the last election... While I do not want to generalise this, we have seen men belonging to a certain class representing a certain Kurdish capital appear to be at the forefront leaving no space for women. The kind of diversity that we had experienced in the earlier years (in terms of style, modes and approach) brought so many people together which created an excitement we never had before... It was something else... (Individual interview, T4).

#### *The emergence of a new political culture*

Although the HDK was only founded in 2011, in this very short period of time it has contributed to the formation of a new political culture in Turkey. This new political culture transformed the social struggle into a more holistic and pluralist approach, under the collective vision of a 'new life'. This new political culture was facilitated through the adoption of the congress model. The HDK became the platform for a new political experience based on bottom-up organisation via local councils; based on togetherness in diversity across different ethnic and religious identities and ideological political movements, based not only on the strengthening organised sections of the society (through the component quota) but also on the strengthening of democratic participation for individuals who are not members of a component organisation, and on equal representation for women.

A prominent HDK activist who acts as the movement's co-spokesperson explains how the HDK became a benchmark for organising praxis:

Well, when we look from an integral perspective like the HDK does, then it becomes a standard. In other words, it becomes a standard for our own political movement. It allows you to see how narrow independent political movements are. I mean their organisational narrowness...You have this power of standard. It's a fact. HDK can alleviate the obstacles set due to habits or dilemmas in the relations of components and political movements. I mean in terms of what HDK does in practice. HDK is also a structure that works with and benefits from a long-term perspective, organising the revolutionary transformation on a social basis as well as organising the possibilities in daily life (Individual Interview, T3)

A young female activist tells how the HDK became for her an optimum standard of what she expects from a political space:

At the age of 21 I considered becoming a member of BDP but now, that's not enough for me. All the components would fall short of my expectations. At that point that's also the case for the components within HDP or HDK. I've seen an upgraded version therefore I wouldn't go anywhere else and be restricted. I haven't lost my mind yet. Because all of these were beyond imagination. That's why we have protect this platform whatever the cost is (Individual interview, T8).

An activist who was active in the revolutionary struggle for more than 50 years, and had important responsibilities in the pre-establishment preparations of HDK, explains her perspective on how the HDK built a new political culture:

Personally, my efforts over the past 12 years occupy a special place in my fifty years of experience. Truth to be told, if you look at the outcome, an opposition that involves Turkey's revolutionary movement, Kurdish opposition and all the segments that the Turkish State is not fond of, had thirteen percent of the votes, this is an historic event. We used to party and celebrate when TIP won three per cent of votes and look what we have achieved now. Now if you ignore this and don't see it as a historic turning point then let me ask you, 'what are you doing in this struggle of class?'. This is really something very important not to be missed at all (Individual interview, T21).

An HDK activist refers to the lack of hierarchy as central to understanding this new political culture:

Yes, by gathering on the basis of a congress, an ecologist does whatever s/he wants to do, respecting each other's ideas, and someone who wishes to do something for the proletarian class can implement their projects

too. But this is considered as legitimate and acceptable for both sides. I think this is an important achievement (Individual interview, T43).

A member of the HDK's Ecology Council highlights the impacts of the movement's innovative approach with regards to the ecological struggle in local areas:

We have achieved success in reaching many local and specific areas, that had not been achieved politically before. It is fair to say that the issue of the river of Ergene gained visibility thanks to us. The Ergene platform contributed a lot to the HDK and didn't limit its activities to the environment. Therefore the 'Derele Kardeşler' Initiative (All streams are brothers) met with us first. As a political formation that doesn't carry the negative aspects of politics, we reached them easily. There had been a period of hesitation because we didn't know if they came to us because of our name. This is the unhealthy characteristic of politics in Turkey. The 'let's have them too' understanding had prevailed for a long time, ranging from LGBTQ organisations to environmental organisations or from the labor milieu to the academic one. Here on the other hand, they saw that they could do all kind of politics all the while being themselves. That's very important. In the opposition structures, nobody tolerates anybody staying true to themselves (Individual interview, T28).

Another activist explains how the space opened by the HDK to individuals (non-movement affiliated people) members through the quota system has been instrumental in the development of a new political culture, contrary to the strict organisational approach within other left political organisations:

You know, the Left has a problem; It can be very brutal on itself. The Left is very cruel towards those who leave the movement. That's not just the case for the Left, but let's think that way. Consider it like AKP's attitude towards Fetullah today. Islamists are a little bit like this too. I don't know how this works in the West. I am sure it works the same. This is how it is in the Middle East. When one of them parts ways, thinks differently, the conflict can be very harsh. This was our past experience - I mean the experiences of the Left. But there is a historical cross-section for the development of the HDK's ideology. There's no need for that harsh approach. What we are talking about is that we express ourselves in terms of moral values, or political values. We also need to be able to say that we can be with people who are not like us. What we mean by these individuals are the ones who have left Leftist organisations in the past or those who didn't agree on the problematics of the Left organisation. There are also those who do not leave the struggle, those who say I am part of this process. The HDK provided them with a place. The HDK told them, 'you may not be in such a narrow organisational line, but you can add a lot as an individual'. This is not only about the form, but it is also related to the level of maturity reached by the organisations within the

HDK. We still have problems, but I think it's a maturity (Individual interview, T29).

*A new form of organisational togetherness and collective ownership of processes*

As discussed in detail in the chapter on the historical roots of the HDK, efforts to develop a common line of struggle between the Kurdish liberation movement and Turkey's socialist movements can be traced back to the 1970's. Over the years, many different initiatives and attempts were made. However, since its formation as a congress in 2011, the HDK has generated a new organisational togetherness expanding not only into Kurdish Liberation Movement and Turkey-based socialist movements, but also into the women's movement, religious/cultural movements, and ecology-based environmental movements. This new form of organisational togetherness, manifested in the congress form, caught the attention of many activists, who argued that HDK has brought together organisations which were previously considered impossible to unite; and that the HDK forced those who claimed that no common language could be developed between these diverse movements to adopt just such a common language. An artist who is a member of the HDK's Culture and Art Commission interprets this new togetherness as follows:

I mean, I honestly believe that the HDK process is a very important experience in Turkey. It was important. It was very exciting. I am a person with an artist identity after all, but we got involved because we believed that working on this ground is more than necessary. Why? I mean it's a necessity. This has been the biggest handicap for Turkey. I wish such a platform could have been created long ago. But what happened? Everyone acted with their own work logic and policy; this understanding gradually made the opposition groups smaller, and brought about their contraction in the face of the state and oppression. Nobody made any effort to come together. The HDK has achieved this, at last, achieved this success. In other words, it brought together groups that could not have come together. This was very important. In other words, groups that do not even greet each other on the street under normal conditions, became comrades on the platform of HDK and showed how precious and valuable this comradeship was by working on this platform. This was a very important experience (Individual interview, T19).

A female activist involved in establishment of the HDK explains the shift from process of forming the movement to the present day, and the adoption of this new organisational togetherness:

I think as HDK we always defended this. I am not aware of any other similar examples in world history for something like us, maybe a few. Such

a diversity of structures, individuals, groups... I think it is an incredibly difficult thing for such an incredibly mixed team to come together and look at a common future together. The idea is very good. What a great idea, but also to succeed in practice... I think we have accomplished something very difficult. Also, individuals who do not know how to act in unity with one other, individuals who have never been involved in politics or anything such. I think we have managed to be together. I mean we managed to establish the HDP. This is a huge success. First, we managed to get together and then we managed to establish the HDP. Because succeeding in setting up the HDP is not a simple thing either. As I said, eighty-five percent of current MPs in the HDP did not believe in the HDP. I'm talking about current MPs you know. I am talking about what always happens. When those 36 deputies switched to HDP, it was somewhat by force. I really have such moments. You know, Selma Irmak, and Faysal Sarıyıldız<sup>57</sup>, when they first got out of prison, they first came to HDP. They never wanted it. Because they weren't sure, but now they believe in it so much. Because the Kurdish Movement had never worked with socialist movements. They worked together in some small ways, it was short-term or for campaign, but then campaigns are easy things. It is very difficult to act together. I think it was really important to be able to accomplish this and to carry on together (Individual interview, T9).

Another activist discusses the importance of this new form of structural togetherness:

I think this is what the HDK succeeded in; by emerging as the HDK and embodying it and creating it... that is, for example, in terms of political history, the HDK's works are good, they can grow and increase. But I think the HDK is now an entity and cannot be undone. It succeeded in doing this. So with the Kurdish democratic dynamism, the Kurdish movement in Turkey, the HDK created a ground for unity and cohesion of Turkey's proletariat-labour movements. The HDK has made this relationship something more concrete, more understandable. This is a very important achievement. I consider this very important (Individual interview, T3).

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<sup>57</sup> Selma Irmak and Faysal Sarıyıldız are both Kurdish politicians and former MPs for the HDP (People's Democratic Party) representing Hakkari and Sırnak cities in the Kurdish region. Both Selma and Faysal were elected as MPs in the June 2011 elections as independent candidates of the Labour, Democracy and Freedom Bloc, but both were denied their new positions due to court cases against them. They were both imprisoned. Selma was released in 2014 and was allowed to resume her role in Parliament. Both Selma and Faysal were re-elected as MPs for the HDP in the June 2015 election. Upon being elected Faysal was released from prison. Selma was arrested in November 2016, upon allegation of supporting terrorism and sentenced to 10 years in prison for being a member of a terrorist organization and disseminating terrorist propaganda. In April 2017, Selma was dismissed from the Parliament. She is still in Prison. Whereas Fayzal due to the same allegation had to leave Turkey for Exile in April 2016, where he carries on his political activities.

A prominent activist who belongs to the ESP component of the HDK summarises the strategic importance of this new form of structural togetherness, while explaining the meaning of being an HDK component member as a political party and struggling together within HDK:

Our perspective is as follows: every ESP member is also an HDK member. So, our party is an HDK member. If HDK grows we grow, if we grow HDK grows. We adopted this perspective since the foundation of HDK and took part in it. With this perspective, I worked in the decision-making processes. I never thought about group needs, namely party needs. I will not lose this perspective in any way if I do such a task again (Individual interview, T14)

## **Impacts on Societal Level**

It is important at this stage to make the following point: in analysing the social impacts of the HDK (and its learning and knowledge production processes), it is extremely difficult separate them from the collective achievements of the Kurdish liberation movement's long-term struggle. For example, many experiences, from the HDK's congress model to the practices of gender equality, had actually begun being implemented in Kurdistan by the Democratic Society Congress (DTK). The DTK can be understood as the predecessor model for the HDK, and through the Kurdish municipalities governed by Kurdish Liberation Movement since 1999. For this reason, it is essential to consider the Kurdish liberation movement's post-2000 general political paradigm (cf. Öcalan, 2020) within this discussion, without denying the authentic and unique dimensions of the HDK, including socialist and various other identities/peoples' movements. We will consider the HDK's effect on broader society, and present positive and negative reflections, from a relational perspective.

The HDK as a movement has effected not only its activists and components, but also the social context in which it struggles. This effect appears in the HDK's organising form and mechanisms for participation, in the construction of a new political culture and a new common perspective of struggle; in the development of an alternative counter-hegemonic perspective based on a general paradigm that seeks to transform societal relations in Turkey in terms of societal struggle; and especially in the areas of inclusion and empowerment of ethnic, religious and sexually oriented minorities on the basis of equality, which are excluded and silenced by the Turkish Sunni-based official perspective of history.

First and foremost, the HDK has had a significant effect upon social movements in Turkey, and upon the transformation of the political forms of movements engaged in Turkey's

revolutionary struggle. Although the HDP, which emerged from the HDK, provided a boost to the political party oriented traditional approach, the congress form pioneered in Turkey by the HDK remains a reference among activists in Turkey.

As a form of organization from below, the HDK became instrumental in transforming assemblies into a key organizational form, inspiring new political processes and new associations (for instance the United June movement)<sup>58</sup>. Talking about this, one movement component activist representing Kaldirac, a left wing political magazine notes:

I think HDK made an important contribution to these lands, brought the idea of the councils back to the agenda and as I said, Gezi Forums and No Councils came about. For example, the idea of a council has now settled. If you are going to organise a people's organisation in this land, it will be named a council. When we say council, people think of an idea that started by people having their own participation and that they had a say in its formation. This idea gained ground. A line emerged from here. This is not something to be underestimated. I am not saying that there is no predecessor to it but the fact that it emerged stronger and that the two struggles are doing this on a common ground, that was the difference and also it emerged strongly. And now, there is nobody in this country who is discussing this. I mean, how do we organise? We will organise with the councils. This is very clear. Nobody thinks otherwise. This is not something to be underestimated, it is a step forward (Individual Interview, T15).

The class and national-based organising perspective of revolutionary movements in Turkey has evolved into a holistic approach as a result of the HDK's congress programme. Within the HDK's horizontal, participative praxis, identities which the traditional left struggle had long overlooked have finally emerged into the public sphere, finding their legitimate representations within the movement and creating a new awareness. By challenging the national narrative, HDK has demonstrated that different identities can form a line of struggle on the basis of being equals under one umbrella, and demonstrated this also through the movement's decision-making and participation mechanisms.

We now consider some of the impacts of the HDK at the societal level through the experiences and comments of HDK activists.

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<sup>58</sup> The United June movement (*Birleşik Haziran Hareketi*, BHH) was formed in 2014 as a political coalition bringing together left-wing, communist and socialist parties, Marxist–Leninist political organizations, independent individuals and various left-wing non-governmental organizations in Turkey.

*Struggle for dealing with the past and the ‘insurrection of subjugated knowledge’*

The perspective set forth in the HDK programme demanded on the one hand the recognition of the diversity of all identities which coexist in Turkey, defying official narratives of national unity, and on the other hand contributed to the demand for social justice and peace by opening a space for those oppressed, excluded and ignored identities to appear in the public sphere. By condemning and exposing all those historical crimes and injustices of the Turkisj state from the Armenian-Assyrian Genocide of 1915, to the Pontus and Dersim genocides, from the Circassian genocide to the Alevi massacres in Maras, Çorum and Sivas, to the mass violence and unidentified e d crimes against Kurds in the 1990s through various political activities (conferences, seminars, special report writing and commemorations), the HDK has come to played in important role in what as Michel Foucault would call the ‘insurrection of the subjugated knowledges’ that are long ‘buried’ and ‘disqualified’ in Turkey’s history (Foucault, 2003:7-8).

This new counter-memory uprising also meant the birth of a counter-memorial regime. It emerged from the grammar of the commemoration regime of Turkish-Sunni character, which established itself and is based on the motto of ‘national unity’. The official narrative of national unity is rooted in supposed glorious victories of the past, the glorification of the nation, and remembrance of ‘great heroes’ of the past. It is defined by an emphasis on the slogan ‘*for* Turkey’. The counter-memory-based commemoration regime, with the Kurdish liberation movement as its driving force, defined itself with an emphasis on the slogan ‘*because of* Turkey’, in reference to the victims, oppression and injustice upon which the nation has been build. This counter-memory emphasises a pluralistic nation, and the voicing of the shameful facts of a past silenced by the official narrative of national unity.

Through its praxis and the process of bringing together such diverse peoples from across Turkey, a key element of the HDK’s struggle has been this work confronting the official narrative of the past, and bringing alternative narratives and histories of vulnerable groups to the public sphere, hence bringing about Turkey’s insurrection of subjugated knowledges.

An activist close to *Kaldıraç*, one of the HDK’s component members, states that the HDK is an important step in the struggle against mainstream nationalism:

[HDK] attempted to gather all these dynamics of struggle in this land under one roof. It succeeded to a large extent. Let's not say it broke it but

let us say it caused a serious crack in the shell of nationalism. (...) The development of a common struggle played a serious role in the curbing of nationalism here. The peoples who started to express themselves thanks to the struggle of the Kurdish People started to stand together more organised and next to each other. It made serious contributions (Individual interview, T15)

An Armenian activist explains the HDK and HDPs' efforts to highlight the Armenian Genocide, and its effects at the societal level, as follows:

Both HDK and HDP members showed a confident and bold attitude towards the Armenian Genocide, as in all other issues, despite all the costs. I think that HDP's statements, especially Selahattin Demirtas's statements, Ahmet Turk's statements had a great impact on Kurdish society. 'We made a big mistake in the past, what happened to the Armenians that day is happening to us today'. I think that the HDK had a significant achievement in establishing that empathy; it has been a great learning and teaching process for me and for the Armenians and the Kurds, both in relation to establishing that empathy and to understand what happened a hundred years ago. Because the Armenian people also had prejudices against the Kurdish people, the attitudes in this period, I see those prejudices against the Kurdish people, the attitudes in this period I see it all over the world, the Armenians of the Diaspora showed great development, the prejudices wore off (Individual interview, T39).

Another activist discusses the effect of the HDK on society with regards to the past, and its work to draw attention to the Armenian and Syriac Genocide:

It is not right if we don't see the positive contribution of [HDK]. It made a very serious contribution; because both the HDK and HDP had this in their statutes, the programme or for example the election bulletin, namely the 1915 Armenian and Syriac genocide. This is a recognised, accepted approach. The fact HDK accepted it made it more controversial. Today, if 1915 is a serious debate in Turkey, if it is in the agenda and if confrontation is mentioned, then I think it is impossible not to see the contribution of the HDK in this issue. It made a very positive contribution to it. In other words, the discussions we had there and the thoughts we shared, they all found echo in society. We can say that the memory awakening you are talking about in society is thanks to the efforts of the HDK and HDP. Of course, there are other efforts, but the HDK and HDP have very serious positive contributions in this regard (Individual Interview, T40).

A Yezidi activist, also a member of the Peoples and Beliefs Commission and actively engaged in the HDP, also draws attention to the HDK's social pedagogy through the work of confronting the past:

The reasons for the HDP's success in politics today are the infrastructural studies carried out by the HDK. In other words, they are political analysis and studies. (...) HDK was established in 2011 and immediately sends deputies to the parliament. Therefore, despite all the pressures, this establishment idea and philosophy of the HDK contributes to the HDP's success. Because I think they had an accurate analysis. Because there is sensitivity for everything, from family to intercultural communication, from relationship with Muslims, Christians, pressure on Yazidis, to Sinjar. Therefore, that sensitivity forms a social pedagogy. It then gets back to you as a form of behavior in social pedagogy. For example, organizing and participating to Commemoration of Medz Yeghern<sup>59</sup> and Commemoration of Sinjar Mascarra<sup>60</sup>(...) discussing what is happening to the Yazidis people, especially women at Galatasaray Square in Istanbul through HDK is a huge thing, especially in the context of Turkey! I think, bringing those life experiences, histories and stories of those Yezidis to those people live in the big metropoles and incorporating those issues that are important to those marginalised communities (for instance recent massacres of Yazidis particularly on women by the ISIS) into the HDK's political agenda is an important thing that has a pedagogical and social manifestation that changes people's attitudes (Individual Interview, T34).

#### *The construction of counter-hegemony and empowerment of minorities*

The HDK, with its alternative politics, praxis and organisational form, represents a new third force in opposition to the current hegemonic actors of Turkey (the Sunni-conservative nationalist block and secular-nationalist block). Yet HDK's struggle is does not define itself by its opposition to those two hegemonic political poles, and does not adapt its agenda to their grammar, but rather it is based on a radical new strategy which transcends these two hegemonic poles, rooted in the collective construction of counter-hegemony. The new subjectivities produced in this counter-hegemonic stance have been instrumental in strengthening all those Others who have long been subordinated to Turkish and Sunni subjectification in every aspect (culturally, politically and socially) and allowing them to speak as themselves and for themselves through the symbolic affirmation created by the HDK's radical third line option.

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<sup>59</sup> *Medz Yeghern* (Great Crime) refers to Armenian genocide that resulted in the killing of 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottoman Turks in 1915.

<sup>60</sup> The activist refers to a massacre that took place in Sinjar Mountain (in Nineveh region in Iraq) in August 2014 that marked the beginning of the genocide of Yazidis by ISIS, and the killing and abduction of thousands of Yazidi men, women and children.

A Syriac activist argues that the most fundamental effect the HDK has had on Turkey is the development of a new awareness within society:

So now when we look at it as a whole, we can say that HDK's practice is very successful because it had an effect on Turkey. I mean, it has intellectually impacted the whole Turkish community. Turkey learned that there are structures that have different understanding than the dominant understanding, that there are different peoples, learned that there are different religious structures. This is the success of HDK (Individual Interview, T40).

A Yezidi activist explains how the HDK's counter-hegemonic perspective encourages vulnerable groups to engage in the public sphere:

HDK, I should maybe avoid saying that it resolved the issue regarding the powerful dominating the powerless, but at least I think I can say it opened a door in that regard, put a question mark and said that this was not destiny. Perhaps I think it has made a new addition to the concept of 'geography is destiny' that we have been hearing for thousands of years. The HDK said this; 'If this is destiny, we can intervene in this destiny, change it, transform it', and they did it. The most important thing was this; before the HDK, the powerful were celebrating their existence in the middle of the street, out in the public area, others were imprisoned inside their houses to celebrate their holidays in agony, but the HDK created a brotherhood of holidays. All holidays were siblings. So now there is the calendar of the peoples, the agenda of rights, and the HDK built incredible bridges, paved roads, laid signs for the peoples to touch each other (Individual Interview, T34).

An HDK General Assembly member states that the impacts of the HDK's pluralist structure and the challenge to the monist narrative and the structures that built the symbolic power of this singular narrative, brought with it a Turkish-Sunni reaction:

[HDK] eliminated the significant prejudices of people from different faith communities, such as our Armenian friends, Sunni, Shafi, Kurdish friends and Alevi friends. I think this is a very important thing. In my opinion, this attitude and approach of HDK partially spread to the HDP. I think this is the first ground of pluralism. So, a Muslim friend who is doing politics in this party now knows this. Yes, Alevis have problems in this country, Cem Houses are their faith centers. I think this is an important thing. Yes, just as we have a Ramadan Feast, if we have a Sacrifice Feast, there is Easter for the Christians living on this land. But I think we have not strengthened this enough. This wouldn't not happen in the current conjuncture, but I think Selahattin Demirtaş tried it in the June 7th election. I think there was a big reaction here, as, we objected to one of the basic foundations

of the Turkish-Sunni thing. It is not so easy to build positive things anyway (Individual Interview, T43).

An activist from the Call for New World Magazine, an HDK component, explains the positive effects of the emergence of various marginalised groups and demands within the HDK:

Syriacs, for example, are at least as important as the Armenians. We call it all Armenians, but the Assyrians also suffered genocide as much as the Armenians. In other words, they are a society that suffered in 1915. For example, they started to express themselves on this ground for the first time [in the HDK]. So, it was a very important thing. They appeared and we started to get to know the Assyrians more closely for the first time and they started to explain themselves more intensely. Also, the Romanis, we all used to use this traditional definition and called them Gypsies. But for the first time, the Romanis emerged on the grounds of the HDK and started to defend themselves and express themselves; I mean, I know, many of us had not heard of them or didn't even known their name until they emerged. So, it was an extremely exciting situation. It's with the HDK that I began to see and hear much more intensively of such colourful social structures in Turkey. This was an important thing. (...) In other words, there is something that these social segments are increasingly connected to internationally. There is an origin and a country. So, this gradually carried your studies to an international basis. Let me say that. For example, there were the Rums. What do we say to the Rums? It was the first time that the Rums who lived here came out and spoke on the grounds of the HDK, they were talking about themselves, how much these discriminatory policies and marginalizing approaches affected them... Maybe we didn't know until then; but because they are Rum for the first time, after all, they are the people of these lands, they lived here and they remained as a very important minority and still persist here. To learn about their problems and troubles; it was an important experience, an important excitement, to get to know them and therefore to include them into the political discourse (Individual Interview, T18).

An Alevi-Kurdish activist, member of the HDK's Culture and Art Commission, explains that HDK not only created symbolic empowerment for these oppressed social groups, but also helped to highlight issues of the different groups as they arose:

There was an incident in Malatya. There was an attack on a family in a neighbourhood. There had been an attack on an Alevi family. I saw how difficult it was for the members of that family to convey what they lived somehow, okay? I remember it well. Then the HDK came into play. With the involvement of HDK this issue that happened in Malatya, began to be discussed intensively in the Turkish media. As an Alevi issue. I understood that: yes, this excited me so much. This is why we went to Malatya twice. In other words, social segments that were seen as problems were not alone. After the HDK, even if a Romani's little finger was harmed, we

would go to Edirne, this was very important. If an Alevi's house was destroyed in Malatya, we were there. If someone was making an attack; we were there, because 'we' meant, 'HDK' meant, that all these structures concentrated in some way all this representation. Under normal circumstances this is very difficult to create. So let's say, there is an incident, okay, group A goes there but group B doesn't because they don't consider it as close to themselves. But when the HDK is the case, I saw that all these groups jointly organised a reaction in some way. I also understood that this was a very important factor in taking a step back. In other words, we combined our powers, in a moment but we were also an important thing in front of the isolation of these social segments, we served as a barrier. And of course, we also made them feel that they were not alone in some way. This was a very important thing. This excited me. For example, we went to the Black Sea, we went to Malatya, we went to Edirne. Or we were going to another place when there was a problem there. In other words, whatever I know, the workers were falling from the cranes in Tuzla, and they were having a hard time talking about their problems and conveying their problems, it was very important when we went there; we were doing something, suddenly it was on the agenda. It was a very important thing. We were going strong, so they were too (Individual Interview, T18).

An HDK activist emphasises that the movement became a target of the state because it has managed to become such an important counter-hegemonic actor:

I think the HDK has proven itself as a project. In its one hundred years, this was the first time in the Turkish Republic, in terms of the regime and all identities and in terms of faith, that oppressed classes had a threatening and organised restructuring against the state in such a way. Both revolutionaries and Leftists and democrats should know this. The state already knew this before us, understood and valued it more than I think. It has better analyzed its value and its future effects. Because this is a six-century, seven-century old reflex for the state, and the state has taken measures accordingly. We have slightly underestimated our own success. It is a success to be able to frighten so many state institutions, its parties, the representatives of capital, armed or unarmed officials, and make them take such serious measures. So that in itself is an indicator of success (Individual Interview, T21).

The counter-hegemonic rhetoric and practices of the Kurdish liberation movement strengthened other vulnerable minorities within HDK, and encouraged them to recognise their own struggles. Some activists drew attention to this point and emphasised the importance of inter-movement mobility, solidarity and learning in the congress. For example, a Circassian activist describes the effect of Kurdish liberation movement on the Laz and Circassians as follows:

The Kurdish Revolution revealed a little bit of that. PKK also helped it get exposed a little bit more. Let me give you an example from daily life. For example, it is thanks to the Kurds that the Laz and Circassians could publish publications and become so self-expressive (Individual Interview, T15).

An active movement actor who is a member of the Syriac Unions Federation, one of the active components of HDK since its foundation, and also a deputy of HDP Mardin, explains how Kurdish liberation movement's struggle has affected on the Assyrians:

Two points can be mentioned. One, the Syriacs were affected in terms of the change created by the Kurdish liberation movement and the Kurdish people. In other words, because there was more religious weight in the past, more feudal structure in the past, and a structure with religious dignity in the foreground, and a different structure in these Assyrians were negatively affected because they were Christians; of course, Syriacs were also affected in terms of that feudal structure. The change created by the Kurdish liberation movement; the Assyrians saw this as very positive, since the equality, fraternity of the peoples, or the idea of the peoples living together on a common, equal basis has developed the Kurdish people positively. Of course, the second point, in other words, the Kurdish struggle influenced the Syriacs. So that was the point I am making. This emerging thought, this development, this struggle led to the emergence of a thought and a struggle amongst the Assyrians. The development of the Kurds affected both the Assyrians and the Syrian freedom movement and created a positive development in terms of the Assyrians forming their own structures (Individual Interview, T40).

#### *The spread of gender policies*

Based on the general perspective of the Kurdish liberation movement, the HDK's democratic and egalitarian means of participation have had significant impacts in altering gender dynamics in the country. As discussed in the previous section, the HDK's gender related praxis, principles and policies inspired many movements and institutions across Turkey. Many HDK affiliates have carried these mechanisms into their organisations over time. Through its gender policies, the HDK not only influenced the subjective transformations of its activists and the institutional-level perspective of its components, but also paved the way for these policies to have widespread social effects.

A female activist from the New Life Association tells how the HDK's approach to gender transforms activists not only in terms of their activism within HDK, but also in their relations with their families and communities in their concrete experiences of everyday life.

We do not do all this struggle in vain, we do not waste all this effort, and people do these things in their own homes too. We have many friends, and we can go to their houses. This auto-control also began to happen in their homes. For the classic Turkish leftist or Kurdish leftist, the free woman is out of the reach for him all the time. They give her great value but don't want her as their wife. We are trying to change it. We are developing a very serious resistance in that regard. We make it our red line and it is really effective. They are really changing. For example, many married female friends have said to us, 'after my husband came here, he changed a lot. He comes home and help with chores; he changed the way he speaks'. These are important things to one person, even to two people. The problem with leftism is that we already talk a lot about the problem, but we do not put it out in our lives. We will do it with such little things. (...) So, we feel very good as women. We know that we have a serious impact on men. Men sincerely pay attention; The way they act and behave. For example, they wash the dishes in the kitchen. Let's see them not doing it and they will see what is coming to them (laughs) (Individual Interview, T33).

An Armenian activist explains what happened during an election campaign where he stood alongside a transgender person, and the transformation which this process had on him and his family:

I was a candidate for the Municipal Council Membership in Kadikoy along with a trans women named Asya. We were both standing for an election as two candidates to co-share the position. The candidacy of one trans women and one Armenian alongside each other and willing to co-share the power was seen first time in Turkey's history and hence generated lots of interest both in the media and TV and in society. Asya and I were appearing on various TV and media as co-candidates. This was an amazing experience. Frankly up until ÖDP<sup>61</sup>, I looked at these sexual preferences as a disease. But I came to realise it was my own disease. Running an election campaign with Asya and interacting with her and other trans and gay community was ultimately a test for me to see my own limitations and to overcome them in practice. The effect of these interactions for me (my family and Armenian community) was simply enormous... For instance, on one occasion, a 70-year-old man approaches to my father and tells him that 'an Armenian and trans woman are standing side by side in his neighborhood' under the HDP without knowing that that Armenian was me. The first time an Armenian standing in an election as themselves together with a transwoman. These kind of interactions and conversations within my own community and between different communities are incredibly important. They represent breaking points in our history... I think we broke a lot of things thanks to these interactions

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<sup>61</sup> He refers to Freedom and Solidarity Party (ÖDP) /Özgürlik ve Dayanışma Partisi which was formed in 1996 and brought together range of left political parties and organisations.

and experiences within ourselves and our communities. It is very important someone like me who has worked at religious cleric at a church attending to a pride parade organised by LGBTQ communities (Individual Interview, T46).

#### *The flourishing of the idea of social peace*

The HDK has increased the hope for social peace in Turkey, and revealed that this can only happen with under such a model. In difficult times, the HDK has demonstrated its capacity to adapt to the situation and reach out to broader society. The HDK exposed the possibility of a common social opposition and solidarity:

We began to believe with the HDK that in Turkey all the problems can be solved by discussing politics. In other words, everyone has experienced the fear; because different dynamics come into play where there is no politics, and that these confrontational understandings will gradually complicate the solution and deepen the gap between the social peoples, both on the state front and in other segments. I also lived it as an artist. The only way to get around this is through the HDK and through strengthening the political ground and the political space. In this sense, the HDK was a meaningful start in the creation of this as an idea. Later on, this process was strengthened further with the HDP (Individual Interview, T18).

A member of the Labor Party (EMEP) and activist who was involved in the establishment of the HDK emphasises the movement's contribution to the development of a peaceful life perspective:

The HDK has done meaningful things that have left important marks in our history, not only in terms of its struggle against the war, but also creating a meaningful democratic opposition against the government and addressing the conjectural and temporal problems and issues. Of course, our presence in the parliament and our work and speeches in the parliament also drew attention to the HDK's work. The HDK (and of course the HDP) has ensured/shown that the Kurdish Movement/people are not alone and that Kurdish problem can only be solved by a peaceful and democratic means by creating a common stance and position against the encirclement and marginalization of Kurdish politics/politicians. The HDK's instance and work on the need for peace both in Turkey has made an important inroad into circles and section of society who approach the Kurdish issue with nationalistic prejudices by forming new relations with these section of society, including them in political space and convincing them the joint struggle is possible and will be beneficial to everyone. The HDK especially explained to those people living especially in the western part of Turkey and those workers and laborers working in industrial zones how Kurdish issue and their issues are combatable and related as the

Kurdish demands are no longer involves in separation or division. By explaining the importance of solving the Kurdish issue (peace) and its indispensability not just for Kurds but everyone and for a democratic Turkey, The HDK has undoubtably managed to bring all those people together and work collectively (Individual Interview, T36).

One of the most prominent activists and founding members of the HDK explains the effect of the congress experience on social peace, and why this should be seen as a success:

This experience is very instructive. There is a bridge constructed between philosophy and truth for the first time in Turkey. There is no experience more valuable than this. The pre-eighty experiences are very small and particular compared to this. There is a huge maturity here, there is prudence. You see, we criticise ourselves, but we should not overdo it. Everyone pushed their capacity to the end, their hopes, their ideas, their maturity. Think about it, only six million people in Turkey are supporting us and assuming that all these six million are supporting this radical freedom project would be an exaggeration. Organising that much hope with so few materials, keeping it standing and saying 'let me stand next to it' is not something that can be taken lightly at all. So, I can say that I see this journey to hope as proof that it can actually happen. We have come this far, and this is not something to be forsaken. Of course, Marx always says; 'Revolutions stop, they stop and look at themselves, and they mock the dwarfness of their situation.' Frankly, when we look back, we see that it can actually be thought of like this. I think we have already seen where the possibility of change in Turkey is. The state knows that we see it, and so it wants to blind our eyes and cut our fingers. However, the information is out (Individual Interview, T45).

## Conclusion

As we have hopefully demonstrated in this chapter, the HDK has transformed individuals, institutions, and society in meaningful and substantive ways. At an individual level it has developed a new identity amongst activists that is rooted in the history of Turkey, embracing its diversity and richness of imagination. These new social subjects are interacting in new and exciting ways with each other, developing a new vocabulary and grammar of struggle, forging new solidarities and respect, and creating new radical and revolutionary subjects that have the capacity to think and act beyond the hegemonic status quo. These transformed social subjects are spreading that change to their relationships, their families and work colleagues, educating, persuading and transforming them in both subtle and profound ways.

Institutionally, the HDK's model and ethos has dramatically transformed oppositional politics in Turkey. The horizontal, participatory, open model of organisation has become a template

for other organisations to follow and replicate. The HDK has forged unity and solidarity in bringing together diverse social groups in a way that had never been done before in Turkey. This space of encounter has facilitated the production of new ideas, new visions, and new historical memory that has provided oxygen for communities and identities that have long been suppressed. The HDK has led an insurrection of memory that pervades the present and harnesses the talents and diversity of a plethora of diverse actors.

Societally, the HDK has similarly had a massive effect on the political landscape of Turkey. It has created a new politics of recognition for all those left out of the official story of belonging. It has extended its reach and its ideas well beyond those achieved by previous oppositional movements, and its political wing the HDP won more than 6 million electoral votes. Its effects are also demonstrated in the sad reality that the HDK/HDP and its affiliate movements are now under attack across the country by a state that deploys overwhelming force against any challenger. Many of the HDKs founders and leaders languish in prisons, or in exile, many have lost their jobs and face widespread persecution. Sadly, it has been the Kurdish areas, once again, that have faced the most sustained and violent state response and the brutal legacy of that remains. Despite the repression, both the HDK/HDP continue their work, and their ideas, values and vision remain a powerful mobilizing force across the country. The struggle continues.

## 6. Conclusion

The Peoples' Democratic Congress (HDK) was founded in 2011 with the coming together of the Kurdish liberation movement and Turkey's socialist movements through the political form of a 'Congress', a horizontal and egalitarian form of association based on multiplicity and togetherness. With this political platform, based on prefigurative policies, it aims to construct the future '*from today and in today*' by embracing the vision of '*building political, economic and social emancipation together*' by making it subject to a '*new life*'.

The HDK's struggle not only calls for a structural material change, but at the same time also signals an epistemological break which strives for 'cognitive justice' precisely in the way Santos describes (Santos, 2007, 2014). The goal of 'democratic confederalism', the theoretical and political framework specified by the political and ideological leader of the Kurdish liberation movement Abdullah Öcalan (2017), is the backbone of the HDK's '*new life*' ideal- agreed upon by all the social actors in the organisation- both materially and epistemologically. The HDK seeks to challenge the colonial and patriarchal nation-state form that underpins capitalism (*capitalist modernity*) and create a new counter-hegemonic political ethos (*democratic modernity*).

Looking at the HDK's brief history, we can say that in a remarkably short amount of time the HDK created an exciting political alternative and offered a vision for the future that was unique in its scope, ambition and inclusivity to so many marginalised sectors of society. Our research shows that the HDK gained significant visibility in those early years, facilitated by a range of conjunctural factors, including the fact that peace seemed to be on the cards, conflict was relatively low, and the media was interested in the HDK's activities. It was in this climate that the HDK sought to form new political organisation, a new party, in order to capitalise upon its momentum and extend its influence and represent excluded groups in the parliament. That decision, and its subsequent electoral success, brought with it a number of challenges and problems internally, in terms of the relationship between HDK and HDP, but more importantly also unleashed the full anti-democratic and authoritarian wrath of the Turkish state.

While the current situation of the HDK seems to remain a long distance from achieving its initial aims and goals, it has become and remains an important member of the broader social struggle in Turkey. While the future direction of the HDK remains an open question, this report

has clearly demonstrated the that the processes, practices and strategies of the HDK, aimed at uniting a wide range of social forces left out of the benefits of Turkish ‘development’, and the subsequent creation of the HDP and its immediate electoral successes, have been nothing short of historic.

This report has explored the learning and knowledge-making processes of the HDK as they have evolved over the last decade, and captured its foundational legacies, its ongoing development, and the challenges it has faced as an exciting and radically different, new social movement in Turkey. In this concluding chapter we will try to review and synthesise some of the major findings of the research, and reflect on their significance. In the next section, we will synthesise the main findings of the report in relation to the research questions. We then go on to reflect upon the way learning and knowledge-making is conceived of within the HDK. Finally, we make some points about the HDK and its challenges, social movements in general and future directions.

In chapter one, we presented the methodology of the research process in Turkey, including data collection, methodological challenges and our ethical approach. In the context of our research, we tried to address three basic questions:

- 1: How does the HDK, located in complex conflict-affected situations, learn and make knowledge? And how does this process of learning and knowledge-making assist the HDK in developing a strategy that can meet the demands of its members?
- 2: What type of knowledge has the HDK made and what has it learned in relation to key dimensions such as Security; Objectives; Leverage for Change; Communication; Internal Cohesion; Inter-Movement Alliances; International Solidarity?
- 3: What have been the effects of the HDK (the learning and knowledge produced) on the promotion and realisation of peace with social justice in Turkey?

In order to answers these questions, drawing on the ‘systematisiation of experiences approach’, we developed a comprehensive research strategy combining archive analysis with interviews, focus groups and workshops. In doing this we sought to create a shared, collective memory of the movement by consulting as many people as we could that had been involved in the HDK process. Overall, we conducted 55 semi-structured individual interviews, 2 focus group meetings, and 5 workshops, with over 200 people participating in the research.

Furthermore, we triangulated this information through extensive engagement with secondary resources (Congress Magazine published by HDK, Independent Communication Network (BIA-NET) based media screening, social media screening, etc, and HDK archives.

The research combined extensive fieldwork with participatory observation in a range of day-to-day HDK processes. Our participatory approach included attending meetings, protests and activities, and engaging in a constant dialogue with movement activists and leaders.

In chapter two we reflected on the historical roots and evolution of the HDK and its ongoing development. The roots of the HDK's foundation in 2011 can be traced to the 1970s. The Turkish left's interaction with the Kurdish movement increased from the 1980s, during the 1990s they searched for new modes of interaction, and at the beginnings of 2000s, it finally went beyond 'supporting' the Kurdish liberation movement, and evolved into a mode of organisation which cultivated structural togetherness and co-operation. Yet from at least the beginnings of 1980s until 2011, the experiences of associations between the Kurdish freedom movement and the socialist & identity movements based on forms such as political 'front', 'union of force', 'bloc' or 'platform' were not continuous. In the 1980s and 1990s, there were 'fronts' and 'unions of forces' stemming from the armed struggle, and the missions of the Europe-based organisational cadres, which left Turkey in the aftermath of the 12 September *coup d'état*. The 1990s was marked by legal struggles inclined towards electoral alliances or 'blocs' for election purposes, and 'platforms' for rights-based partnerships, which started with political parties in the Kurdish movement axis and improved thanks to the various dynamics of trade unions' missions and delegations, human rights-based civil society processes and the women's movements. The accumulation of all those experiences led to the formation of the HDK in the autumn of 2011. Distinct from its predecessors, HDK's emergence as a 'congress' reflected how the movement had learned from the failures of previous forms of association and the pressing need to build horizontal solidarity and inter-movement empathy and collaboration.

The HDK was created, and perceived by its founding members, on the basis of necessity. On the one hand, the necessity created to build upon the achievements of the democratic and left alliances, which had made important breakthroughs between 1995 and by 2011, in alliance with independent members and activists, and shift onto a social movement footing; and on the other hand, the necessity search for a new type of association/relationship due to

the pragmatic transformation that the Kurdish liberation movement had been experiencing since the beginning of the 2000s. It is important to add that this dynamic trajectory was bolstered by the widespread demand for the construction of direct democracy, especially via assemblies, linked to the rise of new social movements around the world during the same period.

In chapter three, we addressed the first research question, exploring how social movements learn and generate knowledge. The outcomes of our field research show that the HDK's collective protest repertoire is developed according to the movement's foundational goals indicated in its platforms and statutes, as well as according to the contemporary political conjuncture. In breaking this down for analytical purposes, we argued that HDK activists learn and produce knowledge in three broad and different forms: learning *in* struggle, learning *through* struggle, and learning *to* struggle. In that regard, the most effective learning space for HDK activists was generally during their engagements via protests, marches, campaigns: learning in struggle. The interaction of activists with different socio-cultural histories and experiences in informal activities and protests creates strong subjective transformations at the individual-level, and increased and facilitated processes of learning between. Mechanisms such as the assembly, commission, congress, and forum which have strong mechanisms of active participation, guarantees for freedom of expression (and the right to dissent/criticise) are the 'spaces' where the generation of information and learning were most effective within the HDK.

However, the routines of struggle of the movements, as well as the unprecedented events that emerged within Turkish society during that period, revealed the learning experiences that took place *through* the struggle of the HDK. Our research suggests that the intense and vibrant struggles of the HDK during abrupt and unpredictable external events provided a fertile terrain for knowledge production, learning and collective memory. However, the periods in which state violence, oppression and criminalization of the HDK increased also caused some activists to step back (due to individual security concerns, intense pressure, threats etc) and caused the HDK (and other movements) to shrink (due to arrests, exile, going underground or mobilising the cadres for other organisational priorities) and eventually weaken. This dual dynamic resulted in the broadening of the HDK's repertoire of struggle, and an increase in the political subjectivity of its activists, but also led to the decline of street-based mass

mobilization, and the weakening of the collective togetherness of the HDK's constituent parts and individual members. In both situations, there is a rich accumulation of experience in which learning, and knowledge production occurred through struggle- both for the movement and for the activists involved.

Our research also shows that since its foundation, the HDK has gradually recognised the necessity of not only learning *in* or *through* the HDK experience of struggle, but also *learning to* struggle. As a result, it has started developing and implementing a more structured learning programme, as part of a new learning policy and strategy. This strategic learning approach remains relatively new, and is still nascent. The HDK, founded in 2011, staged its first annual camp for education and evaluation in 2017; the Education Commission started its education services at a local level in 2018, and the idea of HDK schools only came into discussion in 2018. The idea, which started as training for HDK activists, in time evolved into the idea of HDK schools, which aim to transfer the critical perspective of a '*new life*' to wider society. The one-day education modules which take place in the HDK Education Commission's local organisations, yearly seminar camps and thematic conferences, the Ata Soyer Health School of Politics, and the HDK Schools (preparations for which are still ongoing), are all part of the development of the HDK's own radical pedagogy. The HDK's nascent approach to education radically questions neoliberal global capitalist modernity, the nation-state paradigm, the patriarchal gender regime, and ongoing human-centred unequal relations between humans and nature. The development of an emancipatory pedagogies that will constitute an alternative for the aforementioned mindsets and contribute to the realisation of the '*new life*' ideal is still going ongoing, but the seeds have now been sown and shoots are emerging and beginning to blossom.

In chapter four, we explored the question concerning the sort of knowledge and information the HDK generates and learns about. Our data shows that the HDK generates and accumulates huge amounts of knowledge and learning *within the struggle, through the struggle and for the struggle*, which also creates possibilities for change in different domains. Across chapter four we delved into 6 key knowledge-making themes: unity in diversity; political party vs social movement; struggle in times of conflict; knowledge making related to peace and the peace process; prefigurative politics within the HDK; and prefigurative gender spaces. Finally, we drew some conclusions on the HDK's knowledge making processes.

The HDK's political framework has generated an immense amount of knowledge and learning possibilities. The practice of unity in diversity which is central to the HDK's politics chimes with the words of poet Yaşar Kemal as '*a garden with a thousand flowers*', in that it is an experience which recognises differences and does not attempt to homogenise the subjects involved. This togetherness, which is seen as a multiplicity that cannot be reduced, and joining around what is common to all of them, seems to be the concrete version of what had been tried by social movements in Turkey throughout the 20th century, yet remained unrealised until HDK came into being. However, our research also shows that this process is not without its challenges. This experience, whose structure is tied to the solid theoretical ground of the congress model, creates various tensions and conflicts. These tensions emerge in various guises, including the relationship between the party-form (HDP) and congress form (HDK); the contradiction between class-based and identity based political priorities; the disagreements between individuals and affiliated components during the decision-making and participation processes; and the latent resistance of men towards the implementation of gender equality policies. All of these tensions have enriched the HDK's experiences in the ongoing (constant) process of construction of unity in diversity.

While the HDK was founded on the congress political form as an alternative to the political party, after a short time it decided to establish the HDP as a 'congress party' in order to extend its reach in the electoral domain. Initially, the HDP, whose legal establishment was achieved thanks to the organisational resources of HDK, was considered as a tool to increase the profile, aims and visions and power of the congress. Yet from 2015 onwards, the HDP gained widespread popularity and became seen as the 'last stronghold' of political opposition, due to the rapidly changing political climate. This led it to become much more prominent than the HDK, and gain an important and notable political base of support, both in parliament and in broader society.

This experience corresponds to a process in which new information is produced and different learning processes occur due to both the course of the social struggle, which is conducted by two different organisational forms, and the tension and conflict dynamics that occasionally occur between those two forms. Our research findings suggest that amongst the HDK's activists, the principle factor blamed for the movement's current dysfunction is actually the HDP, its own creation. Indeed, the most common interpretation among HDK activists is that

the HDK's constituents move towards the HDP because it increases their visibility in the public sphere, and independent individuals in the HDK move towards HDP because they wish to acquire status and power in the party, and they believe that they will be able to have more individual security if they are engaged in a formal political party. The rise of populism in the political arena, the demise of mobilization on the streets because of the government's state of exception measures, the neoliberal destruction of society's solidarity webs in the society, and the lingering attachment to the political vehicle of the electoral party, have caused the marginalization of the congress format.

Despite the fact that since 2018 the HDK and HDP have tried on multiple occasions to orchestrate initiatives to overcome this tension and problem, it continues appear that the HDP has absorbed the synergy created by the HDK from 2011 onwards. It is extremely challenging for the HDK to reclaim the terrain in the grassroots domain that it initially garnered. This points to a fruitful learning process via the concrete example of the HDP-HDK experience in terms of how the types of organisation and their organising processes are related, which sorts of factors and dynamics these relations produce, and how they evolve.

The construction and implementation of a mode of prefigurative policies that seeks the realisation of the HDK's vision for the future *from today & in today – the vision* of a new life based on social peace, equality and justice - constitutes another fertile and rich terrain of experience, knowledge and learning. The period from 2011 to 2015, which constitutes the early phase of HDKs evolution and development, was one of relatively low levels of state oppression and violence, as well as a partial opening of the possibilities for democratic expression and democratic debate, and strong hopes for success of the peace negotiations. This provided a rich terrain and the political space for the HDK to construct the *new life* that it aspired to. During that period, its prefigurative politics functioned as a way of living the future in the present. For the HDK mirrored its aspirations of a new democratic modernity through the construction and promotion of a range of initiatives. These included the construction of assemblies and radical democratic representational forms, the promotion of LGBTQ and women-positive critiques of patriarchy; and communal-egalitarian economic initiatives and approaches based on these prefigurative politics and ideals. These prefigurative aspects of organising, which are central to the HDK's process of constructing the future in the present, are seen as central to the long-term struggle. Therefore, the relative neglect and

postponement of some of these policies when the context shifted and oppression and violence increased became a trigger for an internal crisis in the HDK. This is a complex and difficult challenge, which goes beyond the HDK, and extends out to the broader realm of social movements including the Kurdish liberation movement and the Turkish socialist movement. On the one hand, there is the hostile attitude of the state towards the concrete construction of prefigurative policies, and the state's attacks which have broken down the collective spaces that were so carefully constructed. On the other hand, the activists who have been subject to this repression, often cannot free themselves from the patriarchal, sexist and power-hungry elements within their own movements, who in response to state repression, start to raise their voices and express their discontent concerning the effects of these prefigurative policies. For instance, it is the women's struggle and LGBTQ struggle that have often been sacrificed in those dark moments, despite them being the most vulnerable to attack. When times get tough, it has tended to be the prefigurative politics which are immediately queried, problematised and on occasion ridiculed as 'utopic practices' that are too difficult to be realised under harsher conditions. As movements and activists retreat back into the safer terrains of political parties and secure ideas, the powerful aspirations of prefigurative politics become eroded.

The policies which target patriarchy are of great importance to HDK. The nationalistic and highly patriarchal nation-state has been fundamentally challenged by the HDK's platform which sees the struggle of women and LGBTQ movements as fundamental within the struggle. These policies have been influenced by various strands and struggles which target patriarchy, including that of Jineology-the science of women's freedom - which was developed under the influence of the 'Epistemologies of the South' framework within the Kurdish freedom movement; feminism rooted in the leftist movements in Turkey; LGBTQ movement which was involved actively in the establishment process of the congress.

The HDK's gender-neutral information, stance and approach is an ethical driving principle of all of the movement's activities. Our research findings suggest that female and LGBTQ centred gender-egalitarian learning and knowledge making takes place in all of the HDK's decision making and participation bodies. Yet after the increase of oppression and violence from 2015 onwards, gender equality policies were the most affected. As stated above, the prefigurative gender equality policies were the first to be 'sacrificed', meaning that women were besieged

by the 'implicit masculinity' within the movement from one side, and by the state from the other. Yet despite this, the women's movement was still able to put create a struggle that strengthened the social opposition and continues its work inside the HDK.

The struggle 'in times of conflict' is an important factor affecting social movement learning and the quality of information produced. Since 2015, the authoritarian regime in Turkey has tried to consolidate its rule through violence and oppression, and just like all other elements of social opposition, the HDK has been severely affected. This situation reduced the HDK's capacity to mobilise people in the street almost to zero, and many activists were imprisoned and forced to flee into exile. Some activists distanced themselves from the movement due to personal security concerns, and these types of situations undermined the collective generation of knowledge, as well as the collective memory of the HDK. The imprisonment or forced exile of cadres dealt a huge blow to the HDK's ideal of unity in diversity. This harsh period also diminished the intergenerational learning possibilities between activists from different factions, traditions and generations, thus limiting the transfer of knowledge and experience. Nevertheless, our research findings also show that aside from its atomising aspect, state violence and state oppression during this period have also had a role in driving cooperation and unifying. The *solidaristic ethos* which emerged during this period, ensured that activists stood side by side and supported each other even in the most trying circumstances, for example following the court cases of imprisoned activists and the formation of solidarity committees. The widespread moral and material support for Academics for Peace means was a case in point., or the assistance provided for people who lost their relatives at the Suruç, Ankara and Diyarbakır pogroms. The HDK's solidarity academies, the new life associations, and the newly emergent cooperatives, all signify that whilst state violence and repression can indeed fragment and atomise, it can also bond and create deep emotional ties and solidarity. State repression therefore both unites and divides, but without doubt it reduces the open and dialogical spaces that the HDK created over previous years.

The final fundamental question of our research was related to the effects of the HDK's processes of learning and knowledge production upon social change, created *within the struggle, by the struggle and for the struggle*. We categorised those effects into three groups: the individual, the organisational and the societal levels. However, the findings also

demonstrated that despite the HDK's central role, the overall effects it creates cannot be reduced solely to its generation of knowledge or learning experiences. Therefore, we see the HDK's multidirectional effects as an outcome of past and present struggles within the context of a much larger web of social movements, of which the HDK is a constituent part, sometimes visibly inside, and sometimes outside.

Our research findings indicate that at the individual level, the concrete effects of the HDK's processes were particularly evident in gender-focused activities, as well as in those social spaces such as assemblies, commissions or reading groups in which interaction between ethnic, religious and cultural diversities was most prevalent. The variety of ideology, identity and personal experience provided by the constituents and individuals of the HDK, provided the basis for reciprocal learning processes between individuals as they encountered social subjects who had hitherto been distanced from each other. These learning processes often revolved around, for example, confronting stereotypes, tacit discrimination, prejudices towards minorities of different ethnicities, religious and sexual orientations in the assembly and events of the commissions, where interaction between people is often intense. These confrontational moments create precious learning processes in which activists develop, re-evaluate their misinformation/misrecognitions, and transform each other and themselves. Direct encounters with LGBTQ individuals has reconfigured attitudes, stances and perceptions, and often transformed prejudice. These learning processes manifest themselves in ways such as 'correcting of language', 'educating oneself', 'gender sensitivity' and so forth. Individual-level relations follow a general path: activists get to know each other better; activists start to see themselves as subjects that increase their capacities and abilities; the spirit of solidarity expands; learning and experience transferring/sharing takes place; people begin to learn to have a certain self-discipline regarding gender, hate speech and discrimination; long-withstanding prejudices between individuals and constituents are broken down; subjects who cannot/do not normally stand side by side get together; people experience living together with difference; and identity is constructed based on multiplicity and diversity . Many individuals reported that they have changed, become more open to difference, more aware of diversity, and that diversity comes to be seen not as a deficit to be overcome, but as a valuable resource for nurturing the ongoing struggle. This in itself is a

remarkable achievement, particularly in a context such as Turkey where prejudices are state sanctioned.

The findings of our research clearly show that the HDK's learning and knowledge production has also had strong effects at the organisational level. First of all, the HDK created a new cultural persona and a new language of struggle and became a platform for collective learning, in which its diverse constituents encounter and get acquainted with each other, and in doing so begin the process of dispensing with their prejudices and stereotyped beliefs. The HDK is also a pioneer in the adoption of several normative practices (such as the co-chairpersonship or co-spokespersonship system) at the organisational level. HDK brought together movements from different traditions and has both increased the tools of struggle and expanded the oppositional repertoire of struggle in Turkey. Once again, this coming together was conducive to the reconstruction of patchworked historiographies and remembrances of the past around a common collective counter-memory- even if only partially. At the HDK, individuals and constituents from different ideological, ethnic, religious and sexual identities came together and struggled without seeking to prioritise their respective agendas over each other. This resulted in a holistic approach towards problems, and different factions engaged with discussions, even when the topic was not an emergency for them. We also observed that despite occasional serious conflicts and crises, organisations came to recognise the 'unorganised' representations of the independent individual members and see them as important actors within the struggle. At the same time, many individual members changed their negative prejudices about organisations being 'rigid and hierarchical structures'.

Finally, when addressing question of the social impact of the HDK, it is extremely difficult to think of it separately from the collective gains of the long-term struggle of the Kurdish liberation movement. For example, experiences such as the congress model or the HDK's egalitarian gender practices were previously implemented in the Democratic Society Congress (DTK)- an antecedent of HDK. Therefore, it is vital to locate the HDK together with the social effects created by the post-2000 political paradigm of the Kurdish liberation movement - without denying the uniqueness HDK and its capacity to bridge the socialist movement and various identity movements.

Above all, the HDK has had an important impact in transforming the political form of the revolutionary struggle in Turkey, starting a trend within social oppositional forces within

Turkey of transitioning from the party form to the congress form. Although the HDP, which emerged from the Congress, has strengthened the traditional party approach in Turkey, the ‘congress’ form is still prevalent at least at the discursive-level, and as a reference point among activists in their quest for a future model of organisation. From this perspective, it is not an exaggeration to say that the HDK model has become a standard bearer of social organisation form across Turkey.

We should also recognise that the HDK/HDP experience since 2011 has fundamentally changed the aspirations of the opposition in Turkey, and brought a vision of what a post-national state in Turkey might look and feel like. A state based not on the domination of one ethnicity, one religion, one gender, but that is inclusive of the rich tapestry of peoples, genders, sexualities, religions, and cultures that have been forced into the shadows for so long. That post-national aspiration for diversity and inclusion has also produced a powerful and inclusive subjectivity amongst activists that embraces and actively seeks to recover the hidden histories, cultures, and memories of those left out of political Turkishness. Our interviews and evidence bear testament to the rich transformational processes that activists have gone through and continue to go through.

### **What do HDK activists understand from ‘learning’?**

During the course of this research, we have participated in a variety of HDK events such as the HDK’s congress, general assembly, assembly and commission meetings. We were particularly interested in trying to understand the perspectives of the activists’ - whom we considered as active in the various decision-making processes in the HDK – and approached them about generating knowledge and learning both at the individual level and at the Congress level.

One particular issue which struck us was the fact that a large proportion of HDK activists thought of ‘learning’ as a purely formal process. This perspective, which considers education as an experience in a particular setting with at least one instructor/narrator who presents prepared content, is unable to appreciate the processes that occur within and through the struggle, as processes of learning or as spaces for the generation of new ideas and knowledge. In fact, in most cases, it did not occur to them that they could create a link between learning and the experiences they get from engaging in struggle. The first reason for that was that activists’ ideas have themselves been shaped by the Turkish education system and thus they often see learning or knowledge production as being possible only within this classical formal

framework. The second reason was the dominance of a Western-centric and positivist epistemology of knowledge which seems to discredit any experience or knowledge that remains outside of the definition of ‘scientific knowledge’. We observed that many activists, whose ideas are formed around these two dominant approaches, have an attitude that banalizes and belittles the knowledge which they produce within the struggle.

Despite its strong social emancipation programme and its organisational form, the HDK suffers from serious shortcomings in implementing a liberatory pedagogical perspective. This pedagogical need, despite developments since 2018 discussed above, unfortunately remains far from being the main agenda of the congress. Unfortunately, one-day training modules led by the HDK Education Commission, are insufficiently ambitious for the production of this radical libertarian pedagogy. In this sense, the pedagogical dimension of the HDK’s desire to construct a counter-hegemony is to date unfortunately weak in practice.

The HDK is of course not only a pedagogical field in its own right, but also a field of power where power dynamics are experienced at both constituent and individual level. This is an important factor influencing the movement's pedagogical content design and applications. The intense political agenda is one of the main obstacles to the movement's discussion and development of a libertarian pedagogical approach. The following situations cause failure in the implementation of the lessons derived from previous experiences: activists' previous habits developed in other organisation; perceiving the learning and generation of information as belonging solely to the individual level; being constrained by decision-making procedures; and so forth. While a large proportion of activists analyse the current state and insufficiency of the HDK, the source of problems and suggest ways to overcome them through concrete learning experiences, this learning and knowledge has to date failed to influence the HDK's current problems and create change.

We would like to point out that all these things should not be considered only as negative situations, but also as learning opportunities. Social movements' lack of awareness about the value of emerging knowledge and learning within their struggle causes them to be oblivious to the unique experience (and knowledge) that they are creating within and through their struggle. They search for the knowledge/information about themselves elsewhere, whilst overlooking the rich sources of knowledge and ideas that are staring them in the mirror.

## **Some Final Reflections**

Finally, we would like to make some general statements based on our fieldwork and research, and the literature on social movements. These statements should not be considered as definitive, but as suggestions that may contribute to a general discussion on the current state of social movements.

We begin by noting that the congress form, and the aspirations for new modes of radical democracy have been the principal forms of association/organisation of countless global movements against capitalism and neoliberalism since the beginnings of 2000. However, the implementation of these forms creates a severe crisis. The real-life experience of many such congress formats demonstrates how far we are from the dream we have set ourselves. The HDK's experience provides an illustrative example. The activists in the movement cannot free themselves from the established ways and habits of doing politics, the despotic government of the nation-state frequently attacks, neoliberalism's infrastructural power tears apart the webs of solidarity and opens the ground for infrapolitics. For the above reasons, at least partially, the HDK as a Congress movement that constructed its statutes and platforms according to the grammar of these new social movements, has failed to achieve its goal of assembly-based radical democracy.

Social movements tend to lay the blame for all the failures with their insufficiencies or inner conflicts. This damages the inner harmony and future visions of the congress. However, this failure is directly related to the brutal destruction by neoliberal capitalism of solidarity networks which were intended to be the basis for the construction of the Congress. Therefore, evaluating it purely as an individual or organisational responsibility prevents us from recognising the actual cause of the outcome.

For the first time in Turkey's history of social struggle, a political mass party has emerged from within a Congress movement. The HDP, which at first was conceived only as a temporary umbrella party merely for the election period, evolved into a mass party in a very short time. The HDP aimed to help realise the 'new life' by creating a mass, representative democratic force. In contrast, the HDK aimed to establish the 'new life' through assemblies from the local level upwards, which is seen as the foundation for radical democracy. Unfortunately, while appearing complementary, both the HDK and HDP share the same base. As a result, these two different movements, which were originally considered complementary to each other, moved

away from each other over time as the HDP became more prominent and visible across society. The political party model is strong amongst social movements in Turkey. All in all, the relationship between the party and the congress, rather than creating growth and synergies in which they mutual benefit each other, has caused these two models to contradict each other and clash. This has undermined the power and effectiveness of the broad social movement which necessarily includes both. The despotic power of the state terrorised the HDP's struggle in the legal arena, pushing it into total contraction, whereas the state's its infrastructural power together with neoliberal policies, destroyed the HDK's networks of social organisation and solidarity at the local level.

The HDK, by bringing together organisations and individuals with different political and ideological contours, but also guaranteeing their representational rights through quotas, has paved the way to equality of opportunity for the first time in Turkey. This dimension that explains the excitement that it garnered during its establishment, and its strong platform based on these prefigurative policies. However, what happened first in HDK, then in HDP, triggered a process in which independent individuals were increasingly excluded from decision-making processes, and constituents became more and more powerful in the centre. The Kurdish liberation movement wished to form a different legal relationship with these constituents, whose mass-support was relatively greater, to increase its reach and build power. This was a decisive factor in individual members eventually coming to be seen as 'window dressing' and not being given substantive power. Ultimately, this led to individual members losing faith in the congress model, and distancing themselves after feeling that they were not able to substantively affect decision-making processes. It is also possible, and likely, that some individuals walked away from the HDK, as they saw the HDP as delivering both more status and more security for them as independent actors, at a time when the government's repression and intimidation was at its peak. The weakening of these links and the diversity that it hitherto brought has been to the detriment of the movement.

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