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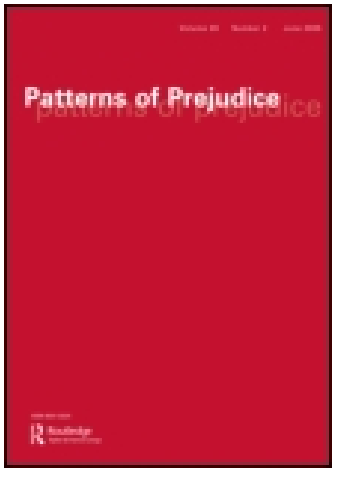

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Imagining peace in a conflict environment: Kurdish youths' framing of the Kurdish issue in Turkey

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Imagining peace in a conflict environment: Kurdish youths' framing of the Kurdish issue in Turkey

ZEYNEP BAŞER AND AYŞE BETÜL ÇELIK

ABSTRACT Drawn from focus groups composed of fifty-five Kurdish young people in Diyarbakır, Başer and Çelik's article concerns the young Kurds' description of the Kurdish issue in Turkey and their visions of peace. In recognition of their social and political agency, the article focuses on the Kurdish young people's framing of both the conflict and peace, based on their individual everyday observations and experiences, and seeks to understand how they frame the Kurdish issue by defining the root causes of the conflict and imagining solutions for its resolution, particularly *vis-à-vis* the dominant frames regarding the Kurdish issue in Turkey.

KEYWORDS conflict, framing theories, intergroup perceptions, Kurdish children, Kurdish issue, peace, social exclusion, Turkey, violence

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Young people are both victims of and active agents in conflict and post-conflict settings, playing a multiplicity of roles. Accordingly, understanding their needs, observations and experiences in conflict settings, as well as the complex processes through which they make meaning out of their experience, is vital in constructing a sustainable peace agenda. Unfortunately, more often than not, the agency of young people is visible only at the level of street violence, and little, if any, attention is given to understanding how they frame the conflict and its realities. In this regard, Kurdish youth in Turkey is no exception. In recent years, young Kurdish people have become increasingly visible both in the Turkish media and in public discourse, particularly due to their increasing presence at the forefront of mass demonstrations celebrating the Partiya Karkêren Kurdistan (PKK, Kurdish Workers' Party) and its imprisoned leader Abdullah Öcalan. They have been represented in the context of Turkey's 'Kurdish issue' either as perpetrators ('stone throwing children' that support a 'terrorist organization' and continuation of violence) or as victims (of police violence, state terror, structural problems, families and finally of the system of justice). What is missing in these representations is the voice of Kurdish young people and their perspectives as actors and potential agents in both the conflict and any future peaceful resolution.

In an attempt to contribute to increasing the visibility of youth as active agents in meaning-making, this article focuses on the framing of the conflict and of peace by Kurdish young people in Turkey, based on their own

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individual everyday observations and experiences. It seeks to understand how they frame the Kurdish issue by defining the root causes of the conflict and imagining its resolution.

Youth in conflict and understanding their frames

Understanding the needs and perspectives of young people in conflict and post-conflict settings is important for many reasons. First of all, the direct, structural and cultural forms of violence that occur in a conflict environment—such as state violence, displacement or unemployment—have enormous effects on young people and hence necessitate the development of special protective measures.[1]

In addition, whether recognized by adults or not, young people are also social and political actors that play major roles in the reproduction of conflict through their political socialization. On the one hand, they respond to conflict by voluntarily or involuntarily participating in violent activities, such as joining guerrilla forces, taking up arms, participating in demonstrations or committing criminal acts.[2] On the other hand, young people also reproduce

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1 Some of the primary structural insecurities in a conflict environment, such as poverty, unemployment and displacement, affect young people more than older-age groups. Other challenges involve lack of education, malnutrition and lack of access to basic needs, such as clean food and water. See Siobhán McEvoy-Levy, 'Youth as social and political agents: issues in post-settlement peace building', Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, Notre Dame University, Occasional Paper, #21:OP:2, December 2001, 18, available on *nabuur.com* at www.nabuur.com/files/attach/2008/07/task/doc_44537a957144b.pdf (viewed 2 May 2014); and Celina Del Felice and Andria Wisler, 'The unexplored power and potential of youth as peace-builders', *Journal of Peace Conflict and Development*, no. 11, 2007, 1–29. Youth are also often victims of direct violence in both conflict and post-conflict settings, the most visible of which is violence by the state. On the other hand, spreading the culture of violence brought about by conflict also reproduces, legitimizes and sustains other forms of direct violence throughout society that are experienced and witnessed by children, such as domestic violence, sexual and economic exploitation, suicide, vigilante justice, and willing or unwilling recruitment by guerillas and criminal gangs, as well as various forms of oppression and humiliation at the level of the state, and in communities, tribes and families. See Michael G. Wessels, 'Children, armed conflict, and peace', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 35, no. 5, 1998, 635–46; Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Carolyn Sargent (eds), *Small Wars: The Cultural Politics of Childhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1998); and Filip De Boeck and Alcinda Honwana, 'Introduction: Children and youth in Africa', in Alcinda Honwana and Filip de Boeck (eds), *Makers and Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa* (Asmara and Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press 2005), 1–18.

2 McEvoy-Levy, 'Youth as social and political agents'; Wessels, 'Children, armed conflict, and peace'.

conflict through their interpretations and discursive practices of framing.[3] As Siobhán McEvoy-Levy puts it:

> conflict is reproduced through layers and memories of trauma, through stories and texts that transmit images of the other, perceptions of grievance and evaluation of peace processes, and through experiences and retellings of oppression, violence and lack of economic opportunity. Youth participate at the hearts of these processes of meaning making…. Out of this they create a variety of narratives that are transmitted to peers, to younger siblings and also to adults.[4]

It is also important to note that young people's victimization and agency is usually linked: in other words, their experiences as victims, the ways in which they interpret these experiences, and the effects of these interpretations on their political socialization occur in a complex, mutually constitutive fashion.[5] In reality, however, it is the participation of young people in violence that gets most attention, and the sophisticated processes of meaning-making through which young people create politics in the context of conflict, as well as their potential as peace-builders, are mostly unnoticed or ignored.

This article focuses on the agency of Kurdish young people in meaning-making. In an effort to understand their interpretations of the conflict and its resolution or, in other words, the way in which they frame the Kurdish issue, it makes use of framing theory. A frame, according to David Snow and Robert Benford, is an 'interpretative schemata [*sic*] that simplifies and condenses the "world out there" by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations,

3 Raija-Leena Punamaki, 'Concept formation of war and peace: a meeting point between child development and a politically violent society', in Amiram Raviv, Louis Oppenheimer and Daniel Bar-Tal (eds), *How Children Understand War and Peace: A Call for International Peace Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass 1999), 127–44; Gill Straker, Michaela Mendelsohn, Fathima Moosa and Pam Tudin, 'Violent political contexts and the emotional concerns of township youth', *Child Development*, vol. 67, no. 1, 1996, 46–54.

4 Siobhán McEvoy-Levy, 'Conclusion: youth and post-accord peace building', in Siobhán McEvoy-Levy (ed.), *Troublemakers or Peacemakers? Youth and Post-Accord Peace Building* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press 2006), 281–305 (284–5).

5 See Paul Collier, 'Doing well out of war: an economic perspective', in Mats Berdal and David Malone (eds), *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner 2000), 91–112; Siobhán McEvoy, 'Communities and peace: Catholic youth in Northern Ireland', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2000, 85–103; Orla T. Muldoon, Katrina Mclaughlin, Nathalie Rougier and Karen Trew, 'Adolescents' explanations for paramilitary involvement', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 45, no. 5, 2008, 681–95; Jane Higgins and Olivia Martin, 'Violence and young people's security', in James Arvanitakis (ed.), *Highly Affected, Rarely Considered: The International Youth Parliament Commission's Report on the Impacts of Globalization on Young People* (Sydney: Oxfam International Youth Parliament 2003), 106–16; Punamaki, 'Concept formation of war and peace'; and Frances McLernon and Ed Cairns, 'Children, peace, and war in Northern Ireland', in Raviv, Oppenheimer and Bar-Tal (eds), *How Children Understand War and Peace*, 145–60.

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events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one's present or past environment'.[6] Frames, therefore, have both discursive and performative functions: they evoke particular imaginations and (re)produce a series of behaviours.[7]

Traditionally, most framing literature has focused on the ways in which frames are used by agents in positions of power to legitimize their discourses and actions.[8] Accordingly, scholars of ethnic mobilization and conflict, including those working on the Kurdish issue,[9] have turned their attention to the political elites and their framing practices. In recent years, however, with the increase in social movements around the world, scholars have warned against an elite bias in, and a static conceptualization of, frames in traditional frame theory. On the one hand, scholars have drawn attention to the necessity of also understanding the framing of contentious events or issues by non-elites, particularly young people, due to their integral part in contemporary social movements.[10] The same scholars also have stressed that frames are not static, that they change, compete with each other and, hence, are continuously redefined and/or reaffirmed by various actors.[11] Seen in this light, acts and processes of framing by non-elites of contentious issues and conflicts cannot be understood holistically without examining them in relation to respective dominant frames of elites, and the context within which these acts of framing take place.

In this article, framing is regarded as a process whereby Kurdish young people interpret, define, reproduce and give meaning to their social reality against the backdrop of the Kurdish issue in Turkey. Diagnostic framing here

6 David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, 'Master frames and cycles of protest', in Aldon M. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (eds), *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1992), 133–55 (137).

7 Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, 'Framing processes and social movements: an overview and assessment', *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 26, 2000, 611–39; Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1974).

8 See, for example, Stuart J. Kaufman, 'Symbols, frames, and violence: studying ethnic war in the Philippines', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 55, no. 4, 2011, 937–58; Edward A. D. Schatz, 'Framing strategies and non-conflict in multi-ethnic Kazakhstan', *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2000, 71–94; and Matteo Fumagalli, 'Framing ethnic minority mobilisation in Central Asia: the cases of Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 59, no. 4, 2007, 567–90.

9 See Neophytos G. Loizides, 'Elite framing and conflict transformation in Turkey', *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol. 62, no. 2, 2009, 278–97.

10 While the political agency of young people is not new, youth has emerged, particularly in recent years, as a significant non-elite actor in influencing political change through social movements. Globally, this phenomenon has manifested itself most visibly in the Arab Spring movements, in which young people have become almost as influential as elites, performing their agency by means of social media and in physical spaces.

11 Fumagalli, 'Framing ethnic minority mobilisation in Central Asia'; Robert D. Benford, 'An insider's critique of the social movement framing perspective', *Sociological Inquiry*, vol. 67, no. 4, 1997, 409–30.

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refers to the act of defining the sources/root causes of the conflict by young Kurds, and prognostic framing to the act of defining its possible solutions.

The Kurdish issue, dominant frames and Kurdish youth

Since the emergence of the PKK as an armed group fighting against the Turkish state, the Kurdish issue has been a major theme of Turkish politics, increasingly so after the conflict entered a de-escalation period in 1999. In 1999 Abdullah Öcalan was captured and, in addition, following the acceptance of Turkey's candidacy to the European Union (EU), the Turkish state passed legal reforms affecting certain aspects of the conflict. The importance of the Kurdish issue peaked after the government initiated the well-known 'Kurdish Opening/Initiative' in mid-2009.[12] This process, however, soon began to stall as a result of several developments, such as the closure of the pro-Kurdish political party, Demokratik Toplum Partisi (DTP, Democractic Peace Party), and the arrest of hundreds of local officials.

Throughout this period and to the present, social tensions have remained high in the Southeast as well as in the rest of Turkey. Concurrently, there have also been frequent reports of discrimination directed at Kurds who live in non-Kurdish parts of Turkey, carried out by their neighbours, employees or others.[13] Moreover, especially with the rise of ultra-nationalism within some circles of the Turkish population since 2005,[14] there have been frequent attacks on Kurds residing in western cities.[15]

One of the negative consequences of the conflict in southeastern Turkey, where Kurds are highly congregated, has been the inability of Kurdish youth

12 When the initiative was originally proposed, it was believed to include greater cultural rights for Kurds (excluding teaching in Kurdish), some form of local autonomy and incentives for demobilizing and reintegrating PKK fighters into society. However, in the end there was only the provision for a Kurdish channel in the state-owned television broadcasting network, changes in laws dealing with the rehabilitation of minors involved in 'terrorist acts' and allowing the use of Kurdish in prisons.

13 Binnaz Toprak, Irfan Bozan, Tan Morgül and Nedim Sener, *Türkiye'de Farkli Olmak: Din ve Muhafazakârlik Ekseninde Ötekilestirilenler* (Istanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi 2008); Konda Arastirma, *Kürt Meselesi'nde Algi ve Beklentiler* (Istanbul: Iletisim Yayinlari 2011).

14 Ayse Betül Çelik and Andrew Blum, 'Track II interventions and the Kurdish question in Turkey: an analysis using a theories of change approach', *International Journal of Peace Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2007, 51–81.

15 Emine Özcan, 'Evlerinden Edilen Ailelerin Suçu Kürt Olmak', *Bianet*, 23 May 2006, available online at http://bianet.org/bianet/insan-haklari/79470-evlerinden-edilen-ailelerin-sucu-kurt-olmak; 'İHD, MAZLUMDER: Muğla Üniversitesi'nde Kürt Öğrencilere Siddet Var', *Bianet*, 13 December 2007, available online at http://bianet.org/bianet/bianet/103556-ihd-mazlumder-mugla-universitesinde-kurt-ogrencilere-siddet-var; Emine Özcan, 'Kürt Olduğumuz İçin Siddete Maruz Kaliyor, Okula Gidemiyoruz', *Bianet*, 29 February 2008, available online at http://bianet.org/bianet/bianet/105259-kurt-oldugumuz-icin-siddete-maruz-kaliyor-okula-gidemiyoruz (all viewed 2 May 2014); Toprak, Bozan, Morgül and Sener, *Türkiye'de Farkli Olmak*, 30–4.

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to enjoy the right to basic education. Not only is the quality of schools in the region substandard, but many children do not remain in school, especially after completing primary school, either because their families cannot afford the education-related expenses or because they have to work in order to contribute to the family income.[16] Problems of housing, lack of proper health care and malnutrition also affect the children of displaced families in their everyday lives. Furthermore, in addition to these structural problems, young people are often subjected to everyday violence within their own communities or families.

With the increase in 'confrontational violence' between the state and Kurdish residents, particularly in the form of mass demonstrations celebrating the PKK and its leader in southeastern cities between 2006 and 2010, many young people have also been subjected to direct violence from the armed forces and the police. Kurdish youth, particularly those who have participated in violent demonstrations, have been framed in the media as 'victims' of the conflict who have been 'manipulated' by the PKK and their families.[17] The Turkish government's framing of Kurdish youth, on the other hand, has been full of contradictions. At the discursive level, these young people have been framed as victims of deception by the PKK, used by the adults who organize the demonstrations on behalf of terrorists in return for monetary gain. On the other hand, the government's response to acts by these young people has been very harsh: they have been considered as part of the 'terrorist organization' and prosecuted as such. Indeed, the 2006 statement by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was also reflective of this understanding: 'No matter whether [the perpetrators] are women and children, as long as they are in the service of terrorism, the security forces will intervene in whichever way is appropriate.'[18]

16 Ayse Betül Çelik, 'Evaluation of fieldwork conducted in the province of Batman: the socio-economic consequences of internal displacement and obstacles to return', in Dilek Kurban, Deniz Yükseker, Ayse Betül Çelik, Turgay Ünalan and A. Tamer Aker, *Coming to Terms with Forced Migration: Post Displacement Restitution of Citizenship Rights in Turkey* (Istanbul: TESEV Publications 2007), 205–27; Deniz Yükseker, 'Internal displacement and social exclusion: problems encountered by internally displaced persons in the provinces of Istanbul and Diyarbakır', in Kurban, Yükseker, Çelik, Ünalan and Aker, *Coming to Terms with Forced Migration*, 256–76; Kurdish Human Rights Project (KHRP), *The Situation of Kurdish Children in Turkey: Draft Version* (London: KHRP 2008); Çağlar Keyder and Nazan Üstündağ, 'Doğu ve Güneydogu Anadolu'nun Kalkinmasinda Sosyal Politikalar', in *Doğu ve Güneydoğu Anadolu'da Sosyal ve Ekonomik Öncelikler* (Istanbul: TESEV Yayinlari 2006), 90–148.

17 '"Bir ucu Ergenekon bir ucu PKK hatti"', *Sabah*, 9 February 2012, available online at www.sabah.com.tr/Gundem/2012/02/09/bir-ucunda-ergenekon-digerinde-bdp-duruyor (viewed 2 May 2014).

18 Quoted in '"Çocuk da, kadin da olsa gereken müdahale yapilir"', *Radikal*, 1 April 2006, available online at www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=183107 (viewed 2 May 2014). Translations from the Turkish, unless otherwise stated, are by the authors.

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The long-lasting conflict has also led to a social polarization between Kurds and Turks, to the point that some major Kurdish cities are only associated with violence.[19] In its recent report, the International Crisis Group (ICG) argued that

> most Turks associate Diyarbakır [the biggest Kurdish city in southeastern Turkey, the undeclared capital for many Kurds] and its residents with the war between the PKK insurgents and the army. The stigma is such that few local drivers get Diyarbakır license plates, because the police stop such cars so often elsewhere in the country.[20]

Similarly, the dominant frame of the Kurdish issue and Kurds in the mainstream Turkish media has been mostly related to security matters, with the lines between separation and autonomy blurred.[21]

In recent years, some Kurdish intellectuals have argued that they are the last generation with whom the Turkish state can peacefully negotiate because the young generation of today will not be as peaceful as they are.[22] Such a warning points out the potential for youth to be violent agents in the conflict. Rojin Canan Akın, who has interviewed young people who have experienced the conflict in southeast Turkey, for example, argued that some of them who were willing to embrace peace two years ago are now angry and no longer open to 'forgiving' the Turkish state.[23] Moreover, the continuous daily experience of poverty, unemployment and related forms of structural violence creates (and recreates) an environment of hopelessness,[24] adding a new, personal dimension to traumas arising from any previous witnessing of such forms of everyday violence and displacement.

As can be seen by the discussion above, the dominant frames of Turkish political elites and social actors, such as the media, have always focused on the socio-economic underdevelopment of Kurdish-dominated eastern and

19 Çelik and Blum, 'Track II interventions and the Kurdish question in Turkey'; Ekin Ok, 'Are We Becoming More Distant? Exploring the Nature of Social Polarization along Ethnic Lines in the City of Izmir', Master's Thesis, Sabanci University, Istanbul 2011.

20 ICG, 'Turkey: the PKK and a Kurdish settlement', Europe Report no. 219, 11 September 2012, available on the *ICG* website at www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/europe/turkey-cyprus/turkey/219-turkey-the-pkk-and-a-kurdish-settlement.pdf (viewed 2 May 2014).

21 Murat Somer and Evangelos G. Liaras, 'Turkey's new Kurdish opening: religious versus secular values', *Middle East Policy*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2010, 152–65.

22 Ezgi Basaran, 'Çözüm için Kürtleri tatmin, Türkleri de ikna etmek lazim', *Radikal*, 2 February 2012, available online at www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalYazar&ArticleID=1077830 (viewed 2 May 2014).

23 Rojin Canan Akin, '90'lardan Bugüne Bölgede Kürt Gençlerinin Deneyimleri', paper presented at the 'Perceptions, Actors and the Settlement of the Kurdish Issue' conference, organized by Heinrich Böll Stiftung and DISA, Ankara, 7–8 December 2012.

24 Çelik and Blum, 'Track II interventions and the Kurdish question in Turkey'; Deniz Yükseker, 'Research findings on internal displacement in Turkey: national reports', in Kurban, Yükseker, Çelik, Ünalan and Aker, *Coming to Terms with Forced Migration*, 145–57.

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southeastern Anatolia, and the emergence of the PKK as a 'terrorist' organization bent on carving out an independent Kurdistan within the border of the Turkish Republic. Many politicians and intellectuals have argued that 'Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin' do not have any problem with the Turkish state and Turks in general. In his analysis of speeches in the Turkish parliament in the late 1990s, Neophytos Loizides found out that the Kurdish issue was framed in relation to the PKK as part and parcel of an international conspiracy.[25]

In a recent public speech, Prime Minister Erdoğan declared that, while the Turkish state might have made certain mistakes in the past, 'there is no longer a Kurdish issue, only a "terrorism" issue, a PKK issue. My Kurdish brothers have problems, and I will resolve that.'[26] Moreover, the framing of the Kurdish issue by the political party in government, the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP, Justice and Development Party), since it came to power, addresses all the structural problems that gave rise to the conflict. Thus the dominant frame of the issue names the PKK and underdevelopment as the diagnostics, and the socio-economic development of the region coupled with some cultural rights (such as teaching Kurdish—excluding education in Kurdish—in private and public institutions as optional courses) as the prognostics. Note that, in this analysis, there is no emphasis on injustices, nor is agency given to any Kurdish political actor. This frame still implies that the power to resolve the issue lies with the Turkish state and that there is no need for social actors (Turks and Kurds at large) to engage in a constructive dialogue to overcome prejudices.

Contrary to this framing, however, the framing of the dominant Kurdish actor (the PKK) is that the conflict emerged as a result of assimilation policies towards the Kurds carried out over time by the Turkish state.[27] Present in the PKK's framing of the Kurdish issue, but absent especially in that of the media, is the suffering of many Kurds, especially those in southeast Anatolia: PKK's frames emphasize countless examples of human rights abuses, extrajudicial killings, the forced migration of millions of Kurds and the suppression of a 'nation', its culture and people. The PKK's website argues that the organization was founded to 'safeguard and realize the freedom of the Kurdish people against the physical and cultural genocide and assimilation policies of the

25 Loizides, 'Elite framing and conflict transformation in Turkey'.

26 'Erdoğan: Kürt sorunu yok, terör örgütü PKK sorunu var', *Zaman*, 2 June 2012, available online at http://zaman.com.tr/politika_erdogan-kurt-sorunu-yok-teror-orgutu-pkk-sorunu-var_1297498.html (viewed 2 May 2014).

27 'İste Avni Özgürel'in Karayilan röportaji', *Demokrat Haber*, 13 June 2012, available online at www.demokrathaber.net/roportajlar/iste-avni-ozgurelin-karayilan-roportaji-h9428.html (viewed 2 May 2014). The pro-Kurdish political party BDP (Baris ve Demokrasi Partisi, Peace and Democracy Party) can also be considered an important actor in this conflict. However, when this research was conducted, the government was only negotiating in secret with the PKK, having excluded the BDP from the process. Although the BDP is considered to have organic ties to the PKK, there are some differences between the two in their public discourses and framing of the conflict.

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Turkish nation-state'.[28] Among those who have contributed to the conflict, according to the PKK, are 'Turkish colonialists', 'international financial powers' and 'the green gladio (Islamist deep state)'.[29] As a result, the PKK sees the prognostics of the conflict as the establishment of a multilingual, multi-ethnic 'democratic nation' based on 'free and equal individuals', 'where no individual is othered by any individual or community', and where the state respects the legitimacy of individuals and the society.[30] Even though, in this prognostic framing, there is the explicit desire for a society in which no one is Othered, the PKK's vision mostly calls for changes at the institutional and legal level to grant Kurds their rights, including: respect for both individual and collective rights; a constitution 'composed through a social consensus based on protecting the democratic citizen and communities against the nation-state'; the 'correct understanding of history and the present'; and the acceptance of a 'self-defence principle' [*sic*].[31] Although a counter-framing of the issue, the dominant Kurdish perspective also turns to the Turkish state as the source of both peace and the recognition of Kurds as a cultural and political entity. In sum, neither in the Turkish state's frame nor in that of the PKK, is there mention of the societal gap between Kurds and Turks, or the social exclusion of Kurds as part of the conflict and thus as something to be resolved.

Methodology

The field research for this study was conducted in 2010 in Diyarbakır. As the second largest city in the Southeast and 'the informal capital of Turkey's southeastern region',[32] Diyarbakır is also politically the most mobilized of all predominantly Kurdish cities and the location of many of the region's political institutions and NGOs. Furthermore, the city hosts a large share of the area's internally displaced population.

Keeping in mind that not all young people living in or having migrated from the Southeast have the same experiences and perceptions of the conflict, and that the most conflict-affected and vulnerable segments of youth are

28 '34th anniversary of Kurdistan Workers Party', 26 November 2011, available on the *PKK* website at www.pkkonline.com/en/index.php?sys=article&artID=175 (viewed 2 May 2014).

29 Ibid.

30 'The road map to democratization of Turkey and solution to the Kurdish question', 15 August 2009, available on the *PKK* website at www.pkkonline.com/en/index.php?sys=article&artID=123 (viewed 2 May 2014).

31 Ibid.

32 Zeynep Gambetti, 'Decolonizing Diyarbakir: culture, identity and the struggle to appropriate urban space', in Kamran Asdar Ali and Martina Rieker (eds), *Re-exploring the Urban: Comparative Citiscapes in the Middle East and South Asia* (Karachi: Oxford University Press 2009), 95–127.

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among those families living in impoverished urban neighbourhoods,[33] the study focused on young people from lower-income families in Diyarbakır.[34] Thus the study reflects lower-income young Diyarbakırlı Kurds' frames of the Kurdish issue, and does not claim to represent all Kurdish youth in Turkey.

The study employed a loosely structured, consultative focus group methodology that favoured minimal moderator involvement in exploring the perceptions of young Kurds with regard to the Kurdish issue and their visions of peace.[35] The choice of this methodology was based on its potential, on the one hand, for capturing the perspectives of young people with regard

33 Yükseker, 'Internal displacement and social exclusion'.

34 The sites of the study were determined accordingly, and focus groups were conducted in the following locations in the neighbourhoods of Bağlar (2), Yenisehir (3) and Sur (1): the Sümerpark Children's Centre in Yenisehir; the children's centre of the ÇAÇA Foundation (Çocuklar Ayni Çati Altinda, Children under the Same Roof) in the Ben u Sen neighbourhood of Yenisehir; the Çocuk Eğitim Merkezi (Child Education Centre) and 5 Nisan Gençlik Merkezi (5 April Youth Centre) in Bağlar; and the Eğitim Destek Evi (Educational Support Centre) in Suriçi (Sur) (see Table 1). The Bağlar and Sur districts and the Ben u Sen neighbourhood in Yenisehir are home to a large population of internally displaced persons who have been evicted from villages during the armed clashes of the 1990s. These neighbourhoods are characterized by widespread poverty, unemployment and lack of infrastructure. Baglar and Sur have also been sites of recent confrontations between police and the local population. Yenisehir is a more heterogeneous neighbourhood in terms of the socio-economic profile of its residents. While it also hosts a large number of internally displaced persons in its surrounding neighbourhoods, some relatively well-off families live in this district as well. Nevertheless, the majority of young people who attend the community and youth centres come from the low-income population, not only from the impoverished neighbourhoods of Yenisehir but also from other neighbouring districts and neighbourhoods, particularly Baglar.

35 As seen in Table 1, the ages of the participants ranged between 11 and 20. It is difficult to make clear-cut distinctions between the overlapping categories of 'child' and 'youth', and the meanings attached to them, and we have therefore chosen to refer to them as young people and/or youth throughout this article. This is consistent with the findings of recent anthropological studies that state that making distinctions in these categories is generally a complicating and a problematic factor (see, for example, Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, 'Reflections on youth, from the past to the postcolony', in Honwana and De Boeck (eds), *Makers and Breakers*, 19–29; and Siobhán McEvoy-Levy, 'Introduction: youth and the post-accord environment', in McEvoy-Levy (ed.), *Troublemakers or Peacemakers*, 1–25). For example, while 'children' are idealized as innocent victims to be protected, the tendency is to characterize 'youth' as problematic, dangerous troublemakers who need to be contained (see Demet Lüküslü, 'Günümüz Türkiye Gençliği: Ne Kayip bir Kusak Ne de Ülkenin Aydinlik Geleceği', in Nurhan Yentürk, Yörük Kurtaran and Gülesin Nemutlu (eds), *Türkiye'de Gençlik Çalismasi ve Politikalar* (Istanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayinlari 2008), 287–97). In this regard, these distinctions 'reveal *not* empirical categories but *assumptions* about what is acceptable or unacceptable about "our" children and "their" children, assumptions that may be tied to foreign policy interests or gender stereotypes' (McEvoy-Levy, 'Introduction: youth and the post-accord environment', 4, emphasis added).

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Table 1 Number of participants by location of focus groups

Focus group location	Date	Number of participants			Age
		Male	Female	Total	
Sümerpark Children's Centre	8 March 2010	3	8	11	11–13
ÇAÇA Foundation (Ben u Sen)	13 March 2010	5	5	10	12–15
Bağlar Child Education Centre	9 March 2010	3	6	9	13–15
Suriçi Educational Support Centre	14 March 2010	3	6	9	12–14
Sümerpark Vocational Training Centre	8 March 2010	6	2	8	16–19
Bağlar 5 April Youth Centre	10 March 2010	3	5	8	17–20
Total		**23**	**32**	**55**	

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to their own experiences and worldviews,[36] and, on the other, for empowering socially and economically marginalized groups.[37] Focus groups can provide participants from similar socio-economic backgrounds with a space to discuss, share and reflect on those issues that are relevant to their lives; in other words, they allow for the production of 'collective testimonies', which have the potential for 'impacting directly on individual and collective empowerment'.[38] This methodology also encourages participants to broaden topics that matter the most to them by asking open-ended questions, enabling them to reflect on these questions freely and providing space for lively discussion among the participants.[39]

During March 2010, the first author of this article conducted a total of six focus groups in five educational and youth centres in Diyarbakır, including 55 individuals, 32 females and 23 males. The groups were divided by age, and each group contained both genders and between 7 and 11 participants.[40] All the participants were self-identified as Kurdish and from a low-income socio-economic class. Keeping socio-economic status of the participants constant,

36 David L. Morgan, *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*, 2nd edn (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage 1997).

37 Raymond V. Padilla, 'Using dialogical research methods in group interviews', in David L. Morgan (ed.), *Successful Focus Groups: Advancing the State of the Art* (London: Sage 1993), 153–66; Alan Johnson, '"It's good to talk": the focus group and the sociological imagination', *Sociological Review*, vol. 44. no. 3, 1996, 517–38; Esther Madriz, 'Focus groups in feminist research', in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds), *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage 2003), 363–88.

38 Rina Benmayor (1991), quoted in Madriz, 'Focus groups in feminist research', 159.

39 Morgan, *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*.

40 The reason for the use of mixed-gender groups was that they can reveal additional insights and interactions between male and female participants, whose reactions to and experiences of the conflict can differ.

while gender and age varied, also served to control for variance in factors affecting the participants' framing of the Kurdish issue.[41]

In the focus groups, the questions concerned how the participants defined the Kurdish issue both at the local level (Diyarbakır) and at the national level, as well as how they framed possible solutions and what they would do to bring peace if they were leaders. Before each group, the participants were asked to complete a brief survey that included demographic information, and was designed to obtain general information on the participants' social, economic and educational background.

Analysis

The conflict and peace frames of the Kurdish young people in the focus groups were predominantly shaped by their immediate experiences and observations in their social and political environments. Concerns and insecurity about social, political and economic marginalization and continuous political violence at street level were the main themes that emerged in the discussions, and formed the young people's frames about the Kurdish issue and their visions of a future peace. The discussions were also important in that they revealed how these young Kurds reacted to the dominant frames about the Kurdish issue prevalent in Turkish politics and society.

Peace as absence of social exclusion

Perceptions of and grievances about negative stereotyping, stigmatization and consequent ill-treatment of Kurds at the societal level by Turks was a dominant theme that appeared in most groups. On the one hand, participants complained about how being Kurdish or from Diyarbakır (Diyarbakırlı) was equated with being a PKK member, a 'terrorist' or a criminal, like a thief or a drug dealer. Their frame of the conflict was heavily influenced by their sense of stigmatization by Turks. As examples of this, two young people recounted their experiences in western Turkey:

41 In all groups the participants were selected by the administrators of the community centres. The focus groups were conducted in Turkish in the recreation rooms and classrooms of the centres: places familiar to the participants. All participants without any exception were fluent in Turkish, although some stated in the survey that their mother tongue was Kurdish. During the discussions, some of the participants also stated that their Kurdish was not as good as their Turkish. Thus Turkish as the language of choice did not pose any visible, overt challenges during the focus groups. Nevertheless, at Sümerpark Vocational Training Centre a participant in a private conversation drew attention to the symbolic political importance of the language, stating his personal opinion that the young people would be more open to discussion if the researcher could speak some Kurdish.

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> Once I went to Bursa [one of the major western cities that received high numbers of Kurds in the 1990s] to work. For those people [living in Bursa] even a dog is more precious than we are. When I would walk past their houses, they would say 'Kurds are passing by', and would get angry. When a little [Kurdish] child entered a yard, the owner would get mad and beat him (Ahmet, 14).[42]

> Once I went to Istanbul to my uncle's house. Only Turks live in that neighbourhood and there are no Kurds. One day some friends of my uncle's nephew came for a visit. As we were talking, he said, 'Among us, some people always wish that there had never been Kurds'. They kept repeating this over and over again. It was almost as if they saw them [the Kurds] as enemies, and yet they did not know I was Kurdish. After conversing for a while, I told them that there shouldn't be any discrimination. And they asked me, 'What is your race? Are you Turkish or Kurdish?', and I said, 'I am Kurdish'. They were very surprised. They said '[until meeting you] we had thought that Kurds were very ignorant, very aggressive, very greedy' (Büşra, 14).

Perceptions and perspectives like these were informed both through personal—or second-hand—interactions with Turks, and through living with the national media's frames of Kurds, Diyarbakır and the Kurdish issue. A shared grievance was the Turkish majority's perception of all Kurds—and Diyarbakırlıs in particular—which directly associated them with the PKK and its actions, and the consequent stigmatization and criminalization of Kurds as 'terrorists', enemies or aggressive people.

During the discussions, it was clear that the media served as a device for these young Kurds to measure how they were perceived by the Turkish majority. Many complained that the national news, as well as some television shows, such as *Tek Türkiye* and *Ölümsüz Kahramanlar*,[43] misrepresented and stereotyped Kurds as evil criminals, and completely ignored Kurds' own perspectives, stories, experiences and the 'good things' about Kurds and Diyarbakır. Some complained that, while the pain of soldiers being murdered was always covered in media, the suffering of the mothers, who had lost children who were Kurdish guerrillas, was never mentioned. Based on their impressions of the media, these young Kurds also believed that Turks neither knew about their past suffering nor their current grievances and political demands for collective rights.

Most participants saw a strong causal relationship between the representations of Kurds in the media and their treatment by Turks. They believed that

42 All names used in this article are pseudonyms.

43 *Tek Türkiye* is a fictional series that takes place in the Southeast. It depicts clashes between the Turkish state and the PKK (unnamed in the series, but obvious) from the perspective of the state. *Ölümsüz Kahramanlar* is a television show in which the personal stories of Turkish soldiers who died in clashes with the PKK are told. Both shows are aired on Samanyolu TV, known for its nationalist and conservative stand and closeness to the government.

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Turks rarely visited or lived in the region, were seldom or never engaged with Kurdish people and, therefore, formed their impressions based solely on the national media's negative frames of Kurds. Accordingly, a common belief among the participants was that, if Turks visited the region, lived among them and got to know them in their own localities, these negative impressions could be corrected. A resolution of the conflict would only be possible if Turkish society was willing to understand Kurdish perspectives, suffering and anger.

An analysis of the focus groups suggests that these young people want to be included as Kurds; theirs is a desire and a call to be heard and to be understood by the larger segment of the Turkish society. Their conceptualization of a future peace involves this desire to live as equal citizens in Turkey. It involves coexistence, respect for the Other and having space for the expression of pain that has been experienced by Kurds as a group throughout the conflict. Peace as the absence of social exclusion was also linked to the other dimensions of their vision of peace, especially peace as the absence of socio-economic marginalization.

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Peace as absence of socio-economic marginalization

Framing theorists argue that focusing on the discursive content of frames is not enough; it is also important to understand how the social and political context shapes the frames.[44] In this study, we observed that these young Kurds' frames of the conflict and of peace were largely shaped by the conflict-related, situational factors that they experienced in their everyday lives, such as widespread poverty, unemployment and regional underdevelopment.

During the focus groups, participants discussed poverty and economic marginalization as directly connected to the broader dynamics of the conflict, and particularly to social and political exclusion. The underdevelopment of the region and lack of employment opportunities were seen to be rooted, first, in a lack of investment in the region due to anti-Kurdish discrimination and sentiments on the part of the Turkish majority: 'Turks in Istanbul cast out all Kurds, believing that all Kurds are members of the PKK. That is why they don't make investments here. That's why we have been abandoned this way' (Ece, 14). Second, some participants viewed the high investment rates in weapons by the Turkish state as an obstacle: 'If these generals, instead of spending their money on guns, construct factories in Diyarbakır … if they give [Kurds] jobs, there won't be any unemployed … And there will be peace' (Şiwan, 12). They imagined that an end to conflict and the establishment of peace would stimulate improvements in the economy of the region.

Hand-in-hand with prejudices towards Kurds was the negative reputation of Diyarbakır as a home of violence and conflict, which participants thought

44 Benford, 'An insider's critique of the social movement framing perspective'.

contributed to Diyarbakır's economic marginalization. For example, one of the young Kurds drew attention to the destructive role of Diyarbakır's bad reputation, due to violent street demonstrations, on their educational opportunities: 'Sometimes teachers are appointed here, or anywhere else in the region, but they stay for a month or so, and immediately thereafter get scared and leave. This is bad for our education, [moreover] the name of our city is blackened' (Sena, 14).

The tripartite causal relationship these young Kurds established between discrimination against them as Kurds and Diyarbakırlıs, their socio-economic marginalization and the overall absence of peace, was perhaps best explained by Kadriye (14):

> If they [Turks and/or the Turkish state] provided the kind of job opportunities that people have in the West also in Diyarbakır, wonderful things could happen here. This would be better than denigrating Diyarbakır. This could provide peace; some steps [for peace] could be taken then. If these kinds of job opportunities were also provided to us, people could explain their opinions much better. [But] right now half of the city of Diyarbakır is unemployed. There is a need to find a solution for this, it would be better if factories were built here…. In Istanbul there are many universities. If they built the same here, there would be many educated children right now. There are kids whose fathers are crippled, so they need to work. In Diyarbakır right now many kids work and give the money to their fathers.

Overall, in the light of their personal experiences and observations, young Kurds described peace as an environment devoid of discriminatory practices and consequent economic problems, particularly of poverty and unemployment. By doing so, they framed the Kurdish issue as one of socio-economic marginalization.

Although this might echo the dominant frame of the Kurdish issue in Turkish politics and society, it is different in the sense that the young people's understanding of economic underdevelopment is closely connected to their understanding of their identities. They believe that the Kurdish issue is not a result of underdevelopment, but that the region is left underdeveloped because of the conflict, and that peace would come if this vicious cycle could be broken. These attitudes have also been shaped by their understanding of the 'Kurdish community' and its relations with the Turkish state. As far as these young people are concerned, the absence of state mechanisms to resolve the problems of economic marginalization makes any discourse of social solidarity and communal support impossible, and they describe peace as a place where people, regardless of their identities, help each other whenever it is needed.

Similarly, this framing of the issue as socio-economic marginalization based on ethnicity might echo the PKK's description of the conflict, as mentioned above. However, we can detect two distinguishing features in the frames of the young Kurds. First, they do not use the terminology that the PKK adopts

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in describing the socio-economic marginalization (such as 'Turkish colonialism' and 'Kurdistan as a colony').[45] And, second, along with the state, they also blame Turkish society for their marginalization because it fails to invest in the region due to its association with the PKK, thus labelling them as 'terrorists'.

Some young Kurds said that the ability and skills of people in the region to express themselves in meaningful ways were also important for peace to be achieved. Kadriye's statement—'If they provided the kind of job opportunities … people could explain their opinions much better'—reveals that youths perceive a lack of the means to express themselves in the region, and consider the ability to express themselves as an important dimension of the peace process. This, considered together with Büşra's reflection of her encounter with a Turkish family cited above, points to the importance of dialogue for a future peace-building process, and the potential for the empowerment of these young people as agents of positive social change through non-violent means.

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Peace as political and cultural rights

While the grievances of the Kurdish participants concerning their social exclusion were mostly conceptualized *vis-à-vis* their relations with (members of) Turkish society, frustrations about political exclusion were conceptualized, sometimes ambiguously, *vis-à-vis* relations with the state and its institutions. The participants discussed political exclusion mainly in the context of street demonstrations and the violent tactics adopted by the PKK. At one level, both acts were conceptualized as a means, first, to force the state to grant cultural (especially linguistic), political (recognition of Kurdish political parties and freedom of expression) and economic (provision of employment opportunities) rights for Kurds, and, second, to give voice to past sufferings and ensure they don't happen again. The matter of linguistic rights was discussed in relatively more depth than other matters, and significantly shaped the participants' frame of the Kurdish issue. For instance, freedom was associated with, among other things, the unconstrained use of the Kurdish language. Moreover, when asked about why young people participated in demonstrations and threw stones, many answered 'to live in freedom' or 'for our mother tongue', and went on to recount how they had been restricted from using the Kurdish language in public spaces, such as schools and hospitals: 'With the doctor we have to speak Turkish. But not everyone can. For example, if the patient is Kurdish and cannot speak Turkish, how can she talk?' (Sabahat, 13). '[Turks] can speak whatever language they want anywhere they want; but we can't' (Zilan, 13). In this respect, while the limit to the freedom to

45 See the *PKK* website at www.pkkonline.com (viewed 7 May 2014).

speak Kurdish, in many cases, had symbolic meaning for issues of identity and belonging, it also was of practical concerns in everyday life.

In the context of discussions around political and cultural rights, the diagnostic framing of the conflict was based on the state's discriminatory practices towards Kurds and its denial of their rights as a group. Seen in this light, participants' conceptualizations were reactions to these dominant diagnostic frames of the Kurdish issue, underdevelopment and terrorism, and reflected a desire to bring political and cultural rights to the forefront in order to achieve peace.

Understanding violence and using non-violence as a means of achieving peace

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The fact that 'terrorism' is the Turkish state's dominant diagnostic frame of the Kurdish issue has long suggested a military prognosis. The militarization of the Southeast and violence by the state has accordingly become a continuous reality for Kurds in the region. As discussed above, the dominant frame about the PKK in Turkish politics and media is that it is a separatist 'terrorist organization' that is supported by 'some foreign countries' and, hence, constitutes a barrier to peace.

It is important to note that, while violence, and particularly street violence, had become part of the everyday lives of many young Kurds at the time of the field research, almost all participants in the focus groups emphasized non-violence as the way to achieve peace. However, despite deviating from the dominant diagnostic frames in Turkey that emphasize the 'terrorism' of the PKK, these young Kurds stressed the need to understand the reasons for resorting to violence. In other words, they believed that the dominant diagnostic frames were insufficient to capture the realities of the Kurdish issue. They themselves framed the Kurdish issue as a conflict, one whose root causes were yet to be understood by Turks and the Turkish state. In doing so, they emphasized the need for spaces in which they could make their demands heard through non-violent means. The riots in Diyarbakır, for example, were described by participants as a response to a set of factors involving the past (inherited) and present (experienced) suppression and suffering of Kurds, the influence of families and family histories, as well as peer pressure, resulting in conformism, in the name of solidarity with the Kurdish cause:

> In our neighbourhood most of the youth [including] my friends, participate. When they pressured me into it … I mean, they asked me 'are you not Kurdish, or what?', like that … The first time I participated I was a little anxious. But then you get used to it (Sedat, 16).

> By participating [in the demonstrations] one looks for his rights. But if you get caught by the police, then it's bad (Ahmet, 14).

> They are looking for their rights. In fact I want [to participate], too. It's good that they do it, but [it should be] quiet and calm, not with fights and noise, like this (Sena, 14).

Another participant drew attention to the direct causal link between the current and future victimhood of the young people, and their engagement in political violence (that is, being a PKK member) in the future.[46] She explained eloquently how young people, who are serving long prison terms, would end up lacking the skills they need to survive as 'normal people' in everyday life when they got out and, therefore, their only chance for survival would be to join the ranks of the PKK.

Besides the need to understand why some young Kurds resort to violence, some of the participants also complained about the way the taking up of arms by the PKK, as well as the riots in the streets, were framed by Turkish social and political actors as 'violence for the sake of violence', without allowing for the memories of past suffering that provoke, and the legitimate demands that lay beneath, the violence: 'Nobody goes up the mountain just for the sake of being a terrorist' (Roni, 19). In this sense, the participants understood there was a demand for recognition of pain and need, some involving the sufferings of families who had experienced internal displacement or death during the conflict, along with a desire for empathy from the Turkish society.

Many young people, and particularly young females, stated that they did not approve of the violent behaviour of their cohort, and acknowledged that violent acts were punishable. Yet, at the same time, harsh and indiscriminate police violence, arbitrary arrests and the long prison terms for minors provoked their resentment and feelings of injustice. Some young females believed that there was a need to give voice to the past and current grievances of Kurds, that demonstrations were a means to that end and that, if it were possible, they would prefer demonstrations to be peaceful. Others stated that, while they did not and would not participate in the demonstrations or approve of their violent character, they still supported them: sometimes passively, both emotionally and because of what they symbolized, and sometimes actively by hiding those who were trying to escape from the police. Still others stated that there was a need to invent new and more peaceful forms of getting their ideas across (like planting trees, writing articles), and that there was a need to create spaces for dialogue to nurture mutual understanding. Nevertheless, within their current circumstances, in which alternative non-violent means of protesting were unimaginable or unrealistic, many saw violence as an inevitable vehicle for the expression of grievances. This did not, however, stop them from imagining a non-violent future:

> We want the guns to be silent, too. And we don't want the soldiers to be killed either. But if on their side the soldiers are dying, on our side the guerrillas are

46 Collier, 'Doing well out of war'; Higgins and Martin, 'Violence and young people's security'.

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> dying. And like the soldiers' mothers, the guerrillas' mothers also grieve; they grieve for the soldiers, and they grieve for their own children [the guerillas] (Şevin, 13).

The narratives of most participants also revealed a recognition that violence, no matter how legitimate it might be considered by some, did not result in the desired outcomes. Participating in demonstrations that were 'quiet and calm, not with fights and noise', as Sena said, or writing articles in newspapers to defend one's rights and engaging in non-violent means of protest like planting trees, as suggested by Büşra, were manifestations of their desire to play more constructive roles in dealing with their concerns. Even more importantly, they believed that the longing for peace was mutual, as put by this female participant in reference to the film *Güneşi Gördüm*:[47]

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

It is in this belief in mutuality, recognition and the creation of alternative spaces for dialogue between Turks and Kurds that the Kurdish youth's vision of peace is perhaps most valuable.

Transforming the conflict

The dominant frames concerning the Kurdish issue in Turkey are constructed out of beliefs and fears held by society at large, and simultaneously manipulated by political leaders and nationalist ideologies. This manipulation is justified by a fear of separation, known as 'Sèvres paranoia',[48] prevalent among Turkish political actors and the media in Turkey. Contrary to these fears, fed by nationalist frames, none of the young Kurdish participants in this study associated a separate Kurdish state with the conflict and/or the establishment of peace. Rather, all of the young people in this study framed the current conflict as a struggle for equal rights and opportunities as citizens within Turkey. Based on this diagnostic framing, most of the participants disagreed with violence as the prognostic frame, and stated a longing for non-violence as the way to address the conflict.

47 *Günesi Gördüm* (*I Saw the Sun*), dir. Mahsun Kirmizigül (2009), is about the life of a Kurdish family who were forced to migrate to Istanbul during the late 1990s when their village was evacuated as a result of violent conflict. It deals with the consequences of the conflict on the everyday lives of internally displaced people, and was one of the first films on the subject to reach a wide Turkish audience when it was first screened in March 2009.

48 'Sèvres paranoia' refers to fears that there are external powers attempting to challenge the territorial integrity of the Turkish state and implement the provisions of the Sèvres Treaty of 1920.

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The focus groups revealed that participants felt a set of mixed emotions as a result of their observations and experiences of misrepresentation, degradation and discrimination as a collectivity. They expressed anger and frustration, as well as feelings of inferiority, lack of confidence and loss of dignity in the presence of the dominant Turkish frame of Kurds, which ignore their suffering, identity and degradation. At the same time, the desire to change these circumstances by making themselves known through engagement with Turks was so strongly communicated in most groups that it became impossible to ignore a significant presence of hope for the future. Having the space and the skills to explain themselves to and be heard by Turkish society and individuals was not only suggested as a feasible solution by these young people, who believe such activities could constitute an alternative to violence, it was also expressed as a prerequisite for many young people who feel uncomfortable with their own feelings of anger, lack of confidence and loss of dignity. They see the conflict, in its current form, not as intransigent, but as transformable, and some are willing to make their own contribution to the process of transformation.

Although it seems like the Kurdish youth's framing of the Kurdish issue closely resembles that of the PKK, it should be noted that participants in this study focused mainly on Turkish-Kurdish relations, how they are biased against Kurds, and how this prevents peace: matters that neither the PKK nor the pro-Kurdish BDP was paying much attention to at the time this research was undertaken.[49] Furthermore, although the young people's framing of the conflict as socio-economic, political and cultural marginalization, in particular, sounds similar to that of the PKK, the young Kurds mainly focused on the role of Turks, as a collective, in creating and perpetuating this marginalization by not engaging in dialogue with the Kurds and turning a blind eye to the realities of their region. The focus group discussions also showed that the conflict in Diyarbakır was not simply one between the state and the PKK, as framed by Turkish and Kurdish social and political actors, but also one that takes place at a societal level in the form of social tension between Kurds and Turkish bystanders.[50] And this is, without doubt, a different form of social tension; on the one hand, it is directly connected to social tensions between Turks and Kurds that occur outside the region, since it is partly based on Kurds' own lived or second-hand experiences of unfriendly and

49 During the time the interviews for this research were conducted, neither Kurdish nor Turkish political actors included the necessity of dialogue between Kurds and Turks in their plans for peace. However, after the restart of negotiations between the Turkish state and the PKK in 2013, and increasing anti-Kurdish demonstrations in the Black Sea region, the mayor of Diyarbakır invited the mayor of İzmir (the third biggest city in western Turkey) and various civil society actors to visit Diyarbakır, in the hope of contributing to the peace process. See 'Osman Baydemir'den İzmir'e mesaj var!', *Ege'de SonSöz*, 10 March 2013, available on the *Ege'de SonSöz* website at http://egedesonsoz.com/haber/Osman-Baydemir-den-Izmir-e-mesaj-var/836276 (viewed 7 May 2014).

50 Çelik and Blum, 'Track II interventions and the Kurdish question in Turkey'.

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discriminatory treatment in western Turkey; and, on the other, it is based on observations and impressions taken from media reports and influenced by Kurdish actors. In this regard, the social tension in Diyarbakır that is felt and experienced by young Kurds is more indirect, unidirectional and divorced from daily encounters of violence than that occurring in western Turkey.

More importantly, young people are active agents in making meaning out of their own experiences and observations. The complexity with which the participants frame peace and conflict, as well as how they discuss related social and economic phenomena, is a clear manifestation of this agency. In general terms, they reproduce both conflict and the (constructive and deconstructive) means through which they believe it can be resolved, in their interpretations and discursive practices. They observe, think about and make sense of their observations, impressions and experiences, analyse and construct meanings out of them, and consider and decide on their own roles and responsibilities in the light of these constructed meanings.

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