Dialogue in polarized societies: women's encounters with multiple others

Ayşe Betül Çelik and Zeynep Gülru Göker

Abstract

Based on the analysis of a meeting with nineteen women from civil society with diverse backgrounds, invited to discuss what has gone wrong in Turkey's Kurdish peace process and what women can do for peace in a highly polarized atmosphere, this article explores women's dialogue in a conflict situation. With insights from deliberative and agonistic perspectives, the article shows that in a multiple-identity conflict, topical shifts in dialogue are accompanied by shifting alliances. The search for mutual definitions on conflictual issues renders the deliberation of sensitive issues difficult, so women circumvent polarizing discourses through indirect and covert language. However, the discussion of gender-based experiences with direct, contestational language helps women underline shared issues and address resentments. Dialogue's transformative potential also depends on the existence of trust and an intersectionality perspective for which further dialogic initiatives should develop strategies.

Keywords: *Turkey's multiple-identity conflict; dialogue; gender; deliberative democracy; agonistic democracy*

Many studies show that dialogue among women in conflict zones is a hard but invaluable experience for its participants.[1] While its difficulty comes from the fact that in many cases participants possess rigid positions on identity issues, which bring discussions to a deadlock, its value comes from developing an understanding of others. Most dialogue efforts, however, focus on a single axis of conflict defined by ethnic or religious identity whereas women's encounters in multiple identity conflicts can provide an opportunity to explore, identify, and analyze the barriers against and the possibilities for the facilitation of peaceful relations among women.

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1 Cynthia Cockburn, *The Space between Us: Negotiating Gender and National Identities in Conflict* (London: Zed Books, 1998); Janet M. Powers, "Women and Peace Dialogue in the Middle East," *Peace Review* 15, no. 1 (2003): 25–31.

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To develop an understanding of the internal dynamics of women's dialogic encounters in a multiple identify conflict setting, on January 10, 2018 nineteen women from civil society (CS) with diverse ideological orientations, ethnicities, and sects were invited to a meeting to discuss what went wrong in Turkey's Kurdish peace process between 2009 and 2015, and whether and how the women of Turkey could work together for peace at a time when conflict has re-escalated and social and political polarization has intensified along different identity lines. Although the meeting's focus was on the Kurdish issue, it soon turned out that the discussion necessitated talking about Turkey's various other current and historical conflicts which have led to polarization and the different needs of identity groups in Turkey. This article studies how dialogue on Turkey's different conflicts among women from diverse CS background proceeds and how participants perceive their experience of talking to the "Other" women in a multiple-identity conflict context where civil and political liberties are exercised under constant pressure by focusing on the content and style of communication and on women's perceptions of their dialogic encounters with one another.

Instead of focusing on the potential outcomes of the dialogue, or individual-level transformation in views and perceptions, the article focuses on the internal dynamics of the encounter and sheds light on the styles of speech and their interplay with the issues spoken about. The article shows that in a multiple-identity conflict, where identities are bound with discourses,[2] topical shifts in dialogue are accompanied by shifting alliances and stylistic shifts between formal, more diplomatic, and indirect speech; and direct, open, and confrontational speech, and that the potential of dialogue in bridging societal divides is dependent not only on its content but also its style. Particularly in this case, the stylistic shifts affected by shifting power positions attached to political positions and previous social and political alignments helped move along a sensitive conversation. Moreover, women's dialogue of gender-based experiences helped underline issues that can foster solidarities among women as well as those that remain as areas of contestation. Bridging literature on theories such as conflict, democracy, and feminism, this study analyzes the dialogue of women across multiple divides, and shows the different communicative styles involved in this process. As such, it also makes a contribution to the literature on agonistic and deliberative democracy by showing that dialogue inhabits a dynamic interplay between consensus and contestation, closure and openness, association and divergence, and hence it is unproductive to think of civic political encounters as either consensual or contestational.

2 John S. Dryzek, "Deliberative Democracy in Divided Societies," *Political Theory* 33, no. 2 (2005): 218–42.

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Women's dialogue in conflicts

Dialogue is a widely used conflict transformation method to decrease polarization in conflict and post-conflict societies through providing a space where the participants can listen to the Other's perspective and discuss conflict issues in non-threatening environments. In the long run sustained dialogue can change the dynamics of interpersonal and intergroup relations,[3] and facilitate a shift from antagonistic to agonistic relations. Although dialogue can be analyzed in terms of attitudinal and emotional changes among its participants, how participants interact and what barriers exist in their communication during dialogue are also important topics to study in order to shed light on possible future peace interventions and inform decision makers on axes of conflict and peace at the grassroots level and mid-level leadership. Leaving aside its potential effect on the participants' cognitive and emotional processes, studying dialogue as it takes place can present an understanding of what prevents/facilitates a participant to prevent/motivate to listen to the Other and expand alternative communication venues.

Even though gender identity might be a bonding identity, other identities, such as ideology, religion, ethnicity, etc., can divide women along the lines of different conflicts in the society. Consequently, understanding of "victimhood, truth, human rights violations, and justice acquire a monofocal meaning,"[4] polarizing women on many contested terms and events. Women also become part of "the reconstruction, reproduction and transformation of ethnic and national identity," and the ideologies they support "reinforce the power and privileges of patriarchal institutions (such as the family, church, schools, political parties, etc.) by constraining women to demonstrate their loyalty to these institutions."[5]

However, women also share experiences, especially where they commonly oppose patriarchy, and build bridges across social divides. Many studies show that women's encounters with each other can help build peaceful relations.[6] Research on women's dialogue provides alternative analyses to male-dominated narratives,[7] presents intersectional analyses of these alternative explanations, and brings to the surface barriers that exist in the way of developing a common understanding of a peaceful society. Women's dialogue

3 Harold H. Saunders, "Sustained Dialogue in Managing Intractable Conflict," *Negotiation Journal* 19 (2003): 85–95.

4 Maria Hadjipavlou, "No Permission to Cross: Cypriot Women's Dialogue across the Divide," *Gender, Place & Culture* 13, no. 4 (2006): 329–51, p. 330.

5 Ibid., 335.

6 Cockburn, *The Space between Us*; Elisabeth Porter, "Risks and Responsibilities: Creating Dialogical Spaces in Northern Ireland," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 2, no. 2 (2000): 163–84.

7 Hadjipavlou, "No Permission to Cross."

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also gives voice to the stories of women which are silenced under the militaristic and patriarchal practices of politics in conflictual societies. Last but not least, women's dialogue can also contribute to peacemaking due to the specific communicative styles women adopt such as using more conciliatory manners,[8] speaking with the voice of care,[9] and employing less adversarial listening styles.[10]

Deliberative and agonistic perspectives on dialogue

The value of dialogue has been comprehensively studied by deliberative democrats, who believe that deliberation, taking place under the principles of free and equal access of all affected by the matter, requires dialogue participants to shift from self-centered to public-centered thinking to produce an understanding toward the common good.[11] Yet, defining the common good is demanding, especially in a multiple-identity conflict context, because in such contexts people define their Other based on different perceived threats and level of social contact with them.[12] In a deliberative encounter with the Other, the exposure to different arguments can help question one's hard-line position because deliberation requires giving reasons to defend one's viewpoint and being ready to change it when confronted with Others' reasons. Deliberative democrats believe that the more one practices presenting reasons that can be shared by others, the better one becomes at it,[13] as thinking from multiple points of view creates an enlarged mentality.[14]

During dialogue the open discussion of certain issues with the Other is risky on many levels because it makes one vulnerable. Entering deliberation puts self-certainty at risk as it requires being open to a change of mind and

8 Iris Marion Young, "Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy," in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. S. Benhabib (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 120–35.

9 Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

10 Catherine Bochel and Jacqui Briggs, "Do Women Make a Difference?" *Politics* 20, no. 2 (2000): 63–8, p. 66.

11 James Bohman, "Survey Article: The Coming of Age of Deliberative Democracy," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 6, no. 4 (1998); Joshua Cohen, "Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy," in *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics*, ed. J. Bohman and W. Rehg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 67–93.

12 Ayşe Betül Çelik, Rezarta Bilali, and Yeshim Iqbal, "Patterns of 'Othering' in Turkey: A Study of Ethnic, Ideological, and Sectarian Polarisation," *South European Society and Politics* 22, no. 2 (2017): 1–22.

13 Jon Elster, *Deliberative Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1998), 111.

14 Seyla Benhabib, "Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy," in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. S. Benhabib (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 67–94, 72.

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ready to face Otherness. In addition, in the context of deep discord and distrust, self-disclosure can have concrete risks and produce new vulnerabilities.[15] In polarized contexts, where proximity to the governing political ideology is an important aspect of power, the stakes are not only high for the relatively powerless but also for those members of the politically powerful groups whose ideas challenge the government, and who then risk facing isolation, deportation, shaming, etc.

In polarized societies it is not solely cultural difference/identity that is a matter of conflict, but also clashing discourses that are aligned with these divisions.[16] Public spheres in such societies are highly segmented and prone to the "law of group polarization";[17] in other words, like-minded tend to stick with like-minded. Studies show that exposure to different political views can cause people to stick to their group's position more aggressively, and to try to construe counterarguments instead of listening attentively.[18] Yet, in places where society is divided along many lines, the composition of the like-minded changes as the conflict issue changes, allowing space for deliberation.

Deliberative democracy's assumptions about the role of deliberation in democracy have been most vehemently challenged by the proponents of the agonistic perspective on democracy, who put stress on the ineradicability of difference and conflict in politics. As such, proponents of the agonist perspective find deliberative democracy ill-equipped to deal with the problems posed by deep differences and passionate identifications, believing that it undermines the role of conflict and power in politics.[19] They reject the possibility of deliberative consensus, arguing that any consensus is an expression of the hegemonic crystallization of power relations, rather than the sign of a power-stripped collective rationality.[20] They see identity as a site of fundamental agonistic struggle, and value democratic dialogue not for resolving conflicts, but for turning antagonism into agonism, thus enabling the continuation of contestation.[21]

15 Porter, "Risks and Responsibilities," 167.

16 Dryzek, "Deliberative Democracy.".

17 Cass R. Sunstein, "The Law of Group Polarization," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 10, no. 2 (2002): 175–95.

18 Diana Carole Mutz, *Hearing the Other Side: Deliberative versus Participatory Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 83.

19 Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London and New York: Verso, 2000), 95.

20 Lars Tønder and Lasse Thomassen, *Radical Democracy: Politics between Abundance and Lack, Reappraising the Political* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005); Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985).

21 Samuel Allen Chambers and Terrel Foster Carver, *Judith Butler and Political Theory: Troubling Politics* (London: Routledge, 2008); Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*; Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London and New York: Verso, 2005).

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For Mouffe, when two people come together they do not give reasons, but "combat," and what gives it democratic character is an agonistic spirit of adversariality, namely, mutual respect for each other's right to defend ideas.[22] While she presents a pragmatic version of agonism that explicates politics strictly between collective identifications and hegemonic constellations of power, Connolly offers an expressivist version of agonism,[23] where the contestation that agonists celebrate takes place not only on the level of collective identification but also within one's relation to the self and collective.[24] This acknowledgment of internal contestations of identity is valuable for studying encounters in multiple-identity conflicts, as such contestations help avoid the formation of singular blocs in dialogue.

Although Mouffe's critique has its merits, in that there is value in recognizing the role of passions and contestation in dialogue,[25] she singularly focuses on the disruptive moments in political encounters which renders her position weak in terms of attesting to where and how antagonism will translate into agonism, and how this can be learned.[26] As Villa argues, the agonist understanding of politics as centered around "incessant contestation" and resistance offers a very constricted account of democratic politics,[27] and especially agonists like Honig, who borrows from Arendt's work, fail to see that for Arendt agonism is also about "public-spiritedness, independent judgment, and self-distance in addition to initiatory action."[28] In fact, dialogue often inhabits both deliberative and agonistic elements,[29] and moments of contestation with those of reflection and independent judgment, and one needs to make use of these elements while paying attention to the identity contestations among the dialogue participants. Women's dialogic encounters do not necessarily undermine but bring to the surface and help the

22 Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 70.

23 William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

24 Andrew Schaap, *Law and Agonistic Politics* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 1.

25 There is now a growing body of research on the role of emotions in dialogue that we do not address in this article as it is beyond its scope. However, it is worth noting that emotions have a significant role in encounters whether seen from a deliberative or agonistic perspective. For instance, the question what makes political emotions democratically appropriate and compatible with adversarial politics is taken up by Mihaela Mihai, "Theorizing Agonistic Emotions", *Parallax* 20, no. 2 (2014): 31–48.

26 Michael Morrell, "Listening and Deliberation," in *The Oxford Handbook of Deliberative Democracy*, ed. Andre Bächtiger et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 237–51.

27 Dana R. Villa. *Politics, Philosophy, Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 125.

28 Ibid., 127.

29 Dryzek, "Deliberative Democracy"; Selen A. Ercan, "From Polarisation to Pluralisation: A Deliberative Approach to Illiberal Cultures," *International Political Science Review* 38, no. 1 (2016): 114–27; Mark E. Warren, "What Should and Should Not Be Said: Deliberating Sensitive Issues," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 37, no. 2 (2006): 163–81.

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acknowledgment of the constant contestation of identity categories and include both reason giving and argumentation aiming at opinion change, if not consensus, as well as the accepting of difference and contestations that would come out of it. As such, it calls for openness to a change of heart and opinion, as underlined by deliberative democracy, and an agonistic openness necessitating direct confrontation regarding contested issues as adversaries.

In multiple identity conflict contexts where many identities and narratives are under contestation and power positions constantly shift, the polarizing macro-political discourse is also prevalent in dialogue, and there are positions women feel they need to defend, and words they do not want pronounced, or fear doing so. Moreover, an agonistic openness is required to deal with differences and to confront past issues that cause tension among women when discussing contemporary matters. Hence, seeing dialogic political encounters from the perspective of what White suggests is a more tempered version of agonism can capture the continual negotiation between agonism and consensualism, rather than seeing them as two distinct options.[30]

Women in multiple-identity conflicts: the case of Turkey

Turkey has experienced various forms of conflict between its different ethnic, sectarian, and ideological groups since the Republic's foundation. Studies show the existence of multiple axes of polarization in Turkey.[31] Increasing nationalism,[32] religious conservatism,[33] and the media's language of polarization and hate[34] have contributed to this polarization. Negative attitudes, behaviors, and feelings are not only directed against one group, but to various ones, although at different levels. Turkish society is also polarized around lifestyles,[35] ethnic lines,[36] and religiosity and conservatism.[37] Intensifying

30 White suggests that Honig's version of agonism is representative of this tempered version, see Lida Maxwell et al., "The 'Agonistic Turn': *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* in New Contexts," *Contemporary Political Theory* 18 (2019): 640–72, p. 656.

31 Binnaz Toprak et al., *Research Report on Neighbourhood Pressure* (İstanbul: Açık Toplum Vakfı, 2009); Elif Çelebi et al., "Out-Group Trust and Conflict Understandings: The Perspective of Turks and Kurds in Turkey," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 40 (2014): 1–12; Çelik et al., "Patterns of 'Othering'."

32 Rezarta Bilali, Ayşe Betül Çelik, and Ekin Ok, "Psychological Asymmetry in Minority–Majority Relations at Different Stages of Ethnic Conflict," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 43 (2014): 253–64.

33 Toprak et al., *Research Report*.

34 Hatice Çoban Keneş, *Yeni Irkçılığın "Kirli" Ötekileri: Kürtler, Aleviler, Ermeniler* ["Dirty" Others of New Racism: Kurds, Alevis and Armenians] (Ankara: Dipnot Yayınları, 2014).

35 KONDA, *Toplumda, Siyasette Kutuplaşma* (İstanbul: Konda, 2010).

36 Çelebi et al., "Out-Group Trust."

37 Toprak et al., *Research Report*.

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societal polarization, political parties build their political identities and discourses along different social identity lines that often exclude and alienate different social groups.[38] This polarization manifests itself in various forms of conflict; Sunni–Alevi, Turkish–Kurdish, and pro–anti government being the most salient ones in recent years.[39]

The ruling Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) has been accused of introducing predominantly Sunni policies (e.g., Islamicizing the educational system and formulation of ethno-religious foreign policy,[40] continuation of non-recognition of cemevis as worship places, and Sunni-Hanefi interpretation of Islam in society, the state, and legislation)[41]. Although it initiated an "opening" on the Alevi issue following the Kurdish initiative in 2008, it failed because of the failure to convince Alevis of its sincerity[42] and inability to institute mechanisms to produce a pluralistic society.[43] Consequently, some argue that it resulted in the Islamization of the country[44] and increased the Othering of Alevis at the societal and the political level. Authoritarian governmental control in many aspects of public life in the aftermath of the failed coup attempt on July 15, 2016 and re-escalation of violence on the Kurdish issue after 2015 also contributed to this polarization.[45]

The armed conflict between the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partîya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, PKK) and the state which emerged in 1984 gained a societal aspect and intensified in the early 2000s. After a failed peace attempt between 2009 and 2015, state repression against the Kurdish movement has increased, coupled with increasing restrictions on social and political rights. Following the coup attempt in 2016, during the two-year state of emergency tens of thousands of people—including the co-presidents of the pro-Kurdish political party—were arrested or dismissed from their jobs, and the state increased security measures in the Kurdish cities. A specific target of the government was the Kurdish women organizations, which were fighting against state oppression and patriarchy in the Kurdish-dominated regions.

38 KONDA, *Toplumda, Siyasette Kutuplaşma*.

39 Çelik et al., "Patterns of 'Othering'; Bilali et al. "Psychological Asymmetry."

40 Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, "An Alternative Reading of Religion and Authoritarianism: The New Logic between Religion and State in the AKP's New Turkey," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 19, no. 3 (2019): 79–98.

41 Mehmet Bardakçı "The Alevi Opening of the AKP Government in Turkey: Walking a Tightrope Between Democracy and Identity," *Turkish Studies* 16, no. 3 (2015): 349–70.

42 Ibid.

43 Derya Özkul, "Alevi 'Openings' and Politicisation of the 'Alevi Issue' during the AKP Rule", *Turkish Studies* 16, no. 1 (2015): 80–96.

44 Toprak et al., *Research Report*.

45 Ayşe Betül Çelik and Evren Balta, "Explaining the Micro Dynamics of the Populist Cleavage in the 'New Turkey'," *Mediterranean Politics* 25, no. 2 (2018): 160–81.

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Added to these dimensions of conflict that had intensified since the Gezi protests of 2013 was the pro–anti governmental axis, which may overlap with other axes of conflict in Turkey.[46]

Since 2016 Turkey's democracy score, especially concerning its respect for freedom of speech and press, decreased significantly.[47] All these factors resulted in heightened tension, especially between different groups in the country, and overall created an environment of distrust preventing meaningful dialogue not only between Kurdish and Turkish CS actors but also among ideologically, sectarianly, and ethnically different groups.

Party politics in Turkey has always had a role in shaping axes of solidarity and divergence within the women's movements, especially on ethnic and sectarian lines, but particularly in the 1990s it affected the development of a divergence between Kemalists and Islamist women.[48] Intensifying polarization in recent years also increased tensions between pro- and anti-governmental women's groups, while class and ethnic antagonisms fragmented the struggles against the government's gender politics, making the divergence within the women's movement much more complex than binary oppositions.[49] In the past, from time to time women worked together on shared issues such as violence against women, employment, and education, or in the process leading to Turkey's ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.[50] In the 1990s and early 2000s organizations with divergent worldviews could mobilize in the name of "thin commitments."[51] The increasing criminalization of pro-Kurdish politics in recent years led to an unwillingness and fear of giving support to pro-Kurdish women's politics, which damaged inclusive coalition-building efforts for gender equality that had gained momentum after the Gezi protests.[52] Hence, proliferating inclusive dialogic encounters between diverse women could all be more valuable in such a context.

Although we do not associate gender with women as an essential, biological category, we believe that women's subjective lived experience represents valuable content for dialogue as the disproportionate and specific gendered effects

46 Çelik et al. "Patterns of Othering."

47 Freedom House, "Freedom in the World: Turkey." https://freedomhouse.org/country/turkey/freedom-world/2020. Accessed December 16, 2020.

48 Berna Turam, "Turkish Women Divided by Politics," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 10, no. 4 (2008): 475–94.

49 Selin Çağatay, "Women's Coalitions beyond the Laicism–Islamism Divide in Turkey: Towards an Inclusive Struggle for Gender Equality?" *Social Inclusion* 6, no. 4 (2018): 48–58.

50 Aksu Bora and Asena Günal, *90'larda Türkiye'de Feminizm* [Feminism in Turkey in the 90s] (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002); Nora Fisher Onar and Hande Paker, "Towards Cosmopolitan Citizenship? Women's Rights in Divided Turkey," *Theory and Society* 41, no. 4 (2012): 375–94.

51 Onar and Paker, "Towards Cosmopolitan Citizenship?"

52 Çağatay, "Women's Coalitions beyond the Laicism-Islamism Divide in Turkey."

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of conflict can differentiate women's perspectives on peaceful societies, while other social attributes, such as ethnicity, can intersect with gender to structure discursive participation.[53] In fact, multifaceted identities and power positions intersect in the case of multiple-identity conflict situations, such as the one we study. Although in general women encountering other women in dialogue use "conflict resolution principles of cooperation, non-domination and creative synergy,"[54] when they are constantly challenged by hierarchies and power asymmetries due to multiple fault lines such cooperation becomes difficult to establish. It becomes harder to identify crisscrossing ties in multiple-identity conflict situations where power positions constantly shift. Dialogue, thus, can be a means to identify and carefully handle the internal contestations of individual and group identity without necessarily aiming to create shared narratives of multiple conflicts in the society.

Furthermore, a gender perspective allows the inclusion of the concrete experiences of women in dialogue which macro-political deliberations often exclude. Feminist political theorists criticize the assumption of impartiality endorsed in the normative origins of deliberative democracy, in that the view of the "generalized other" assumed in deliberation overlooks pertinent and often gendered distinctions between individuals and is actually the view of a privileged group claiming to be impartial.[55] The assumption of impartiality works to deny the existence of "concrete others" and relegates their needs and interests to privacy and subjectivity.[56] Furthermore, concrete experiences often find expression not in overly rationalistic, formal deliberations but in the "metaphorical, rhetorical, playful, embodied aspects of speech that are important aspects of its communicative effect."[57] In fact, as Habermas argues, under conditions of deep discord it is the "the gentle style of mutual understanding" that can help foster mutual respect between self-enclosed groups, so the style of deliberation (as well as its content) has much significance.[58]

Gender perspectives offer a nuanced view taking into account both verbal and non-verbal dynamics of dialogue and its corporeal elements, such as body

53 Edana Beauvais, "The Gender Gap in Political Discussion Group Attendance," *Politics & Gender* 16, no. 2 (June 2019): 315–38.

54 Hadjipavlou, "No Permission to Cross," 336.

55 Seyla Benhabib, "The Generalized and the Concrete Other: The Kohlberg–Gilligan Controversy and Feminist Theory," in *Feminism as Critique: On the Politics of Gender, Feminist Perspectives*, ed. Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 77–95; Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

56 Benhabib, "The Generalized and the Concrete Other."

57 Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 118.

58 Jürgen Habermas, "Interview with Habermas," in *The Oxford Handbook of Deliberative Democracy*, ed. André Bächtiger, John S. Dryzek, Jane Mansbridge, and Mark Warren (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 71–83.

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language, eye contact, voice tone, silences, and gestures, namely the "interstices of dialogue."[59] Moreover, scholars who theorize communication with an eye on gender issues also take into account those aspects of communication that are grounded on everyday communication such as greeting, rhetoric, and storytelling.[60] From an agonistic perspective that rejects any closure or singularity of the identity of "womanhood," speech, discourse, and language are sites of signification, power, and performance, and woman as subject is "both produced through political exclusions and positioned against them."[61]

The debate on deliberative politics versus agonistic politics has also been a central one for feminist politics.[62] Both approaches study communicative styles as a political space within a network of power positions. While deliberative scholars focus on the transformation of opinions through reason giving toward some sort of a common ground or understanding, agonistic scholars study how women create, reproduce, transform, and articulate the rules of the game in communication in constantly changing power dynamics[63] by analyzing how difference is welcome/contested through open contestational discussion. In a multiple-identity conflict context, power dynamics themselves constantly shift along political, ideological, ethnic, and sectarian lines, thereby creating a dynamic dialogic encounter, embodying both moments of association and divergence. Observing these power dynamics and axes of conflict during dialogue can help identify how current polarization in Turkey works to either exacerbate existing divergences between women or in certain cases promote alliances across different ideological positions.

Methodology

Nineteen women working on gender and peace issues in Turkey were invited by the first author, a scholar working on intergroup conflicts in Turkey with no formal political affiliation, to a meeting in İstanbul to discuss Turkey's Kurdish issue and to identify the roles women can play in the peaceful transformation of the conflict. Particular attention was paid to select women representatives (most of whom were leaders in their organizations/networks) from a purposive sample of organizations close to the Kurdish movement, the government, the Alevi community, the main opposition party, etc. that are

59 Diana Coole, "Gender, Gesture and Garments: Encountering Embodied Interlocutors," in *Dialogue, Politics and Gender*, ed. Jude Browne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 184.

60 Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*.

61 Mary G. Dietz, "Current Controversies in Feminist Theory," *Annual Review of Political Science* 6, no. 1 (2003): 399–431, p. 422.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

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aligned differently on the Kurdish issue. They were determined based on membership in formal or informal organizations/networks relevant to this discussion (one to two participants from each organization) and their work related to gender equality/justice in Turkey. They expressed their familiarity with the convener's previous work or academic institution as the basis of their trust in this dialogic encounter. Except for two participants who could not join due to health reasons, all invited participants replied positively. Three questions we formulated beforehand were: "Can you present your analysis of the role of women in the past efforts to prevent violence in Turkey?"; "In your opinion, what are some common areas where women can work together?"; and "What do you think women need in order to work together?"

In the meeting we informed the participants that their identities would remain anonymous in both the policy report and the research article that would come out of the meeting and asked their permission to use their quotes anonymously. To keep their identities confidential we use aliases throughout the article. The information we use to describe participants is based on their organizations (whose ideological orientations are known by the public), the way they introduced themselves to the rest of the group, and the way they self-described in the meeting. With due respect to the multiplicity of the participants' identities, it is safe to say that the composition of the group reflected the diversity of the issues discussed: six participants were Kurdish (two Alevi Kurdish), five were headscarved, three came from Ankara, two from Diyarbakır, and the rest from İstanbul. Among them were journalists, academicians, businesswomen, and CS activists. Since all participants stressed the multiple identities of women, we refer to these in the narration of their discussions. Most of the women knew each other either in person or through their organizations, although their levels of acquaintance varied. Most participants work on women's issues but not all of them self-defined as feminists, itself a contested definition. Both authors are academics with no involvement in any of the organizations to which the participants belonged, yet are familiar with the internal dynamics of the women's movements in Turkey.

The participants were asked to use the time allocated to say what they wanted to say about the question rather than replying to a participant and were advised to listen to each other carefully. Notwithstanding, many participants preferred to reply to each other during the meeting. We noted down all of these instances, paying attention to how replies were formulated and to whom they were directed.

The three-hour meeting was recorded and transcribed verbatim, including notes on all verbal reactions. While one of the authors facilitated the dialogue, the other, along with three assistants who sat strategically to see all participants (who were facing each other around a table), took notes on participants'

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non-verbal reactions. All gestures, such as frowns, smiles, nods, and silence in-between speaking, were recorded. The notes were incorporated into the transcription to obtain a complete picture of the participants' verbal and non-verbal communication.

In the first three months following the meeting, ten participants, who were selected to represent the diversity of the meeting, were interviewed about their perceptions of the meeting, those moments when they felt the dialogue was exhausted, and their suggestions regarding the principles such meetings should adopt in the future. All data were analyzed by the authors using MaxQda (a qualitative software analysis program), which allowed the identification of themes and analysis of thematic and stylistic shifts, and linked the conversation analysis to the interview analysis.

Changing themes, shifting alliances, dynamic speaking styles

Many participants initially stated that it had been a long time since they had been in a meeting with such a diverse group. Even though these views were expressed in a celebratory tone, as discussions grew heated many issues created discomfort. As their focus changed from one issue to another, alliances also shifted along visible and latent power dynamics that we observed in participants' manner and greetings, and whether they actively listened to each other, cut each other's words off, or responded to each other by rewinding to a previous nexus of conflict. Overall five issues revolving around the three questions asked stimulated intense reactions and shifts in conversation over the course of the meeting. These were: questioning women's agency in conflict resolution or peace processes (the naming of the very process was another source of debate); whether women were (ever) able to coalesce and unite for a common cause; whether peace/conflict resolution processes should focus on women's maternal role or on other cross-cutting identities, such as class, ethnicity, religion, place of living, and proximity to conflict; whether the war in southeastern Turkey was gendered and women were disproportionately affected by it, who has been "Otherized" in Turkey, and whose pain is the hardest to bear.

As the conversation shifted between different axes of conflict, alliances shifted accordingly, which complicated reaching mutuality on a single axis, but also prevented the creation of fixed blocs. These shifts happened momentarily; while women discussed issues central to the meeting revolving around women's coalitions for peace, they constantly made references that touched upon other axes of current or past conflicts. For instance, as women were discussing why there was/is no women's alliance in the resolution of the

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Kurdish issue, a participant argued that it is because there was no women's alliance to fight against the ban on headscarves in the past. The dialogue constantly derailed from one subject to the other as each subject caused women to bring up another contested issue, recall a past agony, or underline a difference. Interestingly, in the interview after the meeting a participant close to the pro-government circles mentioned that another participant close to same circles was not happy that there was not "as strong" an alliance as she would have expected between the two on matters related to the "pro–against" governmental axis, such as those related to the Kurdish issue, although for other participants that alliance was present in the discussions despite the fact that those who did not present a strong governmental position adopted more cautious language to address these matters.

As these issues pertain to Turkey's prevalent political cleavages, the general polarized political atmosphere and increased state repression created lack of trust in the room, which made getting everything out in the open difficult regarding polarizing issues, so women spoke about them in an indirect, careful, and formal style to keep the conversation going. However, the women said they felt a sense of security due to past acquaintance or proximity to the women's movement which allowed an agonistic openness when the dialogue shifted to women's issues per se.

Generally the women were more careful in the way that they described the state of the Kurdish issue at the time of the meeting, whether it was gendered, women's role in the peace process, and how the security measures practiced at the time of the meeting affected the lives of the people more cautiously, while there was a more open, even sincerer atmosphere in the air when they discussed past alliances and divergences, such as those related to the heardscarf issue or violence against women. Addressing the contextuality of security, at the meeting one of the participants, Feryal, said, "if we were to be in a conflict resolution process now, I would eliminate three out of the ten sentences I would form, but today, I am eliminating ten of the sentences and only forming three." She went on to describe how she's been involved with many women's groups over the years where women who did not know of each other could come together and observe each other's resources, limits, and boundaries, and work together, and added:

> But when we leave the meeting room, a louder voice, that of macro politics, runs over all those interactions and we end up not being able to talk about them the next time ... Hence even if we are comfortable at this table, no matter how insecure we feel, [that interaction] gets lost in the loud voice of macro politics. This is a big problem and the state of emergency [at the time of the meeting] helped raise that [other] voice.

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Besides shifting alliances, another common trend in discussion along identity lines was passive voice use. While in deliberative circles sincere and open conversation is promoted so that dialogue fulfills its transformative role, in the deliberation of sensitive issues in polarized settings the passive voice helps continue the dialogue by preventing cross-accusations and by impersonalizing the conflict. Its use may, however, make women's voices invisible if what they say sounds too much like a repetition of dominant discourses perpetuated by men in party politics. For example, during the discussion about whether women were able to form alliances in the past, Emel, a headscarved Sunni woman with an independent political position, used the passive voice to accuse "some" women for being under male leaders' influence. Nilay, another headscarved woman working in a non-governmental organization (NGO) close to the government, stated that the women's movement was not able to unite under shared emotions or produce shared discourses, and specifically accused women whom she finds to be "under the influence of ideology" for being silent in the peace process, implying that they are "being used" by men. While she made this accusation, Selen, a member of an Alevi woman's organization, shook her head dismissively. Yet Gülay, a member of a woman's platform who previously worked at a women's entrepreneurial group known to have a liberal feminist stance, directly reacted to this accusation by cutting Nilay off, while Inci, another headscarved woman working for the same NGO as Nilay, allied with Nilay by derailing the subject matter, thus forming an alliance based on the pro-government stance they shared.

These examples show that while women's reaction to Nilay's claim is, in fact, a reaction to the dismissal of the women's movements' past victories and a reaction to the sidelining of gender issues in the peace process, women close to the government were making a political statement by implying that it was the Kurdish groups which did not represent women in the failed peace process (even though the PKK leader specifically nominated a woman to shuttle between himself and the Kurdish women's groups just before the peace process failed). The participants such as Nilay, who argued that women were not active as women but were being strategically used by men, were making the point that women's presence in politics was not strong in general. In fact, throughout the dialogue this accusation became a discursive attack from all positions to the Other side, regardless of how the other side was defined. It was also a sign of the negative effect of political polarization on women's solidarity. Almost all women implied that the Other (political) women are mouthpieces for male politicians, and they perceived polarization to be based on ideology alone without acknowledging other elements, such as ethnicity or class.

Shifts in communicative style accompanied the thematic shifts. Given the difficulty of reason giving, and of listening with an openness to a change of

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opinion, regarding heavily polarized matters where macro-political discourse entered the conversation, women spoke in a more indirect, diplomatic, and formal style, especially on matters concerning present-day politics. However, they shifted to a more directly confrontational style—one we identify with agonistic politics—when discussing matters regarding the women's movement or women's issues in general. While women carefully avoided references that would ignite antagonism given the polarized political atmosphere when discussing present-day politics, when talking about issues from the past—such as the headscarf ban where confronting past practices is lacking at the societal level, thereby creating a lot of resentment—they shifted to a directly confrontational style of speech. For instance, before Yasemin, a headscarved participant known to be in social circles close to the government, stated that women who are part of the women's movement could not coalesce with headscarved women in the past, she gave the warning: "I know that there are people among us who will be angry because I am bringing this matter up." Knowing these women from previous networks and having a history of working together, she was quite aware that her statement would receive staunch reactions, but she said it anyway to underline why she thinks a coalition might be difficult today and to call attention to her agony. It can be argued that this agonistic openness is related to the fact that Turkey's headscarf issue has recently been addressed by allowing headscarved women access to public space; however, there is still resentment and negative emotion stemming from not having had adequate and sincere public discussions between those who were pro and against the headscarf ban in the past.

Like the headscarf issue, another heated subject that kept reoccurring during the meeting was whether women's role in peace is constrained by their maternal role alone, and relatedly, whether "war" in southeastern Turkey was gendered. In the Turkish context the discussion of women's maternal identity in relation to peace is very much connected to the governmental slogan used during the peace/resolution process, "mothers shall not cry anymore," which implied that the resolution would bring about an end to mothers' tears. During the meeting the reference to women's maternal identity was embraced by the participants close to the government, while others reacted to such references as essentializing women's identity, as did Yelda:

> [During the recent conflict in southeastern Turkey] many women and children lost their lives. The makeup of the identities of those who lost their lives mainly fell in the typology of mother, spouse, daughter-in-law, and mother-in-law. In other words, they fell within the scope of identities which define our social lives.

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Whether the "war" had distinctly gendered effects and was hence a "gendered" war became another source of validity clash on the pro-government and pro-Kurdish movement axis where ethnic and feminist alliances merged: both Alevi-Kurdish Sema and Sunni-Kurdish Emel came to Yelda's rescue against Sakine, who denied any knowledge of gendered abuses taking place during the "war on terror" in the southeast. In short, reaction to the AKP became a source of alliance crossing sectarian and ethnic lines. While from a pro-governmental position Sakine was quite dismissive of arguments about what Yelda called a "sexist war," she was more open to discussing the disproportionate effects of war on women per se. In other words, when discussion shifted from macro-political discourses to women's shared issues the tone of the conversation also shifted from antagonism—loaded with politically charged clashes of facts and norms—to agonism, which allowed women to start asking questions in order to learn from each other and to think together rather than challenging each other's claims. Even though Sakine did not give up on her stance regarding the naming of the conflict as "war" or as "sexist" per se, she wanted to hear out the position of the other, saying, "honestly, I would really like to know how a gendered conflict took place in the [southeast] region." As such, she displayed a deliberative openness to listen to the other's reason, if not to change her mind, and an agonistic respect for the other's right to defend a contested opinion. As seen, these positions are not distinct options but elements of dialogue that are negotiated throughout. At time antagonistic, at other times adversarial, participants exercise a capacity of reflection and judgment when listening to each other.

From covert to overt language: identifying commonalities and contestations

We observed that when women talked from a discursive position they were listening to counter-argue and the risk they took in dialogue was related to whether they would be able to defend or advocate their position. In-between meanings, silences, gestures, implying, and the use of passive voice helped move the dialogue on. For instance, women said "some people," "some sections of society," or started to talk with critical undertones, such as "I am going to talk more concretely" or "I will not derail the subject," without naming but implying the previous speaker. Similarly, meeting of eyes, smiling toward, or eye-rolling were observed to take place between women sharing similar ideas. The use of such gestures or the passive voice are actually distancing forms of communication, but in this particular context they helped women avoid direct confrontation and impersonalize the conflict so that no single bloc

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could be formed, although the strongest alliance we observed was along the pro- and anti-governmental axis due to the power asymmetry in Turkish politics in recent years (despite the perception by the women from the pro-governmental NGOs that it was not a strong alliance). Yet at the same time, such covert language also caused emotional tension in the room.

Covert language is very generalizing; participants referred to "us/them" distinctions without necessarily defining who we/they are when speaking because they did not want to name anybody directly. While the more powerful groups wanted to impose their definitions, the less powerful ones (both defined depending on the issue discussed) insisted on the freedom to make their own definitions. A participant put this as the expression of powerlessness: under conditions of war, she said, if you are not saying the same thing as the powerful group you are completely ignored. Those who spoke from a hegemonic position advocated stripping off ideologies and identities and having shared definitions—but did not acknowledge that they were also talking from a position of ideology and privilege. Those who find themselves on the "other" side in multiple contexts, such as Nesrin (a Kurdish Armenian woman), or not "fit enough" for an identity as defined by the majority, such as Nalan (a Turkish peace activist), expressed the impossibility of stripping oneself of identity, as a piece of their identity became the source of their Othering in different contexts. Nalan said, "we were too Turkish for the Kurds, and too Kurdish for the Turks," and added, one cannot be oneself if there is no ideology or Othering. Such an expression shows that the fluidity of identities, which makes alliance slippery in multiple-identity contexts, requires different styles of communication in dialogue.

In a multiple-identity conflict situation, when an accusation is made it points to a certain identity aspect of the Other depending on the situation. For instance, Nesrin's Kurdish, Armenian, secular identity is Othered differently, whether the issue at stake is the headscarf ban or the Kurdish issue. So, she is put into the category of "them" for a different reason in each case. Hence the impersonalization of conflict prevents the conversation from turning into a clash of validity claims. Even though such impersonalization does not mean the acceptance of the other's position, it prevents antagonistic clashes between the dialogue participants. Nevertheless, to make the dialogue continue moving to first-person language becomes necessary to avoid generalizations that deny the complexity of people's identities and positionalities, as well as vulnerabilities, as Nesrin expressed in the meeting:

> It makes peace really hard [to achieve] when definitions are made without saying "I" . . . My conscience is so clear knowing that the Kurdish issue is my issue. Regarding that issue, I use my own language, make my own definitions,

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> exhibit my own position. I believe that for women to avoid objectification and clichés, women need to define everything from their own standpoint, with the condition that they express such characterization of events not independent from their feelings and put to the fore their own solutions.

In her follow-up interview, Feryal said it is the expectation that one only speaks from a predefined position that brings dialogue to deadlock, it is what makes women perceive each other's words as those of male political leaders they oppose and see in the Other woman's existence "an embodiment of higher politics" (March 22, 2018). Once that is the perspective, any reaction is a reaction to the invisible male(s) in the room rather than the woman who is actually speaking. It is the very complexity of identities, and the internal contestations of one's identity and viewpoint, that can allow the identification of crisscrossing ties among women which requires an agonistic openness. Oscillations between the generalizing passive voice and direct, personalized, agonistic language help recognize the dignity of the "generalized Other" along with the reality of the perspective of the "concrete Other."[64] The shift to direct and open confrontation when talking about differences among women and conflicts within the women's movement that have caused resentment over the years also helped foster a sense of group identity as women, who are concrete Others in male-dominated political platforms, especially on issues related to women's lives such as violence against women. Yet ideologically ridden women also accuse each other of reciting men's political discourses, so this sense of collective Otherness is momentous and conditional on the issue at stake. A sense of security stemming from past acquaintances in political and social movements helped women speak as adversaries (not as enemies) and stress commonalities between women through shared problems, such as those concerning labor, the environment, or refugees in relation to gender; as Emel said,

> We are living a period where for the first time east and west [of the country] became equal. I can no longer talk about the Kurdish issue alone. I mean, today we have an issue that is accepted by everybody, except those assimilated under politics. That is the problem of not being able to know what tomorrow will look like. I mean, that is why hope is very important [. . .] societal reconciliation will not come through the Kurdish issue, but something that will include [issues like] labor, environment, refugees and all.

For many of the participants the problems women face on a daily basis could be the source of women's conversations and efforts for peace. Nalan suggested

64 Seyla Benhabib, "The Generalized and the Concrete Other"; Paul Hoggett and Simon Thompson, "Towards a Democracy of the Emotions," *Constellations* 9, no. 1 (2002): 106–26.

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that this type of coalition stemmed from shared societal injuries—"issue or problem-oriented politics"—as a contrast to identity politics. As Nesrin said in the meeting, "peace is the essence of the gender issue. Where discrimination and violence ends, there is peace," hence she regarded any kind of work that women do for gender equality as an effort toward peace. Such a gendered perspective on peace and the lack of it means that women can only be taken up in dialogue where they are present to talk about their concrete experiences.

As argued by others working on deliberation in polarized societies, focusing on needs and fostering issue-specific networks in designed micro-deliberative exercises can help make engagements less likely to end in hostility.[65] Having issue-specific conversations was also suggested in the meeting a few times and in interviews as a way to understand the Other and facilitate alliance building. For instance, Emel (interview, April 4, 2018) argued that working together on daily issues would allow knowing the Other in all of her identities, thus being able to trust her and express true emotions.

In her study of the women's movements against the gender policies of the AKP, Çağatay shows that the most inclusive coalitions among women are flexible and issue-based.[66] Violence against women, or issues concerning education, are shared problems among women of diverse worldviews.[67] However, our case shows that in a multiple-identity conflict situation one issue always brings about other issues as it touches upon past or present divergences, hence subject matters derail and alliances shift constantly. In such cases the prospect for mutual action depends not on an unchanging commonality but on contextuality in relation to shifting alliances, and on the acknowledgment that the identity of women or of feminism itself is a matter of contestation. Honig calls this type of mutuality and cooperation that is ridden by strife "agonistic sorority" that inhabits both consensual and conflictual elements.[68] As elaborated in the following quote from Feryal's interview (March 22, 2018), the complexity of identities brings about the complexity of alliances:

> I can always be there with one of my identities, to be visible as such even if I do not really endorse that identity, but I have to have a position such that different aspects of my subjectivity are seen and hence are transforming that

65 Dryzek, "Deliberative Democracy"; Robert C. Luskin et al., "Deliberating across Deep Divides," *Political Studies* 62, no. 1 (June 2012).

66 Çağatay, "Women's Coalitions."

67 Yeşim Arat, "Islamist Women and Feminist Concerns in Contemporary Turkey: Prospects for Women's Rights and Solidarity," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 37, no. 3 (2016): 125–50; Hulya Simga and Gulru Z. Goker, "Whither Feminist Alliance? Secular Feminists and Islamist Women in Turkey," *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 23, no. 3 (March 2017): 273–93.

68 Janell Watson, "Feminism as Agonistic Sorority: An Interview with Bonnie Honig," *The Minnesota Review* 2013, no. 81 (2013): 57–78.

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> environment [. . .] In that respect, when I enter Muslim circles I most definitely say that I'm a feminist and when I enter feminist circles I talk from a more Muslim perspective [giggling], in other words, showing the hybridity of identities and positions. When you start working together, they diversify anyway.

The deliberation of gender-based experiences helps identify crisscrossing ties and shared issues while it also brings to surface differences as well as past and present divergences and contestations. While these contestations seem to make a shared understanding difficult, from an agonistic perspective that acknowledges the power in dialogue and discourse it is the very presence of such individual- as well as group-level contestations of identity that can help women avoid falling into self-enclosed and singular blocs in a polarized atmosphere.

Conclusion

In this article we showed how dialogue among women of diverse ethnic, sectarian, and ideological backgrounds proceeds in topical and stylistic shifts accompanied by shifting alliances in multiple-identity conflicts in a polarized society. Our analysis shows that in such contexts, discussion topics frequently change as women recall past and present grievances touching upon multiple axes of conflict, preventing the formation of singular blocs, but also challenging the establishment of perspective shifts toward mutuality.

Dialogue includes both reason giving and argumentation aimed at opinion change, as well as accepting the differences and contestations that come out of it. It calls for openness to a change of heart and opinion, as underlined by deliberative democracy, and an agonistic openness necessitating direct confrontation regarding contested issues as adversaries. As such the article shows the falsity in thinking of civic engagements as either contestatory or consensual in nature.[69] In multiple identity conflict situations where many identities and narratives are under contestation and power positions constantly shift, the move from self- to public-oriented thinking that deliberative democracy aims to establish is difficult as subject matters and alliances constantly shift. Moreover, speaking everything out in the open (although as suggested by deliberative democrats this may facilitate reasoning with the Other) entails

69 For a discussion of consensus and conflict forming a continuum in democratic politics and civic engagement in the context of Turkish memory debates see Emre Gönlügür and Devrim Sezer, "Therapeutic Forgetting, Agonistic Remembrance: Conflicting Memories of Izmir's Kültürpark and Contested Narratives in Contemporary Turkey," May 29, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698020921432.

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understanding each other's position to facilitate acting together for a peaceful society. However, it is not the best strategy in situations where there is lack of trust and intense polarization toward multiple Others. Hence an indirect and formal style and passive voice use do not necessarily help people to handle issues but move the conversation on as women circumvent polarizing discourses through stylistic shifts in conversations.

Past acquaintance and sympathy toward women's issues helped women speak as adversaries and not enemies, with an agonistic openness to acknowledge differences and to confront past issues that cause tension among women. Yet alliance building among women for a peaceful society requires constant and unending questioning and contestation regarding the very category of women and intersectional analysis in separate identity communities,[70] so further issue-based dialogic endeavors within and between women's groups is able to facilitate action with an aim to affect policymaking.

Women's dialogue is valuable for providing alternative gendered narratives of conflict processes and to underline barriers that exist in the way of developing a common understanding of conflict and peace. As Habermas argues, the unedited, offstage deliberation in CS can influence the mainstream political agenda, yet how to build effective channels between women's dialogue and representative politics is a topic of concern for another research effort.[71] The women's dialogue studied in this article shows the facilitators of and barriers to women's dialogue toward establishing mutuality and solidarity in polarized societies as well as the precarity of any established solidarity, which asks participants for an agonistic openness toward each other to make dialogue continue. Nonetheless, given that many of these women hold important posts in civil and political society in Turkey, underlining common issues as well as the expression of internal contestations regarding conflicting identities, including that of the identity of women, can have impact on policies, strengthen women's political voice, and bring the gender dimensions of conflict and peace to light.

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70 Siobhan Byrne, "Troubled Engagement in Ethnicized Conflict," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 16, no. 1 (2014): 106–26.

71 Habermas, "Interview with Habermas."

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