



Universidad de Oviedo



SOLIDARITY AS A HEALING PRACTICE: EXAMPLE OF QUEER FEMINISTS IN TURKEY

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1. RESUMEN EN ESPAÑOL

Esta investigación explora las experiencias de violencia y trauma sufridas por activistas feministas y queer para evaluar si la solidaridad y la colectividad ayudan a la sanación de las violencias e injusticias estructurales que tienen lugar en Turquía. Con este fin, la investigación se centra en los aspectos sociopolíticos de la sanación y el estudio se realiza a través de 7 entrevistas en profundidad con activistas feministas y queer en Turquía a quienes se pregunta sobre solidaridad, violencia contra la comunidad LGBTIQ+ y la sanación. Las entrevistas fueron llevadas a cabo de manera virtual y analizadas con MAXQDA y una narrativa de temas comunes. Los resultados relevan que las personas LGBTIQ+ están expuestas a violencias e injusticias multidimensionales en Turquía y que se involucran en organizaciones no-gubernamentales que representan espacios de sanación, empoderamiento y búsqueda de la justicia.

2. ENGLISH SUMMARY

This research explores queer feminist activists' experiences of violence and trauma to assess if solidarity and collectivity help to heal from structural violence and injustices in Turkey. Thus, the research centers on the socio-political aspects of healing, and the research questions are tested by conducting in-depth interviews with 7 queer feminist activists in Turkey asking them about solidarity, violence against LGBTIQ+ people, and healing. The interviews were completed by online platforms and analyzed through MAXQDA and a narrative of common themes. The results reveal that LGBTIQ+ people are exposed to multidimensional violence and injustices in Turkey, and they engage with grassroots and non-governmental organizations as spaces for healing, empowerment, and seeking justice.

Approval signature

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I dedicate this thesis to all *Lubunyas* and women in Turkey who need healing and justice immediately! I feel the struggle you give every day just to exist with all my heart and I believe in your (our) power to transform the world and make it a better place for all.

Asla yalnız yürümeyeceğini, gece karanlıktan korkarsa o şehri yakıp yıkacağımızı bilsin! Her feminist bir diğer feminist için, her queer bir diğer queer için bir şey inşa etmeye çalışıyor aslında çünkü biz birbirimizin çaresiyiz! (Zenan)

**They should know that they will never walk alone, that if they are afraid of the dark at night, we will burn that city down! Every feminist is trying to build something for another feminist, every queer is trying to build something for another queer, because we are each other's remedy!*

Güçlüyüz zaten ve sadece bunu hatırlamamız gerekiyor. Çünkü kırılabilirlik de bir güçlülük, zayıflık da soft olabilmek de bir güçlülük! (Bal ve Yeşil)

**We are strong already and we just need to remember that. Because fragility is also a strength, and being weak or soft is also a strength!*

İyileşmekten ve mücadele etmekten hiçbir zaman vazgeçmeyin! (Gökkuşakğı)

**Never stop healing and fighting!*

Kaçmaktan vazgeçmemiz gerekiyor artık ki hepimiz birer savaşçıyız çünkü varoluşumuz için her gün mücadele ediyoruz! (Deniz)

**We need to stop running away because we are all warriors. Because we are fighting for our existence every day!*

Yaşanılabilir bir dünya bir arada iletişirken, dayanışırken, madileşirken, iyileşirken, gullümleşirken mümkün ve gerçek lubunya! (Siren)

**A livable world is possible and real, while communicating, acting in solidarity, quarreling¹, healing, and being a barrel of laughs² together Lubunya³!*

Yollular yolsuzları yenecek! (Aybecer)

**The sluts will defeat the corrupt!*

Umutsuz da mücadele edilir! (Epifan)

**It is possible to fight without having hope!*

2. Introduction

Writing a dissertation might be challenging, especially if you choose a topic that is intimate to you. It becomes a process and a practice that is personal yet political. Healing has the same dimensions: it is deeply personal and equally political. Healing as a political matter

¹ Madileşmek (v) means quarreling or arguing in Lubunca which is a secret slang jargon used by the LGBTIQ+ community of Turkey.

² Gullümleşmek (v) means having fun, enjoying, or having a great time in Lubunca.

³ Lubunya (n) means queer and LGBTIQ+ people in Lubunca.

is a question I have asked and an answer I have found through the years. As a Zaza⁴, feminist, queer woman who was born in Turkey, I met intersectional violence and discrimination early in life. However, as I wrote in one of my poems⁵ “I would never choose to be on their side, to be ‘normal’ like them, so every day I appreciate this life for being a freak instead of being one of them”, I also had the chance to encounter the idea of equality, justice, revolution, and feminism in this way, for which I am grateful now. Still, it was not always easy to live, enjoy, and hope until I found ways and methods to survive just like other women and LGBTIQ+ people in Turkey and that is why I decided to research these methods and practices of survival and healing. In my experience, the wounds in our souls, that are caused by capitalist, patriarchal, heteronormative, racist, and colonialist systems, are healed only with the support of people like us, through solidarity, and knowing that we are neither wrong nor alone.

I decided to write this dissertation as an open act of solidarity with women and LGBTIQ+ people, all *Lubunyas*, in Turkey and to challenge its system of hetero-patriarchal hegemony. I do not claim that there are specific solutions for healing, in fact, I am not sure if healing is really possible. A close friend once said something that touched me deeply: “For some lives, it is daily life that is traumatic. So, what does it mean to heal for such lives?”. My aim is to bring awareness of healing as a political condition as well as the violence and traumas we are exposed to. By creating a safe space where queer feminists from Turkey can share their aches and possibilities/impossibilities of healing, I believe the political aspect of healing can be understood better. Moreover, I see this thesis as a political act because talking about healing, injustices, and solidarity, and doing it from an intersectional point of view where LGBTIQ+ people express their experiences, gives hope and power to all *Lubunyas*.

This research proposes that women and LGBTIQ+ people find ways to heal themselves after they are exposed to multidimensional violence since the justice and

⁴ Zaza people or Zazas are an ethnic minority group living in the eastern part of Turkey.

⁵ Called “Thank you!”.

healthcare system does not provide working healing spaces or practices for them in Turkey. Women and LGBTIQ+ people get involved in social and political associations and become part of solidarity networks, non-governmental and grassroots organizations that help them empower, heal, and survive. To understand the experiences of queer feminist activists on solidarity, healing, and justice, seven in-depth interviews are made, and the interviews are analyzed in the light of research questions.

The first chapter of the thesis is divided into four sections: literature review, methods, research significance, and research limitations. Previous research on solidarity, queer feminism, and healing is presented in the literature review. Then, the second section describes the research methodology, participant selection, data collection procedures, and analysis steps. The next section justifies the topic, the contribution it will make to the literature, and the research methods used. The final section discusses the limitations and constraints encountered during the research process.

The second chapter of the thesis provides the theoretical framework for the study in three main topics: feminisms, theories of healing, and solidarity. In order to develop an understanding of queer feminism, the first section on feminism offers insights on the development of feminist notions and movements through the appearance of intersectionality, queer theory, and LGBTIQ+ movements. The second section presents different perspectives on healing while building an approach to the socio-political and collective dimensions of healing and proposes a connection with justice using the framework of healing justice. The final section takes an intersectional, and inclusive approach to solidarity and describes the primary causes and significance of solidarity for women and LGBTIQ+ people in Turkey.

The third chapter of the thesis presents the interviews and their analysis. It begins by describing the interviews and participant profiles, then moves on to narrate the thematic analysis of the interviews, which are divided into five parts: queer feminism, human rights

violations against LGBTIQ+ people in Turkey, solidarity, collective healing, and justice. Finally, in the conclusion section, the research findings are discussed and implications for healing to take place are made.

3. CHAPTER ONE: PRELIMINARY MATTERS

3.1. Review of Relevant Literature

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in queer feminism and solidarity both at the global level and in the context of Turkey. For example, in “Intimate Internationalisms: 1970s ‘Third World’ queer feminist solidarity with Chile”, Tamara Lea Spira (2014) emphasizes the connections between Latin American anti-imperialist upheavals and the third world LGBTIQ+ and feminist movements in the US. She focuses on the previously overlooked interactions between feminists and the LGBTIQ+ community in Chile and the US highlighting the role of collective struggle and resistance in shaping the affective economies of the anti-colonial global revolution and in “Framing Queer Activism in Poland: From Liberal Values to Solidarity”, Justyna Struzik (2020) argues that there has been a noticeable change in the beliefs of the queer community in Poland that are more centered on social justice and solidarity as opposed to more traditional family-centric values.

One of the most relevant studies focusing on queer feminism in Turkey is Ebru Boyacı’s (2021) *Re-thinking Gender: The Possibility of Queer Feminism in Turkey* discusses whether queer feminism is a disruptive and effective movement and whether it has the potential for disrupting traditional gender discourses and for achieving liberation from oppression when compared to previous gender discourses. The findings reveal that the feminist and the LGBTIQ+ movements of Turkey often struggle to work together, and the feminist movement is insufficient to support transfeminism and queer theory. Similarly in

Feminist and LGBTIQ+ Activism across Russia, Scandinavia, and Turkey, Selin Cagatay, Mia Liinason, and Olga Sasunkevich (2022) look for connections between women's and LGBTIQ+ rights movements in Scandinavia, Russia, and Turkey to search for what these movements can learn from each other.

Recently the idea of feminist solidarity is discussed by Ayşe Gül Altınay and Andrea Petö (2022a) in “Feminist+ solidarity as transformative politics” where they offer a better narrative of feminist solidarity which is a more inclusive and conscious solidarity. They acknowledge the hardships and mistakes of old feminist solidarities and focus on empowerment, collectivity, and togetherness as life-changing and sometimes lifesaving. Later again Ayşegül Altınay and colleagues (2022b) in the article “Open Forum: Feminist+ solidarity” discuss the transition of feminist+ solidarity as in the intersection of LGBTIQ+ rights, climate justice, economic justice, racial justice, anti-war, and anti-capitalist ideologies. They discuss feminist+ solidarity’s position in today's feminist politics as they exemplify powerful acts of feminist+ solidarity in their culture, its influence on people at both a personal and collective level, and the potential of such solidarity.

The solidarity of the queer community of Turkey has been studied by different scholars only in the last two to three years. In “Moving from intersectional hostility to intersectional solidarity: Insights from LGBTIQ+ individuals in Turkey”, Rıfat Kamasak and colleagues (2019) investigate intersectionality at the interface between personal and institutional levels by using a qualitative research method. They criticize the dichotomous view of intersections as either individual or institutional phenomena and instead focus on intersectionality as a relational phenomenon. They focus on how intersectionality manifests in workplaces as forms of hostility and solidarity. In *Queer in Translation: Sexual Politics under Neoliberal Islam*, Evren Savcı (2021) examines the travel and translation of Western LGBTIQ+ political terminology to Turkey in order to demonstrate how sexual politics have

developed under the neoliberal Islamic regime. Savcı illustrates how there has been a significant shift from a politics of multicultural inclusion to one of securitized authoritarianism and analyzes the connection of queerness, Islam, and neoliberal governance under new complicated regimes of morality to comprehend how discourses of sexuality migrate and are taken up in political discourse. Savcı also looks at solidarity and the LGBTIQ+ organizations in Turkey. In the book *Queer Politics in Contemporary Turkey*, Paul Gordon Kramer (2022) discusses the difficulties of queer people living in Turkey by reflecting on the opinions and experiences of LGBTIQ+ activists. By doing this, Kramer aims to challenge prevalent conceptions of the queer Turkish experience and suggests that, despite the ongoing injustices queers face from the current Turkish government, there is still potential for an emancipatory struggle. Lastly, in “Transnational Entanglements of Queer Solidarity. Berlin Walks with Istanbul Pride March”, Nazlı Cabadag (2022) examines the discomfort associated with transnational queer solidarity across cultural and geographic divides by researching Berlin’s Pride March in solidarity with Istanbul’s Pride where people are exposed to extreme violence. The solidarity walk, which later took on a collective shape, was inspired by a restlessness that manifested as a diasporic emotional drive. Cabadag also highlights the dual position of Turkish and Kurdish queer immigrants in Berlin, who are both privileged and racialized others.

Violence against women and LGBTIQ+ people, trauma, and healing has been studied in different contexts from a queer or feminist point of view. In “Healing the Psychological Wounds of Gender-Related Violence in Latin America”, Helen Leslie (2001) talks about how women can heal from gender-based violence in Latin America. Leslie advocates for collective rather than individual actions, such as joining social movements and giving testimony but also emphasizes various psychological approaches and therapy methods that empower women. In *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public*

Cultures, Ann Cvetkovich (2003) creates a queer strategy for handling trauma. Cvetkovich makes the case for the significance of identifying and archiving experiences of trauma that are equally relevant to the common and daily as they are to the realm of catastrophe. Cvetkovich proposes that the field of trauma studies misses the experiences of women and queers as well as constrains itself by a rigid divide between the public and the private. Then, she addresses sexual trauma and the large variety of emotions that surround it, especially those connected to butch-femme sex, activism, and care. In “Violence, Trauma and Ways of Healing in the Context of Transformative South Africa”, Britta Hemshorn de Sánchez (2003) emphasizes that many South Africans have experienced trauma over many years as a result of different types of systemic and socio-cultural violence. Sánchez looks into the connections between trauma, recovery, and politics as well as what they mean for both society and the person. Then, the study examines the healing potentials in African religion like holistic health and healing concepts, models of new gender roles, restoring ancient practices while addressing present-day issues, and storytelling.

More recently, in “Mindfulness as a Healing, Liberatory Practice in Queer Anti-Oppression Pedagogy”, Beth Berila (2016) proposes a queer anti-oppression pedagogy that can promote wholeness and healing by using mindfulness practices. According to Berila, queer pedagogy politicizes the ideas of well-being and she admits that actions of healing become acts of resistance by embracing the crucial connection between personal health and social freedom. Berila says self-healing and well-being are never merely personal matters for marginalized groups because of the systemic oppression they are exposed to as a whole group. In “We have to do a lot of healing: LGBTIQ+ migrant Latinas resisting and healing from systemic violence”, Sandibel Borges (2019) focuses on LGBTIQ+ migrant Latinas that keep fighting against multidimensional oppression despite the danger of being detained or deported. Borges describes several forms of resistance including activism, community

building, and survival, and proposes that resistance is significantly influenced by healing, which serves as both a tool and a byproduct of resistance. In “Finding the Strength to Heal: Understanding Recovery After Gender-Based Violence”, Laura Sinko and Denise Saint Arnault (2020) analyze survivor narratives and investigate healing from gender-based violence. In the investigation, significant difficulties and drivers to recovery from trauma have been found and it was uncovered that social context has a significant impact on both difficulties and drivers. According to the research, reconnecting with the self, others, and the world are the three fundamental purposes of healing and counselors can use this knowledge to design healing environments that are safer, more empowering, and supportive.

Based on the literature review, the connection between feminist and queer movements is still a relevant object of study since it has not yet been studied deeply or thoroughly in the context of Turkey. Centering solidarity is an important framework not only for feminist and queer movements but also for other social movements, discussing the meaning of solidarity and the queer feminist solidarity practices in Turkey provides important insights into the experiences of marginalized groups and their ways of surviving together. As healing is mostly discussed in relation to cisgender women’s experiences of violence and discrimination both in the global context and the context of Turkey, looking into the experiences of queer community of Turkey from an intersectional approach provides a more inclusive and diverse approach. Lastly, understanding queer community’s practices and ways of resisting in Turkey enriches the discussion of the collective aspects of healing in relation to socio-political reality.

3.2. Methods

Qualitative and participative research methods, especially when linked with a feminist perspective, help understand the experiences of participants, gives them a sense of

agency, and empower them by emphasizing their value as producers of knowledge. Thus, in order to comprehend the experiences of solidarity and healing, I have chosen to conduct in-depth interviews with seven activists identifying as queer and feminist. In my research, I have interviewed people from a wide range of occupations, including psychologists, students, and social workers from different associations, and NGOs. To contact the participants, I created a call for participants in the form of a digital flyer that was spread on Facebook, WhatsApp, and Telegram groups of queer communities and collectives. I also requested advertising via Instagram profiles of queer collectives. The call had a link to a Google form and my contact information so that potential participants could reach out to me directly or fill out the Google form to schedule an interview. The interviews were conducted on online platforms such as Zoom or Skype to access different contexts and gather different experiences. Before the interviews, I designed an interview outline with semistructured research questions in order to guide the interview. According to the guidelines from the Comité de Ética at the University of Oviedo, which provided approval for this research, I created an information sheet about the study and an informed consent form that I shared with each participant to notify them about their rights as participants.

Finally, after the interviews, the audio files are transcribed, and the original files are kept in a password-protected folder. Each participant has chosen a pseudonym at the end of the interview and the data obtained during the interviews used for analysis are shared under that pseudonym in order to protect the participant's identity unless indicated otherwise by the interviewee. The interviews are analyzed through MAXQDA by using the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) method. In the analysis, five themes were created and the similarities and differences among the participants' experiences are presented through narratives of common themes.

The research questions of this thesis are divided into two main categories and each of them was followed by relevant sub-questions. “What are the main characteristics of LGBTIQ+ solidarity in Turkey?” is the first research question. It was then followed by two associated sub-questions: “Why do LGBTIQ+ people join such networks?” and “Is queer feminist solidarity possible?”. The second research question is: “What kind of violence and discrimination do LGBTIQ+ people are exposed to in Turkey?” which was followed by two sub-questions: “What kind of strategies/support mechanisms do LGBTIQ+ people have to survive or protect themselves?” and “Is it possible to heal from such violence through solidarity or how it would be possible?”. The interviews were used to evaluate these research questions, and the findings were discussed in the conclusion section.

3.3. Research Significance

By arguing violence and trauma are structural and the result of the current hetero-patriarchal system, I hope to understand how collectivity, solidarity, and healing are related. Considering Turkey is a country where the violence and discrimination against women and LGBTIQ+ people are at high rates, my research makes visible the hardships of the LGBTIQ+ community and contributes to their struggle for a better future. Accordingly, I aim to create a safe and empowering space for those who are disregarded and marginalized so that they can talk on behalf of themselves. The literature review shows that most research about healing focuses on single individuals from a psychological perspective rather than on social and political factors. The most studied subjects are women survivors of gender-based violence and even the existing research does not combine the role of community/solidarity with healing.

As seen in the literature review, much research has been done about queer feminist theory or activism in different contexts. Some of this research focused on solidarity and only a

few of them included healing in their topic. None of them combined solidarity with healing contrary to research about women survivors of gender-based violence. Compared to queer/LGBTIQA+ community, there is more research about women healing from gender-based violence. The reason for this might be the perception of women being exposed to a greater amount of gender-based violence. However, I connect gender-based violence with violence against LGBTIQA+ saying that gender is a social construct created by patriarchy which is also heteronormative, and it includes norms and roles for the body, attitudes, sexual orientation, identity, and sexuality. Thus, gender norms and roles are highly effective also in LGBTIQA+ people's lives and nonconforming might result in violence. For instance, violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity is an example of such violence. Thus, most of the research made about healing tends to focus on an individual level and discuss it from a psychological perspective both in the context of Turkey and in international studies. I believe that there is an important connection between solidarity and healing even though the lack of research made about it. I aim to highlight that the personal is political by discovering the healing practices at the collective level through examining queer feminist solidarity and I believe this would also open new doors to understanding the importance of solidarity, connection, and collectivity.

3.4. Research Limitations and Constraints

Due to the scarcity of academic research focusing on healing and solidarity, both at the international and national levels, the literature review turned disadvantageous. Given the time limitation for this thesis to be made, interviews are completed with seven people which could be richer with more people. Even though a low amount of people were reached out, it was seen that applicants were eager to participate in the interviews and share their experiences openly. Several participants mentioned my identity as a queer subject as a key factor in

institutionalization of feminism as well as alliances between women's organizations occurred in Turkey, and they were followed by the project feminism era where non-governmental organizations became important.

In the beginning, the focus of feminist movements in Turkey was on the middle-upper-class women, but starting from the 1990s, critiques of other womanhoods, identities, and sexualities brought more diversity to discussions around feminism in parallel to the Western women's movement (Sancar 2011). Especially, with the growth of the LGBTIQ+ movement both in Turkey and at a global level, feminist movements started to adjust themselves to be more diverse and inclusive. While feminist movements and discourses continue to evolve, it is important to address some of the contributions made to feminism by intersectional theory, queer theory, and the LGBTIQ+ movement which brought awareness of the exclusion and heteronormativity of mainstream feminisms and the need to take into account other categories such as class, ethnicity, or sexuality. Hence, referring to these contributions enriches the understanding and analysis of women's and LGBTIQ+ people's experiences in Turkey.

4.1.2. Intersectionality

Turkey is a multicultural country in which many groups face marginalization and discrimination. Being a man, heterosexual, Turkish, Muslim-Sunni, able-bodied, upper-class, for example, is celebrated whereas being a woman, transgender, LGBTIQ+, Kurdish, Armenian, Arab, Alevi, Yezidi, disabled, or lower class is disadvantageous, marginalizing, and excluding. Moreover, when two or more marginalized social identities come together, such as in a case of a lesbian Kurdish woman, the violence amplifies, and exactly for this reason, intersectionality is an important tool to understand the experiences of women and

establishing confidence in the research and interviewing process. At the end of the interviews, all participants indicated satisfaction with the interviews and their participation.

4. CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The theoretical chapter dives into three key concepts: feminist theory, healing, and solidarity. This helps to contextualize the topic of healing and solidarity as well as the experiences of women and LGBTIQ+ persons in Turkey. The first part of the chapter briefly discusses the evolution of women's movements in terms of Western feminism and Turkey, how intersectionality changed feminist notions, and the concept of queer feminism. The second part looks into the socio-political aspects of healing, including what causes trauma and violence, how healing can be promoted, and the connection between healing and justice. The final part focuses on the importance of solidarity for women and LGBTIQ+ people and discusses the ways it is connected to healing and justice.

4.1 Feminisms

This section describes the evolution of feminist ideas through women's movements briefly at the global level and in the context of Turkey in order to trace changes in the different discourses and conceptualizations of feminism. Among these changes, the emergence of the idea of intersectionality is key to understanding the experiences of the LGBTIQ+ community in Turkey. Another important change is the appearance of the idea of queer or queerness and its relationship with feminism. Paying attention to this history will help us understand different issues and approaches around gender and sexuality and will prepare a base for my proposal of queer feminism.

4.1.1 Women's Movements

The struggle for women and LGBTIQ+ rights has a profound history tracing back to the Suffragette movement which mainly focused on the citizenship rights of women and, later, the Stonewall Riots that marked the first steps towards gay liberation in the US (Paternotte and Tremblay 2015; Belmonte 2021). However, women's and LGBTIQ+ movements are not limited to the US context. The evolution of feminist movements, from first-wave liberal feminism to intersectional feminism, brought transformation in the discourses, issues, and demands of the next generations, and while many countries have experienced feminist movements and transformation differently, feminist movements around the world have influenced each other. Since the beginning solidarity between women has been seen as important but this solidarity was questioned by activists who are not Western, white, heterosexual, and upper-class. These criticisms resulted in a shift towards inclusivity and created a growing awareness of intersectional inequalities and violence as well (Donovan 2000; Shaw and Lee 2001).

In the case of Turkey, ever since the women's movements and feminist ideology emerged in the 19th century, the movement underwent different phases. In *Birkaç Arpa Boyu... 21. Yüzyıla Gिरerken Türkiye'de Feminist Çalışmalar*⁶, Serpil Sancar (2011) examines the historical transition of feminism in Turkey. According to Sancar, feminism started during the late modernization and nationalization era of Turkey (1860-1930). Then, the movement spread to urban middle-class women between 1930 and 1965, continued evolving under the influence of leftist movements between 1968 and 1985, and radical feminism emerged around the 1986-1995 period. Feminism in Turkey was influenced by global feminist discussions and notions, and the Beijing World Women's Congress in 1995-2000 had an influence on the expansion of the women's human rights approach. In the years 2000-2005, the

⁶ *Feminist Studies in Turkey at the beginning of the 21st Century*, translated by me.

LGBTIQ+ people in Turkey because it enables us to see the different faces of inequality and injustice as well as to discover the consequences of such violence.

Intersectionality is a concept that has been used in many different fields including social sciences and gender studies. In *Feminist Studies: A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology, and Writing*, Nina Lykke (2010) refers to intersectionality as highlighting the deeper connections between different power dynamics and social normativity that create unjust, discriminatory, and exclusionary structures through social categories such as gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, age, dis/ability, nationality, mother tongue, and more.

According to Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2020), adopting an intersectional analysis is important for understanding how violence is perceived and performed between different systems of power, along with how it creates a greater danger by amplifying its power by connecting multiple systems of oppression like racism, colonialism, heteropatriarchy, etc. In other words, intersectionality is the lens we need for examining the relationships across various categorizations such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation.

As Black feminism is one of the major influences on the core ideas that formed under the concept of intersectionality, this contribution must be acknowledged. Before Kimberlé Crenshaw developed the term intersectionality in 1989, the Black feminist movement was raising awareness of intersecting identities (Crenshaw 1989). For example, Frances Beal's essay "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female" was published and circulated in 1969, and Combahee River Collective's "A Black Feminist Statement" was written in 1977 (Collins and Bilge 2020). In the article "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis" (2013), Sumi Cho, Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall state that the term *intersectionality* emerged in the 1980s especially to bring attention to sameness in practices of solidarity, particularly in anti-discrimination and social movements. This attention also helped reveal the negative impacts of "single axis thinking" (2013, 787) on

different areas like legal practices, knowledge production, and social justice efforts. In *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color* (1991), one of the most important writings on intersectionality, Kimberle Williams Crenshaw discusses that in order to prevent violence against women, the category of women and their experiences should not be understood as homogeneous as well as the perpetrator of the violence should not be reduced to the category of men, or to the state alone. On the contrary, the examination of the problem and the solution must include extensive and intersectional lenses to be successful.

For example, INCITE! is a US-based grassroots organization of radical feminists of color that aim to end institutional violence against women, trans people, and gender non-conforming people of color and to bring reproductive justice. They address the danger of intersecting violence and discrimination “that locates women of color as living in the dangerous intersections of sexism and racism, as well as other oppressions” (INCITE! n.d.) on their website which they call ‘dangerous intersections’:

Although the anti-sexual/domestic violence movements have been critical in breaking the silence around violence against women, these movements have also become increasingly professionalized and de-politicized, and consequently are often reluctant to address sexual and domestic violence within the larger context of institutionalized violence and oppression. INCITE! recognizes that it is impossible to seriously address sexual/domestic violence within communities of color without addressing these larger structures of violence, such as militarism, attacks on immigrants’ rights and Indian treaty rights, the proliferation of prisons, economic neo-colonialism, and the medical industry (INCITE! n.d.).

Similar circumstances are faced by the LGBTIQ+ community in Turkey. For instance, when a lesbian or a trans woman is subjected to violence, there is no government institution that they can address and seek help; rather, their sexual orientation or gender identity serves as an obstacle. The law in Turkey, which does not also prevent violence against cis hetero women, does not even recognize the existence of LGBTIQ+ people and their human rights. So, violence and inequality are experienced more profoundly by people in

this community. Therefore, the intersectional approach reminds us how to holistically respond to violence and the necessity to think queer with feminism. Because ending gender inequality requires recognizing and responding to different experiences of violence and discrimination, and it could not be successful by ignoring heteronormative hegemony.

4.1.3. Queer

Describing *queer* has always been tricky, as scholars and researchers have admitted and discussed it since the emergence of the term in the academic sphere (Brown and Nash 2016). However, the word queer did not always have positive connotations, in the 1500s, it meant “strange, peculiar, odd, eccentric” as an adjective and “to spoil, ruin” as a verb (Online Etymology Dictionary 2021). These negative connotations associated with queer were ideal for using it as a humiliation directed to homosexuals at the beginning of the 1900s (Jagose 1996). However, around the 1990s, the negative meanings were deconstructed and queer was embraced as a political identity, an umbrella term, by LGBTIQ+ people in the US. This was made as an opposition to the violence and discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people. One of the first appearances of queer as a political identity can be found in the booklet called *Queers Read This* which was printed anonymously in 1990 in New York and spread to the public:

Well, yes, ‘gay’ is great. It has its place. But when a lot of lesbians and gay men wake up in the morning we feel angry and disgusted, not gay. So we’ve chosen to call ourselves queer. Using ‘queer’ is a way of reminding us how we are perceived by the rest of the world. It’s a way of telling ourselves we don’t have to be witty and charming people who keep our lives discreet and marginalized in the straight world. We use queer as gay men loving lesbians and lesbians loving being queer. Queer, unlike GAY, doesn’t mean MALE. (*Queers Read This* 1990, 7)

This booklet was written as a call for other queers to embrace their ‘queerness’, remember that they are not wrong or alone, and unite against homophobia as well as other oppression systems in everyday life but also as a manifestation to the world. A manifestation to show LGBTIQ+ people exist, that they fight, that they do not give up or back down, and that they are strong, furious, and passionate about changing the system. In their statement,

they also acknowledge the connection between their queer struggle and other struggles for equality:

Being queer is not about a right to privacy; it is about the freedom to be public, to just be who we are. It means everyday fighting oppression; homophobia, racism, misogyny, the bigotry of religious hypocrites, and our own self-hatred. (We have been carefully taught to hate ourselves.) And now of course it means fighting a virus as well, and all those homophobicers who are using AIDS to wipe us off the face of the earth. Being queer means leading a different sort of life. It's not about the mainstream, profit margins, patriotism, patriarchy, or being assimilated. It's not about executive directors, privilege, and elitism. It's about being on the margins, defining ourselves; it's about gender-fuck and secrets, what's beneath the belt and deep inside the heart; it's about the night. (*Queers Read This* 1990, 7)

Following the influence of social movements like ACT UP⁷ which was a grassroots organization fighting to end the AIDS crisis in the US, the term queer was used for the first time in the academic sphere by Teresa de Lauretis during a conference in 1990 at the University of California (Ghaziani and Brim 2019). With time, queer found a critical use in the academy and expanded into a scholarly field of queer theory that is interested in "queerness, sexuality, gender, transgender, race, nationalism, discourse, fluidity, performativity, and normativity" (3). In *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, Annamarie Jagose (1996) discusses that queer refers to gestures or analytical concepts that exaggerate anomalies in the so-called constant connections between biological sex, gender, and sexual desire. Queer also emphasizes the unconformities between sex, gender, and desire by challenging the rigid model of heterosexuality and thus rejects any claim of connaturality about sexuality while questioning binary categories of sex and gender. Similarly, in *Tendencies*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1994) discusses queer as "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances, and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality, aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (7). According to Sedgwick, the theoretical investigations reveal that queer cannot be handled in limitation of gender and sexuality just as race, ethnicity, and nation

⁷ AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power. <https://actupny.com/>

cannot be limited to a single detached social category but rather they should be tackled in intersection with other categories.

As queer is “a continuing moment, movement, motive—recurrent, eddying, troublant” (Sedgwick 1994, 8) how to adapt it to an academic field is questionable as Browne and Nash (2016) ask “Is there a Queer method?” or “How do we do Queer theory?” (10). Just like the term queer itself is hard to explain, the theoretical and methodological foundations of queer theory are likewise complex. Still, Ghaziani and Brim (2019) discuss the distinction between queer theory and other conventional scientific methods, for example, the queer theory proposes methodologies that promote “fluid, flux, disruptive, transgressive, interpretivist, and local knowledge” in contrast to classical social sciences that focus on “the systematic, coherent, orderly, modal, normative, positivist, and generalizable” knowledge (4). Queer research exposes the inconstancies in assumed definitions and power dynamics and as a method, it can be used to *queering* feminist discussions, notions, and feminism itself by questioning the ontological base of feminism and subverting essentialist notions.

4.1.4. Queer Feminism

Many scholars and activists differentiate queer theories and movements from feminist theories and movements proposing they have different foundational roots, as well as approaches and understanding of the issues around gender, sex, and sexuality. Yet, other scholars highlight their intersections, and epistemological similarities, saying they enhance each other even though they have some counter-narratives. To investigate the possibility of queer feminism, I propose looking into both resemblances and divergences between them.

In *Feminism Meets Queer Theory*, Elizabeth Weed and Naomi Schor (1997) discuss one of the most projected differences between feminist and queer theories as the distinct historical foundations and roots, that feminism as a theory and movement emerged, in the

beginning, to represent white cis hetero women's struggle whereas queer theory and movement emerged directly to represent different identities, bodies, and sexualities of the LGBTIQ+ community. However, the historical cases of biases against lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender people along with racism and classism in both feminist and queer discourses (Marinucci 2010; Serano 2013) are reminders that neither of them is entirely bias-free, yet both movements are still changing and learning.

Other arguments are that queer theory has criticized feminists' focus on gender as heteronormative and inadequate for understanding the categories of sex and sexuality (Weed and Schor 1997). Most feminist theoreticians share the assumption that gender and sexuality must be explored together with gender having priority over sexuality whereas queer scholars emphasize the significance of analyzing gender and sexuality separately for a better understanding of the production of homosexuality and heterosexuality (Richardson, McLaughlin, and Casey 2006). Hence queer theory pays more attention to sex and sexuality, whereas feminist theory focuses more on gender and sex (Marinucci 2010). Although these claims might have validity, there are also connections and similar characteristics they share, and rather than disassociating, reuniting them can strengthen the struggle against the heteropatriarchal system.

In *Feminism Meets Queer Theory*, Elizabeth Weed and Naomi Schor (1997) describe feminism and queer theory as connected to each other as both are interdisciplinary methods of investigation that have a critical position toward unjust power dynamics. Feminism and queer theory have acknowledged that they were influenced by each other, and they might even be understood as "two branches of the same family tree of knowledge and politics" (1997, 7). In the book *Intersections Between Feminist and Queer Theory*, Diane Richardson, Janice McLaughlin, and Mark Casey (2006) bring attention to one of the intersections of queer and

feminist approaches is that both emphasize sexuality in relation to social and political reality rather than individual.

In *Feminism Is Queer: The Intimate Connection between Queer and Feminist Theory*, Marinucci (2010) mentions that queer feminism emerges from implementing queer notions around gender, sex, and sexuality into feminism and feminist notions around gender, sex, and sexuality into queer theory. As stated by Marinucci, what creates a sense of solidarity between queer and feminist theory is the acknowledgment that the oppression against women and LGBTIQ+ people is inextricably connected. As an example, when a cisgender woman is beaten or killed, and a transgender woman is beaten or killed it is the same violent system of power that provokes the perpetrators that we call heteronormative patriarchy. Thus, neither queer nor feminist lenses alone can respond to the harm caused by this system, and the adoption of queer feminist political consciousness and approach is needed.

One other discussion of the possibility of queer feminism lies in the ‘subject’ of feminism. As it is discussed in the first part, the initial subject of feminism was ‘women’ however many other women felt excluded from this description because it was only covering white heterosexual cisgender women. Activists like Sojourner Truth (1851) brought criticism on this issue, in her speech “Ain’t I a Woman?” which had a significant impact on intersectional feminism. Feminism became more inclusive over time as intersectionality spread through the struggles of women of color, lesbian women, LGBTIQ+ people, and other marginalized groups. However, the debate about diversity and inclusion in feminism continues, especially around the acceptance of transgender women’s participation in feminist/women’s movements which is sometimes difficult because of some feminists, who call themselves TERFs⁸. These phenomena that have taken place globally had their resonance in Turkey where such discussions were spread along Twitter, academia, the 8th of March

⁸ Trans Exclusive Radical Feminist.

protests, and other places (Ozkazanc 2021). However, Butler (1994) claims that the subject of feminism, just like queer, cannot be considered stable, and to open up new possibilities for expansion and improvement deconstructing the subject of feminism is a must. This proposition, in some ways, allows feminism's doors to be opened to queer identities. Hence, combining queer with feminism can fill the gaps that are leading to exclusive actions within the feminist and queer movements.

In this thesis, I argue that gender inequality does not only negatively affect cisgender heterosexual women but rather patriarchy works together with heteronormativity and oppresses different womanhoods, sexualities, and LGBTIQ+ people. So, the heteronormative patriarchy does not only control cisgender women, but it controls every person's life by assigning a gender, sexual orientation, and roles to them. Furthermore, patriarchy does not only operate in a heteronormative manner instead it is a complex set of systems that is not separate from history, politics, culture, and economy, and all these factors play a role in the lives of women and LGBTIQ+ people. Therefore, feminism and queer theory should be adapted to each other to respond to and end the shared repression and injustices.

4.2. Theories of Healing

This subchapter contextualizes healing from a socio-political perspective in order to look at how healing functions as a collective and social process. First, it presents various understandings of healing and discusses the personal and social aspects of healing. Then, it explores collective healing as a consequence of collectively experienced violence and traumas. Lastly, it discovers the connection between healing and justice which is important for understanding the interconnectedness between violence, traumas, healing, and justice.

4.2.1. What is healing?

Healing is a complex term and process that can be understood and handled in different ways from perspectives focused on the individual to those that center the collective. The notion of healing is studied across a wide range of fields, from the fields of natural and social sciences to the humanities like medicine, psychology, education, and spirituality. The root of ‘healing’ comes from the old English word ‘haelan’, which means “to cure, save, make whole, sound and well” (Online Etymology Dictionary 2020). Wholeness in relation to healing can be described as a state of balance between the body, mind, and spirit, which may also include social and environmental factors. Still, it is difficult to define ‘healing’ because it comprises a variety of circumstances, processes, and experiences that change in meaning and intensity from person to person.

The challenge in conceptualizing healing stems from its many definitions. For example, the APA Dictionary of Psychology defines mental healing as “the process of alleviating or attempting to alleviate mental or physical illness through the power of the mind, typically using such methods as visualization, suggestion, and the conscious manipulation of energy flow” (APA n.d.) whereas in the book *The Politics of Trauma: Somatics, Healing, and Social Justice*, Staci Haines (2019) describes healing as “the embodied ability to reconnect safety, belonging, and dignity and have them serve one another, rather than be at odds with one another” (Haines 2019, 137). In “Healing: A Concept Analysis”, Kimberly Firth et al. (2015) characterize healing as “a holistic, transformative process of repair and recovery in mind, body, and spirit resulting in positive change, finding meaning, and movement toward self-realization of wholeness, regardless of the presence or absence of disease” (49) which takes place at multiple levels from the personal level to the social level. These different perspectives provide various definitions as well as strategies for healing, and

engaging these interpretations serves as essential for establishing a more holistic view of healing, including the causes of trauma or pain, and the necessary conditions for healing.

Scholarly perspectives usually focus on healing as something that happens at an individual level rather than seeing it as a collective practice. According to Haines (2019), this limited perspective promotes the oppression and trauma that has been attempted to heal because not considering social dimensions in an analysis results in mismatching to determine what issues need to change both at personal and collective levels. Similarly, in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed (2014) says injustices are more than just personal, because “personal is complicated” (198) and cannot be separated from the social and structural dimensions. She highlights that narrowing an injustice or an emotion, a trauma in this case, to a personal level and seeing it simply in relation to that individual person, covers up the socio-political reality that caused the trauma. Thereby, regardless of the possibility that the person actually heals from the trauma, new traumas keep harming others because the solutions proposed or applied to heal the trauma do not address and dispel the real source.

Nevertheless, there is an increasing awareness and effort to discover the social, political, and collective roots of healing and its relevance in contexts of activism as it was demonstrated in the literature review. One of the grassroots organizations that consider healing from a macro perspective is Dignity and Power Now!⁹ and their definition of healing provides a powerful example: “An ongoing process of mending as well as building power, resilience, and resistance to transform systems of oppression” (Dignity and Power Now 2019, 5). A corresponding example of this definition can be found in the work of Allison Page and Jacquelyn Arcy (2020) who embrace the #MeToo movement as a collective healing practice in their article “#MeToo and the Politics of Collective Healing: Emotional Connection as

⁹ Dignity and Power Now is a Los Angeles-based, grassroots organization that fights for the dignity and power of all incarcerated people, their families, and communities to achieve transformative and healing justice (Dignity and Power Now! 2019, 3). <https://dignityandpowernow.org/>

Contestation”. Their article shows that a person’s healing is connected to others’ healing and by sharing rage and sorrow, building solidarity and a sense of community, and seeking justice women contribute to each other’s healing even if they are not physically together or do not know each other. Because the relationships and connections with friends, family, community, a higher power, or oneself are essential for the healing process to take place (Firth et al. 2015).

I suggest that the feminist notion of ‘the personal is political’¹⁰ continues to be relevant in the experiences of women and LGBTIQ+ people, which is why I propose that looking at the socio-political aspects of healing is essential to see how these aspects manifest in the experiences of queer feminist people in Turkey. This perspective provides a way to identify how solidarity networks enable empowerment, healing, and survival for women and LGBTIQ+ people in the context of Turkey. Meanwhile, in order to look deeper into the social, political, and collective aspects of healing as well as how they are interconnected, it is important to identify different kinds of traumas and the particular solutions offered to heal them.

4.2.2. Collective Healing

Just like healing, trauma is a difficult phenomenon to describe that is dependent on the person, culture, and context. For example, according to the APA Dictionary of Psychology trauma is understood as “any disturbing experience that results in significant fear, helplessness, dissociation, confusion, or other disruptive feelings intense enough to have a long-lasting negative effect on a person’s attitudes, behavior, and other aspects of functioning” (APA n.d.). This definition from the field of psychology focuses on the

¹⁰ This phrase was first used by radical feminist activist Carol Hanisch in 1969 in the US in “The Personal Is Political” to discuss women’s problems are not personal but rather political and that only collective actions and solutions can address them and has been discussed within feminist movements since then.

individual consequences of trauma and does not comment on the conditions that result in such trauma whereas, in gender studies, in “The Everyday of Queer Trauma” trauma is explored as a social and cultural narrative rather than a clinical condition that occurs as a result of historical events which affects queer identities as they are constantly exposed to the exploitative and oppressive systems (Cvetkovich 2003). Unfortunately, not only queer people but many other people and communities experience trauma as a result of witnessing traumatic events, such as injustices, that harm them physically, mentally, or emotionally (Garo et al. 2018).

For example, injustices like the colonization of African countries, slavery of indigenous people, forced migration through wars, genocides, femicides, and transfemicides¹¹ are some examples of traumatic situations that hurt and keep hurting many groups (McGrattan 2015; Meyer 2015; Haines 2019). As these injustices are inextricably connected to major oppressive systems like colonialism, racism, patriarchy, and heteronormativity, the traumas they create are not personal but rather collective traumas experienced by the masses. Similarly, Michelle Emery (2013) in “A Guide For Community Building And Collective Strategizing For Safer And Peaceful Communities” discusses harm, pain, and oppression as having deep roots and historical legacies and refers to it as ‘generational trauma’ This term is used to describe years of trauma and harm that have been passed down through generations and continue to emerge in damaging ways (Emery 2013; Woodly 2021), for example, patriarchy and heteronormativity are accountable for centuries of violence and discrimination against women and LGBTIQ+ people. So, this idea of generational traumas not only presents historical-political aspects of trauma and violence but serves as a warning that as long as these oppressive unjust systems exist, collective traumas continue to emerge just like Ann Cvetkovich (2003) exemplifies from queer experiences of everyday life.

¹¹ The term ‘transfemicide’ was coined by Latin American activists to refer to the intentional killing of a transgender woman motivated by transphobia (Bento 2016, 50).

As social change is never easy or fast, especially when it comes to those systems that are deeply rooted in societies, people, and communities find different ways to live, survive, heal, hope, and struggle within the conditions and collectiveness is an important aspect of these ways. For example, in “The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma”, Bessel A. Van Der Kolk (2014) argues that collective rituals positively impact the person and thus they are important in preventing or alleviating trauma and fostering healing. Theatre, for instance, has a positive effect on negative emotions and it helps in confronting and transforming them into positive ones (Van Der Kolk 2014), while other collective practices including rituals, drumming, dancing, singing, and storytelling might be some of the cultural healing practices that have been recognized as powerful tools (Chioneso et al. 2020, 99). Similarly, in “Creating Ripples: Fostering Collective Healing from and Resistance to Sexual Violence Through Friendships”, Michelle Dang (2018) considers friendship and community responses as critical to promoting healing, justice, and solidarity because the support friends give one another contributes to each other’s healing and empowerment.

In Turkey, feminist and LGBTIQ+ organizations regularly hold meetings, workshops, movie screenings, discussions, performances, or parties as part of their collective and solidarity practices. Social media is also an important tool for activism, advocacy, and consciousness-raising activities as well as for proclaiming when they are exposed to violence and seeking help or justice. In general, engaging with other queer and feminist people online or face-to-face is crucial because it is often the only way to enter safe spaces and in Turkey, these spaces are mostly the only place where women and LGBTIQ+ people can open up themselves, their traumas and wounds, and get closer to healing. As noted by Nkechinyelum A. Chioneso and colleagues (2020), community healing is “an ongoing multilevel process whereby oppressed groups strengthen their connectedness and collective memory through

culturally syntonious processes in ways that promote critical consciousness to achieve optimal states of justice” (100) which I interpret it as the situation of women and LGBTIQ+ people in Turkey.

Still, collectiveness does not simply or alone enable healing because oppressive systems like patriarchy, and heteronormativity are more deep-scaled structures, and healing from them necessitates change on a bigger scale. Both Emery (2013) and Haines (2019) agree that collective action is the only way to respond to systematic and interpersonal damages and to maintain healing that establishes collective safety, belonging, and dignity. Healing must be transformative and anti-oppressive, holding individuals, institutions, and larger oppressive systems accountable for their destructive actions and providing an opportunity to change those actions through collective efforts as noted by Emery (2013), and as a result, a holistic and political approach to healing should include the connection between social justice and healing which leads to healing justice approach.

4.2.3. Justice and Healing

The term ‘healing justice’ was coined in 2005 by the Kindred Southern Healing Justice Collective (n.d.), a South American grassroots organization that aims to empower, particularly black, indigenous, people of color, queer, and trans communities, and to bring transformative justice and healing to them (Kindred Healing Justice 2007). Healing justice is “a framework that identifies how we can holistically respond to and intervene in intergenerational trauma and violence, and to bring collective practices that can impact and transform the consequences of oppression on our collective bodies, hearts, and minds” (Dignity and Power Now! 2019). As it is discussed in previous sections, this approach emphasizes the connection between social justice and healing, recognizing personal

experiences of trauma and oppression and the larger systems of power and inequity, and thus the possibility of healing as intimately connected to justice.

Emery (2013) notes that ensuring equal and accessible healthcare and sustainable wellness for all communities relies on the “possibility of healing as justice and justice as healing” (12). In Turkey, not all social groups and individuals have equal access to quality mental healthcare because public hospitals are overcrowded, private ones are not affordable, and mental health is frequently stigmatized, individual healing is also political and not separable from inequalities. These facts are exaggerated when combined with other injustices women and LGBTIQ+ people face and the need for justice is urgent as there is no possibility to achieve healing without maintaining justice and no possibility to secure justice without fostering healing practices and achieving personal or collective healing requires addressing socio-political injustices and transforming them.

In their article “Contextualising Healing Justice as a Feminist Organising Framework in Africa”, Jackie Shaw et. al (2022) identify four important aspects of structural injustices, three of which we can find explicitly in Turkey: the criminalization of certain social groups, political marginalization, and the perpetuation of violence of poverty. There is no law that protects LGBTIQ+ people’s rights, rather hate speech against LGBTIQ+ people has been practiced frequently by government officials (Kaos GL 2022), only 17.3% of parliament members were women in 2022 whereas LGBTIQ+ people were not represented at all (TUIK 2023) and the vast majority of workplaces are not committed to equal employment opportunities which results in LGBTIQ+ people being impoverished (Kaos GL 2022). Yet, these examples are only a few of the injustices that are experienced by women and LGBTIQ+ people in Turkey.

According to the *Human Rights of LGBTI+ People Report 2022*, the most common human rights violations include freedom of speech, prohibition of torture, right to personal

integrity, right to assembly and organization, and right to liberty and security, as well as other physical, psychological, and economic abuses and violence (Kaos GL 2023). An important example of the Turkish Government's approach against women and LGBTIQ+ rights can be found on March 20th, 2021, when President Erdogan announced Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, by presidential decree arguing the convention normalizes homosexuality and threatens the social and family values of Turkey (International Commission of Jurists 2021). Turkey was the first country that signed the Istanbul Convention in 2011 which was one of the two regulations that protected women from psychological, physical, and sexual violence as well as discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation, extending protection to LGBTIQ+ people. However, the application of the Istanbul Convention is highly questionable considering every year around 400 women are killed by men (We Will Stop Femicides Platform 2022) and the conservative policies of the Turkish Government increased the violence and discrimination in recent years.

To change the preexisting social circumstances that caused violence, injustice, and traumas while embracing healing, justice, and accountability, Haines (2019) offers a method called 'transformative justice'. The characteristics of this approach include a collaborative connection between the personal and political, the need of fostering democratic and decolonized organizations and healing spaces, attention to resources and processes, recognizing that oppression negatively affects a person's mind, body, spirit, and interpersonal relationships, and focusing on both personal and collective care and inquiry practices that are necessary to heal (Pyles 2018). Fortunately, these transformative justice methods are embedded in feminist, queer, indigenous, and other marginalized communities who are conscious of the violent and unequal social systems and who desire to change them. It is no

surprise then that this framework emerged from a grassroots organization rather than a Western academic institution (Brown 2017).

In this chapter, it is discussed that even though healing has personal and collective dimensions, oppressive socio-political conditions are one of the main reasons for traumas that cannot be handled or healed through personal approaches. Due to those traumas being experienced collectively, the solutions should address collective ways of healing and seeking justice so the oppressive social systems transform into equal and inclusive ones. Solidarity practices and grassroots organizations have been always vital for seeking justice and transforming societies, therefore looking into the cultural context of Turkey shows the power of solidarity for women and LGBTIQ+ people, along with the connection between healing and justice.

4.3. Solidarity

Grassroots organizations have been always important for marginalized groups from all over the world because they provided spaces where people can gather around a common goal, consciousness, or worldview. From racial justice movements to queer feminist struggles, people found the safety and support where they could not get from their society or government. In the socio-political context of contemporary Turkey while women and LGBTIQ+ people face multidimensional oppression and violence they actively participate in grassroots and non-governmental organizations because these organizations provide means for survival, empowerment, and healing. As the famous saying “Solidarity Saves Lives¹²” of feminist and queer movements might already signify the significance of solidarity in Turkey, this chapter further discusses the concept of solidarity in relation to queer and feminist

¹² Dayanışma yaşatır.

movements, explores the importance of solidarity in Turkey for women and LGBTIQ+ people, and investigates solidarity as a method for healing and achieving justice.

Since solidarity is an old and important part of feminism which was based on 'alikehood', it is important to situate how solidarity is perceived in the scope of this thesis. In *Feminism without Borders*, Chandra Talpady Mohanty (2003), presents a decolonial anticapitalist framework of solidarity that is beyond the notion of 'sisterhood' that uniformizes or dedifferentiates the subject of feminist solidarity that was created by white-western feminism rather is a political and ethical purpose. Similarly, in "Affective Solidarity: Feminist Reflexivity and Political Transformation", Clare Hemmings (2012) proposes solidarity that is not based on a shared identity but instead informed of power relations and privileges and has an affective dissonance that leads to the desire for social change. As the inclusivity, intersectionality, and common ground of queer and feminist movements discussed in the first part, the idea of queer feminist solidarity suits this description which Ahmed (2014) confirms acknowledging that people do not need to feel the same feeling, live similar lives or in similar bodies to act on solidarity but they need a common ground like in queer and feminist struggles.

Moreover, improving the notion of feminist solidarity, in "Feminist+ Solidarity as Transformative Politics", Ayşe Gül Altınay and Andrea Petö (2022) discuss a framework that they call 'feminist+ solidarity'. They acknowledge '+' as a reminder of interconnectedness, intersectionality, and diversity, within feminist struggles and all the contributions made by anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, human rights, LGBTIQ+ rights, ecological and climate justice movements to feminism through the years. According to them, when solidarity addresses structural injustices and opens space for grieving and joy, it also creates a way to transform those injustices collectively in a creative way while many other scholars give examples of how solidarity and togetherness contribute to healing and empowerment, especially of people

who were unjustly harmed. For example, according to Cagatay and colleagues (2022), Sami women's collective hymn singing experience in Norway is an example of anti-colonial resistance and healing. Also, Muftee and Rosales (2022) exemplify collective healing practices through solidarity from groups like 'Revolution Poetry' which aims to raise awareness about suburbs culture in mainstream Swedish cultural institutions through poetry, storytelling, and performance, and 'Swedish Hijabis' which focuses on Islamophobia and enables women in marginalized communities to share their stories and experiences through theatre. These groups create safe and resistant spaces for women and show the importance of collective support and solidarity practices.

As mentioned in the previous section, Turkey as a country in the middle of neoliberal Islamist politics, through 21 years of power of the AKP (Justice of Development Party) government, attacks the rights of women and LGBTIQ+ people on daily bases (Savci 2021). The Turkish Government supports and creates marginalization of many groups including women, LGBTIQ+ people, Kurdish and other ethnic minorities, feminist activists, and left-wing people through institutionalized hate speech and legal regulations which results in a rise of violence, discrimination, and injustices against mentioned groups (Korkman 2022). The AKP government also prohibits the March 8th Women's Day and Pride parade which is the only day for women and LGBTIQ+ people to show and see how big and strong their solidarity is and takes protestors into custody and prevents parades with rough police force. Notwithstanding these aggravated circumstances, queer and feminist people gather in NGOs and grassroots organizations to raise awareness, find ways to fight against such inequalities, and build solidarity networks in search of justice.

The importance of solidarity in Turkey is discussed by Selim Cagatay and colleagues (2022) in *Feminist and LGBTI+ Activism across Russia, Scandinavia, and Turkey*. As Turkey has been in the face of femicides, transfemicides, and cruel murders of LGBTIQ+ people for

a long time, activists had to find new ways of organizing counter-hegemonic struggles which appeared through growing engagements of civil society. In recent years, social media also became important for expanding the socio-political struggles of women and LGBTIQ+ people and as a new space for solidarity. Even though these new strategies that emerged in civil society and social media were more on a small scale and informal, Cagatay and colleagues (2022) still evaluate them as political actions.

The report of 17 Mayıs Derneği¹³ (2022) *From Discrimination to Poverty: LGBTIQ+ People in Turkey* presents an extensive evaluation of violations of LGBTIQ+ people's rights in Turkey. The report covers cases including violation of freedom of association, freedom of peaceful assembly, right to participate, access to justice, no-discrimination, right to an adequate standard of living, right to education, right to work, right to health, and social protection in the intersection of poverty. Due to these violations of rights -structural violence- being closely dependent on the politics of the government, the report focuses on the non-governmental organizations and solidarity networks in Turkey as almost the only way to fight against such violence and violations. As civil society mostly fulfills the gaps that the government left, it is important to look closely at the actions and means they provide for LGBTIQ+ people and one of the most important things to keep in mind about these networks is they are solely established and coordinated by queer feminist activists, and volunteers who acknowledge intersectionality, diversity and equity in their actions.

Some LGBTIQ+ organizations offer free psychological and legal support as well as financial aid and also solidarity initiatives have an important role in the empowerment and struggle of LGBTIQ+ people of Turkey. For example, Pembe Hayat LGBTIQ+ Dayanışma Derneği¹⁴ which is the first transgender rights association in Turkey was founded in 2006 in Ankara and provides free consultancy services in including legal, educational, health, and

¹³ 17 May Association. <https://www.17mayis.org/en/>

¹⁴ Pink Life LGBTIQ+ Solidarity Association.

transition-process-related issues. The Dilek Ince clothing bank, which was named after a trans activist who was murdered as a result of transphobia, enables them to provide clothing supplies for LGBTIQ+ people in need especially in prisons (Pembe Hayat n.d.). 17 Mayıs Derneği¹⁵ was founded in 2019 in Ankara to fight against discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people and to provide social services, advocacy, awareness raising, and human rights watch. Genç LGBTIQ+ Derneği¹⁶ was established in 2016 in Izmir to fight for fundamental rights like shelter, education, health, youth rights, sexual rights, social activities, and advocacy that has services like peer-to-peer, online, phone, legal, and psychological counseling. Kırmızı Şemsiye Derneği¹⁷ was founded for fighting against discrimination against sex workers especially the ones in disadvantaged groups and bringing awareness, solutions, and equality. SPoD¹⁸ was founded in 2011 to provide legal, social, and psychological counseling to LGBTIQ+ people in Turkey.

There are also informal organizations such as Hande Kader Solidarity which takes its name from the trans activist Hande Kader, who was murdered in 2016 as a result of a hate crime. This solidarity initiative was founded in 2020 to gather and provide scholarships to trans university students (Velvele 2021) but expanded in time and started to pay rent and bills, victualing, housing, job search, find furniture, clothes, computer, phone, as well as covering the expenses in the transition process including the surgery cost, and providing psychological and legal support (Bianet 2022). Another one is Lubunya Eartquake Solidarity¹⁹ which was established right after the massive earthquake occurred in Turkey and Syria on February 6th, 2023 with 7.8 magnitudes that resulted in more than 50.000 deaths of people (reliefweb 2023). This initiative was founded by LGBTIQ+ activists mainly from Turkey to raise

¹⁵ 17 May Association.

¹⁶ Young LGBTIQ+ Association.

¹⁷ Red Umbrella Sexual Health and Human Rights Association.

¹⁸ Association of Social Policies, Sexual Identity, and Sexual Orientation Studies.

¹⁹ LGBTIQ+ Eartquake Solidarity.

money for queers and sex workers in the affected area. They were highlighting the heaviness of the situation for LGBTIQ+ people and trying to foster safeness through financial support and they raised more than 58.000 Euros so far (go get funding n.d.). Another one is the Hormone Access Campaign which was founded by trans activists to raise awareness of the difficulties of accessing sex hormones and to provide financial support (Bianet 2022).

When violence and traumas are understood within the socio-political reality and unjust social systems, healing emerges as a political situation. From a micro perspective, finding a house, clothes, or joining an association might not look like contributing to a person's mental health and empowerment however when violence becomes part of everyday life and leaves no safe space, these organizations, initiatives, or people similar to you becomes the only cure you can access. That is why all of these actions and services are key support networks and, in fact, a matter of life and death for some LGBTIQ+ people in Turkey because they face extreme violence and discrimination faced every day. These networks and associations are, sometimes, the only solution or hope LGBTIQ+ people have which illustrates why they use the saying 'solidarity saves lives' frequently.

5. CHAPTER THREE: INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

5.1. Description of the Interviews

This chapter first describes the interviews and participants and then presents the analysis of the interviews in five parts: Queer Feminism, Human Rights Violations in Turkey, Solidarity, Healing, and Justice. The interviews were completed with seven queer feminist activists from Turkey. Three participants joined the research from Istanbul, one from Ankara, one from Eskisehir, one from Antalya, and one from Kayseri. Participants' ages ranged from 22 to 31 and all of them expressed that they identify as queer and feminist. Two of them

expressed their gender identity as woman, one of them as cis-woman, two of them as genderqueer, one of them as non-binary, and one of them as agender (Figure 1) where two of them expressed their sexual orientation as bisexual, one of them as questioning bi+, one of them as pansexual, one of them as lesbian, one of them as queer, and one of them as asexual (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Gender Identity Distribution

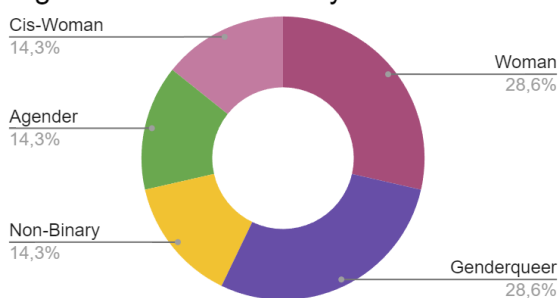
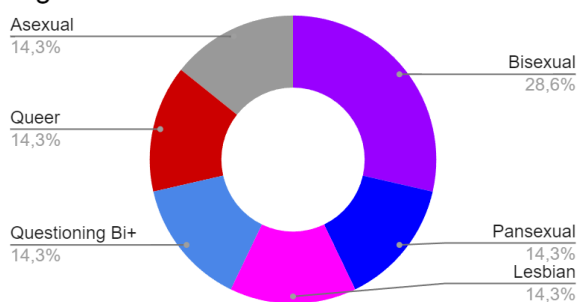


Figure 2: Sexual Orientation Distribution



To reach the participants, a ‘call for participants’ form containing information about the scope of the research and its aim was prepared in Google Forms and its link was spread through different social media platforms, WhatsApp groups, and personal messages. As only seven people filled out the application form and all were suitable for the research purposes, any screening process did not take place instead all the people who filled out the form were contacted by their selected method of communication and the ‘Research Participant Information Sheet’ and ‘Informed Consent Form’ were sent to each applicant. Before the interviews, participants were made aware of their rights, and approval for voice recording was received from each participant. All of the interviews were conducted online on video calling platforms like Zoom, Skype, and Google Meet. The time of interviews was adjusted according to participants, and on average interviews lasted 1,5 hours. At the end of the interview, each participant was asked to choose a pseudonym for themselves. The interviews were made in Turkish, and voice recordings were transcribed and analyzed by MAXQDA

2022. In the analysis, the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) method is used. The participants' profile is described here in order to enable readers better understand their background and experiences. However, some of their personal details are not shared here to protect confidentiality.

- Zenan (she/her) identifies as a bisexual woman. She is a Ph.D. student in political science and international relations and a volunteer at Ünikuir²⁰ and Kadın Savunma Ağ²¹.
- Bal ve Yeşil (she/her) identifies as a bisexual woman. She works as a communication specialist and volunteers at SPOD²² in the LGBTIQ+ hotline and the Lubunya Deprem Dayanışması²³.
- Gökkuşığı (he/them) identifies as a pansexual queer. He works as a social service specialist at Positif Yaşam Derneği²⁴.
- Deniz (they/them) identifies as a non-binary lesbian. They are bachelor's degree student and a volunteer at the SPOD LGBTIQ+ hotline and Trans Pride.
- Siren (they/them) identifies as questioning bi+ and agender. They are master's degree student in sociology and a volunteer at the SPOD LGBTIQ+ hotline and the Lubunya Deprem Dayanışması.
- Aybecer (she/they) identifies as queer. They are master's degree student and a volunteer at SPOD in no-distance talks and ÜniKuir Academy.
- Epifan (she/they) identifies as an asexual ciswoman. She is a psychologist and volunteers at Cinsel Şiddetle Mücadele Derneği²⁵ and SPOD LGBTIQ+ hotline.

²⁰ UniKuir s a student organization based in Ankara advocating for LGBTIQ+ rights and student political engagement. <https://www.unikuir.org/>

²¹ Women's Defense Network. <https://kadinsavunmasi.org/>

²² Association of Social Policies, Sexual Identity, and Sexual Orientation Studies. <https://spod.org.tr/>

²³ LGBTIQ+ Eartquake Solidarity. <https://www.instagram.com/lubunyadeprem/>

²⁴ Positive Living Association. <https://www.pozitifyasam.org/>

²⁵ Association for Struggle Against Sexual Violence. <https://cinselsiddetlemucadele.org/>

5.2. Thematic Analysis of the Interviews

5.2.1. Queer Feminism

To investigate the possibility of queer feminism when participants are asked how they perceive queer feminism and why they identify as queer and feminist, most of them first criticized the current feminist movement in Turkey as still in the process of the second wave and then they explained how they think feminism should really be. In their criticisms, Epifan, Deniz, and Aybecer said there are still trans-exclusionary and homophobic discourses in many feminist organizations. For example, Deniz was exposed to transphobia because wanted to be referred to as they/them while volunteering for a feminist organization²⁶ that asserts to be inclusive and had to quit the organization. Epifan, Deniz, and Aybecer said that this fact resulted in them not identifying themselves as a feminist for a long time and they developed prejudices against feminist organizations. Still, they stated that queer theory and the LGBTIQ+ movement have changed feminism in Turkey making it more inclusive and diverse and that is how they started to feel more familiar with feminism.

I don't know if you were able to follow but a big fight broke out on social media in 2018, especially on Twitter, between cis-women and trans women. It was a fight that already existed, but it flared up more on social media. There I lost my faith in the feminist movement in Turkey and I started to feel much closer to the LGBT+, queer movement. I developed some prejudice against feminist organizations. (Epifan)

When we look at the first visibility of feminism in Turkey when I was in it, for example, I wouldn't define myself as a feminist if it had continued like that. But I think that LGBT+ activism and queer theory have changed feminism in Turkey. Because as I said earlier, in the beginning, it was seen as a more altruistic, more open space for cis hetero women, which is why I couldn't find a place for myself at that point, now it feels more fluid, inclusive, flexible, and more political at the same time. (Aybecer)

The queer theory recognizes subjects and subjectivities as “fluid, unstable, and perpetually becoming” (Browne and Nash 2016, 1) so, the subject of feminism also cannot be considered stable (Butler 1994) rather it can be accepted as perpetually becoming and

²⁶ The name of the organization is not disclosed upon request of the participant.

learning. Butler (1994) also proposes deconstructing the subject of feminism in order to open up new possibilities for expansion and improvement. This proposal, in some ways, allows feminism's doors to be opened to queer identities. Hence, combining queer theory and identities with feminism can fill the gaps that are resulting in exclusionary actions within the feminist and queer movements. Collins and Bilge (2020) discuss that intersectionality enables us to notice that power relations are not distinct, instead, they rely on one another and function together. When participants were asked about their understanding of queer feminism, all of them highlighted the intersectionality, and inclusiveness of all gender and sexual identities and the strong connection between queer and feminist movements. Like Marinucci (2010), they referred to the common ground of the oppression against women and LGBTIQ+ people, and they said that queer feminism should be aware of this intersection and shape itself to fight this reality. Some of them said their queer and feminist identities cannot be separated from each other, and moreover, they do not want to imagine feminism as distinct from queerness where there is “an ongoing battle against homophobia in Turkey” (Epifan).

So it (queer feminism) should definitely be inclusive. As we follow a story of violence or murder of a cis-woman, or the legal struggle after that incident and we bring criticisms like why this woman died, why the precautions were not taken or the measures taken were not implemented, it would be something that would show the same follow-up, the same care, the same voice, the same anger for trans women and queer LGBT+ women. (Epifan)

I think feminism is already a queer act. Therefore, queer feminism is a bit like saying a female director. Because I don't think a feminism that is not queer is possible that would be a feminism decided by others. (Aybecer)

Feminism, then there is a shift towards queer feminism. Here again, yes, in fact, I still had a phobia because of my assigned gender, after I discovered my queerness, I started to feel that phobia and that I don't have a safe space here. I am in this struggle to make these spaces safe and the world liveable, and this is why I define myself as a queer feminist. (Siren 5:6)

5.2.2. Human Rights Violations against LGBTIQ+ People in Turkey

Research shows that LGBTIQ+ people are still exposed to numerous forms of violence and discrimination in many countries and cultures (UN n.d.). Turkey is one of the countries that does not legally recognize the human rights of LGBTIQ+ people and as mentioned before, associations like 17 Mayıs Derneği and Kaos GL explore the extension and size of this violence in their reports (17 Mayıs Derneği 2022; Kaos GL 2023). Accordingly, when participants were asked what kind of violence and discrimination they are exposed to in their daily life and what kind of human rights violations they observe in their surroundings, all of them expressed that LGBTIQ+ people are subjected to all kinds of human rights violations in Turkey including physical, psychological, and economic violence. Each of them mentioned transfemicides in Turkey pointing to the cases of transgender people, mainly transwomen, who are killed and burned inhumanely as one of the most brutal forms of violence like Hande Kader. For example, Zenan especially underlined intersectional violence like Lykke (2010) in addition to the violence against LGBTIQ+, if you are impoverished, Kurdish, or disabled then you suffer more violence. As a result, most LGBTIQ+ person do not open up about their sexual and gender identities to the public or to their families because they do not feel safe, except in their queer communities.

Yes, we are exposed to all kinds of violence. There is death, there is rape, there is harassment, there is mobbing. All kinds of violence literally, I can count them all: emotional violence, economic violence, we feel all of them very intensely. We cannot work, we cannot walk comfortably on the street. We are indeed forced to contend with being constantly pushed out of their domain. (siren)

Transgender people can be subjected to any kind of violence: psychological, verbal, or physical, then they are burned to death in this country. There is no deterrence, no security and that's why I think they have been subjected to all forms of violence. In fact, the head of the state in Turkey using hateful expressions every day about LGBTI paves the way for this. That's why we're literally going to "trans murders are political" because it's supported by the state. (Zenan)

The client says "I'm dying, I'm finished, I'm ruined, I can't live because I can't be myself. I'm 21 and life became miserable for me." I mean, even this, you know, to make someone's life miserable. Somebody doesn't necessarily have to come and hit or kill you in the street. This is also a violation, discrimination, and violence. Definitely, through

homophobia, transphobia, biphobia, misogyny, and trans-exclusionary radical feminism LGBT+ people are exposed to violence. (Epifan)

Structural and institutional violence came forward when discussing what causes and sustains violence against LGBTIQ+ people in Turkey. The prohibition of any outdoor activities, events, or protests by LGBTIQ+ organizations, increasing detentions of any opponent discourses against the AKP government, and unjust provocations justifying hate crimes like femicides and trans femicides can be given as examples of the structural injustices (Shaw et. al 2022) and marginalization of queer people by the AKP Government (Korkman 2022; Savci 2021) in Turkey. As described earlier, all the participants underlined the current Turkish Government as one of the perpetrators and supporters of homophobic violence and that this aggravates the circumstances for queer people. They are the product of unfair and oppressive systems which cause suffering in a variety of social groups and identities, both personally and collectively. These circumstances result in police officers and judges also discriminating against LGBTIQ+ people instead of securing justice when they report an episode of violence. The participants evaluated the reasons from a socio-political perspective and mentioned the lack of deterrence in the legal system (Zenan), hate speech from authorities (Epifan; Bal ve Yeşil), and hetero-patriarchal power relations (Siren) as some of the causes of violence against LGBTIQ+ people in Turkey.

I don't think there is much (social support) because, for example, in such calls to SPOD there is a great need for shelter, a queer shelter, it does not exist in Turkey and it needs to be. That's why we don't have a place to direct these people or they can't go to the police, for example, the police do not take them seriously. If they are a sex worker even worse, maybe even the police punish them, but even if they are not a sex worker, they are treated as a sex worker, as being a sex worker is something disgusting. I mean, I don't think there is much for the Lubunya²⁷s who have been subjected to violence in Turkey. (Bal ve Yeşil)

Of course, I don't think there is such a thing at the state level. No, you get no answer. In fact, the moment you try to carry out a process, you are exposed to violence again, you are exposed to a phobia. You are constantly being discriminated against, which creates great difficulties in accessing state institutions and justice. (Siren)

²⁷ Queer people.

Because it can be sustained by society. In other words, it is the society that raises the individuals who perpetrate that violence, those social tales and nonsense spread within the family. You know, Hrant Dink's wife had a very famous saying that "One does not born as a killer but made". In other words, society is actually a very good tool of power to perpetuate violence. I certainly don't think it's individual. For example, a government authority is talking nonsense like "women should not laugh" or "there is no such thing as LGBTI" and then you hear the next day, that there has been a very specific violence. The court process is going on and after that, the perpetrator makes this defense: "Look, even the head of the government says this." (Epifan)

All participants expressed that they had encountered discrimination, homophobia, or violence based on their queer identity, either directly or indirectly. Their individual experiences and how they respond to these injustices emotionally and mentally vary but Deniz, Epifan, and Siren stated that they attempted or considered suicide as a result of the violence and discrimination they suffered. For example, Deniz attempted suicide because of the homophobia they were subjected to in high school; Epifan similarly attempted suicide when they were in college because of exclusion, loneliness, and the constant need to fight; and Siren said that they still feel suicidal. The examples they provided from their personal experiences coincide with both Sara Ahmed's (2014) idea that personal experiences cannot be separated from socio-political reality as well as Garo and colleagues (2018) and Cvetkovich's (2003) claims that traumas are a result of injustices and socio-political narratives. Another confirmation that their suicidal behavior occurred because of the socio-political environment they live in lies in the amount of calls about suicidal attempts they received on the LGBTIQ+associations' hotline. Moreover, all participants said they think there are collective traumas in Turkey, even though some traumas look personal they are still connected to collective and socio-political reality.

I used this sentence a lot, but yes, there are points where I can no longer cope with it because I feel that I am not in a livable world and I have to struggle all of a sudden, and I have to constantly scrape things up. I feel too much ... and there are times when I get very tired and again, the thing that tires me most is to exist, that being existed is political. I feel this very very intensely (Siren)

I think like this, for example, there is a case of Ahmet Yıldız in Turkey, a gay man killed by his own father. Now I'm thinking, for example, you are gay, you want to open up to your family. Maybe your family is a little strict, but you still want to open yourself up, you want to get out of that closet, but Ahmet Yıldız comes to your mind. You are thinking how he was killed and then how can you open yourself then? How can you get out of that closet? So that trauma is a very decisive thing or you're transgender, you're a sex worker and every day at work, for example, you think about whether you will be like Hande Kader in every customer you meet. (Zenan)

In fact, even the individual things that we experience come together and form something collective. For example, we suddenly have a collective experience in the example of the earthquake, but I think that even the experiences we had separately in our childhood create a collective memory of us. That's how I feel about it. An example of this is that at one point, I experienced the pain or violence experienced by a subject who is far from me and who is not in my life in any way, as if I had experienced it in my own life. In other words, we are all part of a whole, a body, after all, and that's why I never think "This will not happen to me". I feel that if any of us is not safe, none of us are safe (Aybecer)

I think most of the traumas in Turkey right now are social traumas. We have already forgotten our personal traumas, no one can sit down and think about their personal traumas. We are experiencing social trauma like crazy and we are experiencing stupidity all the time. I feel like it's really not healthy, not to be psychologically strained and to be hopeful about the future in Turkey right now. Currently, a healthy individual in Turkey has to be psychologically challenged otherwise, I think it means experiencing something delusional. So yes, I don't think our traumas have social aspects, I think they are completely social. We are experiencing social traumas in Turkey. That's very heavy. (Bal ve Yeşil)

5.2.3. Solidarity

Mohanty (2003) states that the practice of solidarity does not emerge from a commonality of oppression, but rather it is a chosen path of people that wants to fight together with diversity, and difference in contrast to sameness and Hemmings (2012) describes solidarity as a method to fight against a common threat. As a group and socio-political identity that is under attack by the hetero-patriarchal society constantly, when participants are asked what solidarity means for them, their interpretations revealed that solidarity practices are crucial for marginalized groups like women and LGBTIQ+ people in Turkey. Particularly, the queer feminist solidarity they find in organizations, associations, and

networks is described as important for their survival and safety as well as for keeping their hopes in a better future.

That's why I think solidarity is a form of government on its own better than democracy or anything. A place where people respect each other and make it easier for us to come together and make decisions, for example, it was seen in the earthquake that women and LGBT+s organized much faster because we actually experience that disaster every day. So metaphorically, we are always under that debris. Therefore, it is not very difficult to get rid of it (debris) and find it (solidarity). (Aybecer)

Now, when you are not an acceptable citizen, an individual that the state wants to see, there is a big gap in the social state part of the state. You may find it very difficult to reach some services. When the state marginalizes, pushes to the borders, does not recognize it, and does not respond to you, a huge gap arises. Solidarity fills that void. Especially queer solidarity, feminist solidarity, and solidarity among LGBTI+ fill it. It matters a lot to me. It saves lives. (Epifan)

So we talk about it in my therapy, we really talk about it in every session. ... When the questions like "What are the things that make you feel good?" come, I always say that it is solidarity and struggle. I honestly think that the thing that keeps me alive is our struggle. Otherwise, I probably wouldn't be alive right now. I'm very clear on this because yes, we are not in a livable world and so we're going to build that world. Our safe areas, we will take those areas, yes, we will take them by building. This is very important for me. (Siren)

I mean, that emotional solidarity, feeling that someone is behind me is very important and I think it changes things a lot. For example, it changes the way I experience this country a lot. I mean, sometimes my friend makes fun of me when I say a lot of things like that, but I also feel like a lot. I think one of the people who experience Turkey in the best way is people who are in the queer community in Istanbul because it is a disgraceful country and we are constantly experiencing very bad things, and at least we are a community with solidarity practices. (Bal ve Yeşil)

It's a very good question, actually, I'm a person who has a lot of difficulty in defining concepts, but if I had to put it in one word, I would say solidarity is being together in an inclusive way. Because it's more than just being queer or feminist, we can have a wide variety of features, different worldviews, and characters, but if we really have a common purpose, if there is something we support, maybe I can define it as being able to come together and support each other for that purpose. (Gökkuşığı)

In "Open Forum: Feminist+ Solidarity" Madeleine Kennedy-Malfroy says "when we act in solidarity with others, we think beyond the self, recognize our bond with others, and in doing so, strengthen the foundations on which we can build collective justice and freedom" (Altınay et al. 2022, 485). Considering participants confirmed that their rights are violated by

governmental institutions as well and they only feel safe in their queer communities, each participant expressed at least one organization they affiliate with such as SPOD, Unikuir, 17 Mayıs, Pozitif Yaşam, Kaos GL, Lubunya Earthquake Solidarity, Kırmızı Şemsiye, TransPride, İyader, Cinsel Şiddetle Mücadele Derneği and more. They define these associations as safe and empowering spaces, where they can be truly themselves and free of heteronormative misogynist social norms but also as places where they can act in solidarity with other LGBTIQ+ people to seek justice. Even though, as the participants stated, these NGOs are important tools enabling spaces to meet with other queer people, they are not the only way to act in solidarity. Any action like supporting a friend, sharing experiences, standing up for a person, or just sharing joy in daily life could be an example of solidarity and contribute to personal or collective transformation as long as they are made with political consciousness.

For instance, what do they expect from a woman, a cis hetero woman, from such an ordinary mainstream view: she wants to get married, wants to have children, be a mother, wants to have a job, wants to provide for a household. The fact that I don't want any of this and it's being okay. Not like understanding or tolerancing it, but rather glorifying, celebrating, and celebrating this has empowered me incredibly. Well, I found myself a habitat. It is like I was a polar bear and I was living in the Amazon in a terrible way. Then they took me to the poles and I said "Oh my". (Epifan)

When I get organized with a feminist organization, I have seen how political our actions and our loves are and I learned that it is activism. Being able to have fun with feminists out at night is actually a feminist action because patriarchy doesn't want you out at that hour. If you want to counter that, you'll be out at that time of night. I've seen this with feminism, and it made me so good. The best thing you can do for yourself is to have fun. It is very empowering to be on the street with that anger, knowing that it is actually a political thing while having fun. (Deniz)

So it really makes me feel better, like the Lubunya earthquake solidarity I told you about. So in that desperation, it was a very healing thing for me to be doing something like that. Other than that, it's a good feeling to feel like it works especially with something this horrible and desperate. Because in this way, there is both the happiness of being useful and the confidence that if something like this happens to me someone would also stand behind me. (Bal ve Yeşil)

As mentioned earlier, “solidarity saves lives” is one of the most used slogans by women and LGBTIQ+ people in Turkey. When participants are asked what this slogan means to them, all of them confirmed that this sentence is more than a slogan. They expressed this sentence as representing the reality of queer people in Turkey, that different acts of solidarity, from a small scale to a bigger scale, help queer people to survive and heal. For example, the LGBTIQ+ helpline, workshops, discussions, and psychological and economic support provided by associations are some of the examples they give to confirm the importance and need for queer solidarity in Turkey and as one of the closest incidents that happened in Turkey, the 6th of February Earthquake was mentioned by each participant where the queer community acted in solidarity to literally save lives.

First of all, it has a place that I personally value very much because, as I said before, I definitely think that solidarity is what keeps me alive. It's definitely saving lives. If I am alive because I live in solidarity. This is very important for me. When we look at it collectively, I think we are in a place where we get a lot of support from each other. I think that feeling and making others feel that we are not alone is what keeps us together and alive in my opinion. That's why it's definitely saving lives and will continue to do so. (Siren)

Here, I think what we are doing is a great example of solidarity. We receive a lot of feedback from consultants who call us usually like this: “This is a life-saving thing you do. Even the fact that this helpline exists, that I have this phone number, that I can call, that I can even talk about trivial things is a life-saving thing for me”. I see this within the scope of solidarity, in terms of creating a safe space. That's why I think solidarity saves lives. I really think it pulls people off the rope, so to speak. (Epifan)

For example, we acted in solidarity to cover the hospital expenses of a friend at Transpride by organizing a party. One of them had a situation like being disabled. In order to prevent this, a party was organized to raise the money to cover the surgery. Also, for hormones, the cost of surgery, and the cost of surgery for the transition process, for example, are funded by organizing parties. This is a very good example of solidarity. We had a friend in SPOD that we lost in the earthquake. We gathered for her and it was a very bad day, but it was good to come together and share our pain together. (Deniz)

And I really feel that solidarity saves lives at every step of my life. Solidarity is something that we see in every crisis, even in the earthquake, even if it is not only a queer solidarity. Because solidarity is in such a place that stands above the state, above all authorities. It is something that keeps us alive even if the state that we normally think will protect us is not. So I've been thinking about this for a long time. I don't know how much this will take place in the thesis, but I really feel that we are not protected by the state but when I think about why we are still standing, it is entirely thanks to solidarity. (Aybecer)

Even though these services and actions are precious to many queer people, participants also acknowledge that these actions are not enough to heal or save everyone. Accessibility to these services is one of the main problems, as all of the participants expressed. Mostly LGBTIQ+ people living in the western side of Turkey, in big cities have information and access to these services. Moreover, Deniz noted that sometimes LGBTIQ+ persons complain about NGOs which are volunteer-based groups since no one answered their call and they could not get help. In fact, the government is responsible for providing these services and more and they are holding the wrong person accountable for it. As inaccessibility is caused by the unjust and unequal socio-political distribution of resources and services, social change is a must to maintain justice and equality for everyone. As stated by Emery (2013), holding oppressive systems accountable is needed to sustain healing and transform the harm they caused. So, rather than criticizing the LGBTIQ+ associations it is important to acknowledge these support mechanisms should have been provided by the Turkish government in order to direct criticisms in the right direction.

So you understand, if they have a phone -a smartphone-, if they use social media, have an internet package to use social media, then maybe. So that's why sometimes I don't feel like we're very accessible. Some shifts are quite empty both on the phone and on the e-mail. We have consultants who call frequently that's why, for example, I can't say that every caller is a new consulter. For example, we receive 300 applications maybe one hundred of them are frequent callers. That's why I don't think we can reach everyone like this. (Epifan)

But, of course, there are those who do not know especially if they live in a small city because, in Turkey, a big city and a small city are something that has very strict lines. For example, queer in Kayseri was newly established there was no queer organization before. For example, there is Keskesorlgbti in Diyarbakir but is there an LGBTI+ organization in Artvin, for example, or it exists in the Aegean region, but in the Western Black Sea, in Sakarya, I do not know if it exists. The LGBTI+ person there might be following May 17, Spod, Kaos, or something to be aware of these things. Otherwise, they will not be aware of it and not know what to do then. (Zenan)

5.2.4. Collective Healing

Healing is contextualized in the theoretical framework as a complex phenomenon that should be investigated in personal experiences in connection to socio-political realities. According to Haines (2019) shifting from dominance to equity is essential for healing, however, in authoritarian contexts like Turkey where change is never easy or fast, people promote various strategies to survive within these conditions. To understand the experiences of LGBTIQ+ people, when the meaning and value attached to healing are asked, most of the participants handled their healing in relation to the social connections they have such as queer community, friends, and other people they can act in solidarity with. Healing is especially understood in relation to being able to live their lives freely, equally, and free from violence and discrimination. All participants considered the fight for achieving justice as an important part of their healing process. They underlined the moments when they meet with other oppressed and vulnerable groups whose fight intersects with theirs when they learn from and empower one another when they remember there are many groups fighting for justice, and when they see the connection between the justice struggles of all marginalized groups as contributing to feeling better, hopeful, and their collective healing.

Well, healing is actually yes, the motto of my life and it means fighting. It means being able to talk to each other, support each other, socialize, and walk together. Of course, this is again in the "oppressed" quotes, I will always use it in quotes like this. It means being able to walk together with "oppressed" identities, and "oppressed" societies with communities, groups, and vulnerable groups and build our spaces. (Siren)

These are the biggest reasons for healing for me. Not to be judged, not to be marginalized. There is no problem with you, you are okay as you are, all of these are okay. It's not difference, it's not diversity, it's not weird. This is Epifan, Epifan's choices, thoughts, and the self of Epifan. This is what healed it for me. (Epifan)

Since recovery is already such a process for me, fighting at this point is actually a gain for me. I think it is very important and very healing for me to have a purpose, to have a goal, and to work towards that goal, to fight and struggle for that goal during the healing process. For a person who has been subjected to violence, physical violence for example, when you go to the police, struggle against it because you cannot make a complaint, to use

your right to complain through different complaint mechanisms, to seek more rights for the right to complain through organizations -peer solidarity as I mentioned- or just to transmit various complaint mechanisms and provide information about the complaint processes to people who have similar problems. We can see all of this as a struggle, so solidarity is definitely a very important part of healing. (Gökkuşığı)

Gökkuşığı, Zenan, and Siren evaluated some personal aspects of healing and discussed respectively that strategies for healing might differ from person to person, confronting the problem which is an individual process is essential to start healing, and even if we are subjected to the same violence, still everyone has unique experiences. However, they also underlined the social aspects of healing, such as trying to understand each other's experiences and needs respectfully still contributing to the empowerment and healing of both sides. All participants were aware of the effects of socio-political reality both in traumas and healing, and they underlined the importance of transformation of society as more effective to transform and heal individuals living in that society.

That's why society is always like that when trying to raise awareness because we are trying to raise awareness not in individuals but in society. If society heals, the individual will also heal, not because I see it as a disease, but in terms of consciousness, I think that if society gets better, the individuals will also get better. (Epifan)

Social recovery can only change things anyway. For example, the society of Turkey has moved there, no one can heal individually, either all together we heal or none of us. (Bal ve Yeşil)

I think it is definitely not independent of society and social norms, especially since I have seen that personal experiences are not very personal and that people with similar characteristics have much more similar experiences of violence in my life. At that point, no matter how much people change, place, time, and date change we always listen to the same stories because events are not disconnected from social norms. (Gökkuşığı)

When discussing the collective experiences of healing, especially after all of them described solidarity as fundamental in their life, they also connected healing to solidarity. Togetherness and connectedness are described as important aspects of healing by all participants. They did not discuss healing only as a personal experience but also as a practice

of mutual support. Firth and colleagues (2015) emphasize the importance of relationships and social surroundings in the healing process, and most of the participants mentioned the relationships with their friends and queer communities as important to healing. Bal ve Yeşil and Aybecer especially highlighted that they think healing can be maintained through collectivity because the traumas and violence are also encountered collectively.

I think it is very important to access social support networks, especially after you are exposed to violence. Access to social support networks is one of the most important things in my opinion, especially the support one receives from family members, friends, or all those people in the social circle. Apart from that, of course, at this point, psychological support is very important in this process, both to ensure psychological well-being and especially to improve the psychological effects of this post-traumatic stress disorder or trauma. Apart from these, I think it is an empowering point to be able to defend one's own legal rights and initiate those legal processes, especially in these violent incidents. (Gökkuşığı)

Yes, there is definitely, because I can't see that I can heal from a very positive or hopeful place apart from solidarity. Of course, there are places to look but I'm not at this point. So I think that solidarity can take me to a healing place. (Siren)

So one cannot exist without the other. A solidarity that does not care about healing is not solidarity and there is no healing without solidarity and it doesn't always have to be in a political place. As I said, calling and checking a friend daily who you think is feeling bad is an act of solidarity. And nobody cannot heal alone including a person who has never experienced such social traumas cannot heal alone. (Bal ve Yeşil)

Yes, just like we share our pain, traumas, and violence, I think we're healing together again. For example, in the case of Suna whom we lost in the earthquake I think that just as we experienced that trauma together or in relation to other traumas we experienced, we also experience healing together. As I said in that example, I feel bad when someone suffers violence, just as I feel better when someone is healed. (Aybecer)

5.2.5. Justice

According to Bost and Morales (2017), the oppression we face in our personal lives is inextricably connected to the historical, and political context of the country, body, and culture we live in. Similarly, the interviewees' comments revealed some of the connections between solidarity, healing, and justice. For example, all of them pointed out the hetero-

patriarchal system as the leading cause of violence and traumas they have suffered, and they stated that as a result of that oppression and violence, they joined non-governmental organizations where they can connect with other queer people and empower and heal themselves. As injustices are the main reason why they were harmed in the first place, they acknowledged the importance of fighting against and changing those unjust systems, so they are no longer harmed. When they are asked how social change and justice can be maintained in Turkey for LGBTIQ+ people, acknowledgment of legal rights through laws is brought up as the foremost thing to do, and also the need to raise awareness about LGBTIQ+ rights at a local level is seen as essential.

I think one of the most basic things that can be done at that point will be to produce policies in this area. With policies, changes in the constitution, with laws, for example, with the return of the Istanbul Convention. This is one of the most important things that can be done for us when our constitutional rights or our rights are guaranteed together with the legislation because first I need to feel safe (Gökkuşığı)

First of all, I think we need a legal guarantee right now because we no longer have a legal guarantee. If it had been in the past, other examples could have been given, but the first thing we need to do now is to bring back the Istanbul Convention, especially if the government changes after this election, that is, if the president changes and the government is indirectly affected by it. So this is number one for sure. Unless we do this, we can neither provide assurance for women nor can we provide assurance for LGBTI+. We need to do this for both. (Zenan)

And I also see that those LGBTI+s who try to get support blame NGOs as if they are blaming the state: "I called and they didn't answer" for example. Everyone is a volunteer here, so come to yourselves they are trying to serve you without getting paid. You pay taxes, you cannot get this service from the state and you hold NGOs accountable when 'they' are the ones you should hold accountable for. (Deniz)

I think we can pour a little more into the street, a little more into the neighborhood. I think we can get out of the city and enter the middle quarters, I don't know, to the "country", to "Anatolia" in quotation marks. Because now I really lost my optimism in the city: "I made a very good translation, a thousand people have read it, it has been retweeted, etc." and then I look at the people who retweeted and see all of them are people I know. (Epifan)

6. CONCLUSION

Many people and social groups in Turkey continue to suffer as a result of sociopolitical conditions that exclude, marginalize, and expose violence. The LGBTIQ+ community is one of those vulnerable groups surviving in difficult circumstances. The first research question and its sub-questions: “What are the main characteristics of LGBTIQ+ solidarity in Turkey? Why do people join such networks? Is queer feminist solidarity possible?” reveals that the LGBTIQ+ solidarity in Turkey is shaped around anti-heteronormative, anti-sexist spaces where queer people can be themselves freely. One of the most important aspects of this solidarity in Turkey is that it is embedded in grassroots and non-governmental organizations which are critical in providing social services and filling the gaps left by the government. People join these organizations not only for their own personal well-being but also to contribute to the needs and struggles of other queer people, and to be part of a larger social movement that aims to transform society and bring justice to their community. Queer feminism or queer feminist solidarity is possible if feminists engage with inclusive and intersectional approaches and recognize the interconnectedness of feminist and queer movements.

The second research question and its sub-questions: “What kind of violence and discrimination do LGBTIQ+ people are exposed to in Turkey? What kind of strategies/support mechanisms do they have to survive or protect themselves? Is it possible to heal from such violence through solidarity or how it would be possible?” reveals that the LGBTIQ+ people in Turkey face all forms of violence including physical, psychological, economic, and institutional which is worsen with the support of the current Turkish government. Since there are many social groups and identities marginalized in Turkey, such as transwomen, these intersecting acts of violence and injustices are experienced acutely.

Solidarity networks and organizations are the only way to get support when faced with any kind of violence or discrimination. They provide empowering and healing spaces for LGBTIQ+ people through services such as psychological, legal, financial, or emotional support. For example, the LGBTIQ+ hotlines provided by various organizations play an important role in suicide prevention. These organizations and solidarity practices experienced there contribute to personal and collective well-being by providing mental health support, but also by transforming lives through consciousness-raising, advocacy activities, and being a community where equality is practiced. Injustices are the main reason for violence and traumas and for not being able to heal. As a result, seeking justice is a component of seeking healing.

This study examined the relationship between healing, solidarity, and justice, concluding that for groups that are constantly subjected to violence, solidarity practices, and collective actions are critical in bearing and resisting those injustices. Women and LGBTIQ+ people are among those groups in Turkey and organizations play an important role in their struggle and healing. Yet since they are volunteer-based, these organizations are not accessible to everyone and do not provide all the opportunities a government could and should provide. They are only support mechanisms, and they cannot prevent violence against women and LGBTIQ+ people on their own. However, the current Turkish government is one of the main perpetrators of these injustices, and the government does not use its resources to benefit all the people. In order for women and LGBTIQ+ people to heal, legal approaches that are inclusive, accessible, and based on human rights should be implemented. The Istanbul Convention should be re-signed, the 6284²⁸ should be implemented, and more laws should be legally adopted. Then, people can find more safe spaces and begin to heal personally and collectively.

²⁸ Law to Protect Family and Prevent Violence against Women.

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Annex 1

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Firstly, thank you so much for accepting to participate in my research.

Part One: Introduction

1. Could you please introduce yourself? (pronouns, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, city, occupation, educational background, etc.)
2. Do you consider yourself queer (LGBTIQA+) and feminist? Why?
3. What are your reasons for participating in the research and what are your expectations?

Part Two: Solidarity

1. How do you define solidarity and do you think it has an important place in your life?
2. How do you define queer feminist solidarity and how does it take place in Turkey?
3. What are some of the practices or events that show this type of solidarity?
4. Do you consider yourself part of any solidarity, network, or community? Which one(s)?
5. What are your reasons to join such organizations?
6. What are some of the activities of that group/organization and what is your role in there?
7. Could you give some examples of solidarity you experienced or observed within that group/organization?
8. Do you think LGBTIQA+ and feminist organizations/solidarity networks empower their members? How?
9. What does pride march mean for you?
10. Do you think pride is a way of showing solidarity? Why?
11. What do you think about the slogan “Solidarity saves lives” that is used largely by feminists and LGBTIQA+ people in Turkey? Why do you think this slogan is preferred a lot?

Part Three: Healing

1. What kind of violence do you think LGBTIQA + persons are exposed to in Turkey? What are the reasons for it?
2. For those who are exposed to violence, do you think there are support mechanisms available for them? If yes, do you have information about these support mechanisms?
3. Do you think other people (LGBTIQA +) have information about these support mechanisms and can access them?
4. Do you think violence and trauma are personal experiences or do they also have social aspects?
5. Do you consider yourself a person who is exposed or has been exposed to violence based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity?
6. If you are comfortable sharing that experience, could you give some examples of such violence?
7. Did you get any psycho-social support after the exposition? How, or why?
8. Did you get any legal support? How, or why?
9. What does healing mean for you, and how important is it?

10. Do you consider yourself someone who has healed from such violence or who is still healing from it? If yes, could you tell me about your experience of healing?
11. Do you think healing from violence is only a personal experience or it also has social aspects?
12. What do you think a person needs most after being exposed to violence to start healing, if you could answer based on your experience?
13. Do you think there is a relationship between healing and solidarity? If yes, could you give examples from your experience or observations?
14. In general, how can we fight against violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity? How do you fight?
15. Do you think fighting is also a part of healing?
16. How do you think, in general, healing from violence is / would be possible?

Are there any last thoughts or comments you might want to add?

Thank you again for your participation. I really appreciate you taking the time and sharing this experience. Please if you have any doubts or questions feel free to contact me and/or my advisor. You will find her contact information in the information sheet provided at the beginning of the interview.



Referencia del Proyecto: 4_RRI_2023

El subcomité de Investigación e Innovación Responsable del Comité de Ética en la Investigación de la Universidad de Oviedo,

DECLARA que,

Tras revisar la solicitud y la información proporcionada por el solicitante, el Proyecto de investigación titulado **“Solidarity as a Healing Practice: Example of Solidarity as a Healing Practice: Example of Queer Feminists in Turkey”**, presentado por **Doga Rojda Koldas**, y supervisado por la profesora **Elena Igartuburu García**,

CONSIDERA que:

- El Proyecto tiene valor científico y social y la metodología empleada es adecuada
- La capacidad del investigador principal y los medios disponibles son adecuados para realizar el estudio propuesto
- La selección de los sujetos es justa, minimiza los riesgos y maximiza los beneficios sociales de los resultados científicos
- El procedimiento de obtención del consentimiento informado es adecuado, así como los mecanismos para la protección de los datos
- Cumple con los principios éticos y la legislación nacional.

Firmado en Oviedo a 11 de mayo de 2023

Vicerrector de Investigación
Universidad de Oviedo