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S P O D

Traces of the LBQ Movement in Turkey

LBQ Meetings Report

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Who are we?

Empowering Practices Initiative

Empowering Practices Initiative, which started its journey in 2020, aims to support LGBTI+ and women+'s with self-care and collective care practices. Empowering Practices offers mechanisms of support to activists through research, knowledge generation, community building, artistic expression, and solution modeling.

Social Policy, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association

Social Policy, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association (SPoD), which set out with the dream of a fair, equal, and free world under the rainbow in 2011, aims to contribute to the production of social policies necessary for a life where lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and plus (LGBTI+) people in Turkey will not feel pressured about their gender identity and sexual orientation.

Along with its advocacy works for this purpose, SPoD aspires to set an example for public institutions by developing service models for LGBTI+ communities, to eliminate all forms of discrimination in these areas, and to provide services specifically to LGBTI+s through public and private sector collaborations in the long run.

SPoD provides legal, social, and psychological counseling to LGBTI+s, pursues campaign litigation, offers training to mental health professionals, lawyers, institutions, and municipalities, conducts academic research, organizes seminars, panels, schools of politics and activism, election campaigns, forms support groups, and holds advocacy meetings. SPoD carries out these activities with its professional employees, volunteers, and expert networks.

Preface

Today, the invisibility policies that LGBTI+s are exposed to are systematically reinforced by event and march bans, and by media outlets that spread hate speech against LGBTI+s. The pandemic over the past three years has prevented LGBTI+s from gathering in the public arena. The rights of women and LGBTI+s have been endangered by Turkey's abrupt withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, which is an international agreement that protects the rights of people who are exposed to gendered violence. However, despite the practices of marginalization, suppression, and making them invisible, LGBTI+ individuals have found various ways of organizing and continue to resist, stating "We are here, and we are not going anywhere."

In this political context, LGBTI+s do not feel safe. This situation prevents women+, trans+, intersex, and non-binary people who identify as lesbian, bisexual, and queer from coming together, learning from each other, taking strength from each other, and developing as a community.

To explore new ways of breaking through barriers, we designed a three-session online event series for LBQs¹. In this report, we have compiled the insights we gained from the discussions at the event. We have added a section to the report, titled "The Traces of the LBQ Movement in Turkey", which we hope will provide an overview of LBQ self-organizations from past to present.

1. The abbreviation LBQ in the report refers to women+, trans+, intersex, and non-binary people who identify as lesbian, bisexual, and/or queer.

In the LBQ Meetings Report, we discussed the experiences of self-organization and current discussions of LBQs within the framework of the common, differentiated, and specific needs of lesbian, bisexual, and queer people. During the roundtable meetings, we aimed to stimulate a dialogue between LBQ activists and get to know each other.

With this report, we aim to convey information about the experiences associated with the LBQ movement and to preserve today's memory. The LBQ movement referred to in the report does not consist of a monolithic chain of actions and thoughts. Rather, it points to the articulation of the organizational experiences of LBQs struggling with the heteronormative world. We hope this report will inspire the formation of LBQ self-organizations and working groups that are nourished by diversity, intersectionality, and inclusivity and that internalize these principles.

Introduction

Traces of lesbian, bisexual, and queer self-organization can be found in Turkey in the 1990s when the first homosexual and transgender activities and organizations emerged. The self-organizations they established around the specific needs of lesbian bisexual women and trans people within the nearly 30-year-old LGBTI+ movement have increased the participation of lesbians, bisexuals, and queers in the movement and played an important role in its continuous transformation by adding the agenda specific to LBQs to the agenda of the LGBTI+ and feminist movement.

In the mid-1990s, lesbians who were critical of the association of the word “gay” with male homosexuality, established lesbian feminist organizations to understand their own experiences and make their struggles visible.

The notion that “women who love women are lesbians” has been challenged, and awareness was raised that this approach “includes ignorance and marginalization” (Ersoy, 2007, p.2) towards bisexuals. This awareness has been instrumental in creating formations and working areas where lesbian and bisexual women organize together.

“The smaller number of lesbians and bisexual women in mixed homosexual organizations, of course, related to the invisibility of women in the patriarchal social order” (Ersoy, 2011, p.415). Lesbian and bisexual women who put this invisibility on the agenda paved the way for efforts to transform misogyny, lesbophobia, and biphobia within LGBT organizations.

Lesbian and bisexual women, who have been involved in feminist organizations since the beginning of the 2000s, have questioned the heterosexism of these organizations by conducting politics over their own bodies (Begüm & Noir, 2013). With all these possibilities of rethinking, lesbians, and bisexuals have not only struggled with the reflection of limitations of the heteronormative world on daily life but also with the impositions within feminist and LGBT organizations.

In the 2010s, the binary gender system was called into question with the emergence of queer debates. Queer was reflected not only in theoretical discussions but also in actions. Discussing the possibility of “a world where differences can coexist and where differences do not form hegemonic relations over each other” (Öz, 2011), the question “Who is the subject of feminism?” arose.

Transfeminism, which is “open to individuals from other queer experiences, intersex people, trans men, cis men, cis women, and anyone who sympathizes with the needs of trans people and cares about fighting together with all trans women and transgender individuals in their struggle for freedom,” is one of the most important breaking points that enables today’s discussions of diversity (Gulkan & Aligül, 2012, p. 259). With this breaking point, “trans-exclusionary attitudes among feminists became evident,” and at the same time, spaces for dialogue were created by organizing events “where both cis feminists and trans activists come together to discuss the problems experienced and prioritize experience sharing” (Sema, 2021).

The diversification of concepts in queer and feminist debates in recent years provides new tools for critical perspectives, while also offering an opportunity to re-examine the functions of tools used in the past. For instance, the concept of intersectionality, which allows for “efforts to think, analyze, and organize these concepts by being aware of the connections between race, borders, gender, and sexuality” (Davis, 2016, p.31), is frequently used to search for common modes of struggle.

Today, it is clear that there is a need for specific spaces for LBQs that build on the accumulation of the movement and foster new areas of discussion. It is important to explore new ways for LBQs who are active in the LGBTI+ and feminist movements to come together in a space where they can exist in all their diversity, discuss their shared and unique challenges, and connect with one another.

Method

Through the LBQ Meetings Project, we aimed to (1) look at the past and present experiences of the LBQ movement together, (2) explore how intersectionality is reflected in LBQ organizations, (3) identify the obstacles faced by LBQ organizations and as well as possible solutions to address them.

During the preparation phase of the project, we called for a working group consisting of women+, trans+, intersex, and non-binary people who identify as lesbian, bisexual, and queer and would regularly participate in thematic roundtable meetings.

We encouraged LBQ activists from different cities to join the working group. A total of 21 activists, including 10 from Istanbul, 5 from Ankara, one each from Amed (Diyarbakır), İzmir, Mersin, and Rize, and an activist resides in both Van and Mardin, were included in the working group.

We interviewed working group participants to gain insight into their motivations for being interested in the project, the ways they interact with LBQ policy and agency, how they can contribute to the project, and their expectations from it. The responses we received from the application form assisted us in creating a collaborative work process.

We have redefined the need for a meeting centered on LBQs, based on the answers to the questions “Why are you interested in LBQ Meetings?” and “What are your expectations about the work?”.

The common themes of the responses are:

- Visibility of LBQs within the LGBTI+ and feminist movements
- Togetherness and solidarity
- Being informed about each other and getting to know each other
- The intersectional and shared field of struggle
- Safe discussion and dialogue space
- Intercity interaction
- Experience transfer
- Informing and learning together

After establishing the working group, we held three thematic roundtables and encouraged ongoing participation. We also reached out to those who were unable to attend due to scheduling conflicts and received their written opinions on the matter. We created the insight report, which you will read in the next section, based on the views of the working group participants.

Themes

1- History and Present of the LBQ Movement:

While determining this theme, we aimed to create a space for the experience and knowledge transfer of activists who have LBQ self-organization experience and who are active in LGBTI+ and feminist organizations.

Guiding questions:

- What are your LBQ organizational experiences and testimonies?
- How have we created and are creating the history of the LBQ movement?

2- Intersectionality and the LBQ Movement:

Since many activists in the group are associated with more than one social movement, we wanted to raise the group's awareness of how the participants interpret intersectionality.

Guiding questions:

- In which areas do you carry out your work?
- With which social movements, work, and advocacy areas does the LBQ movement intersect?
- What ideologies of discrimination intersect when you consider the LBQ experience?

3- Challenges Faced by the LBQ Movement and Their Solutions:

We sought to identify the reasons that make it difficult for LBQs to self-organize and to define what needs are required to overcome these difficulties.

Guiding questions:

- What are the challenges to LBQ self-organization?
- What is needed for an inclusive LBQ self-organization?
- What do we need for an LBQ self-organization where we can feel a sense of belonging?

Insights

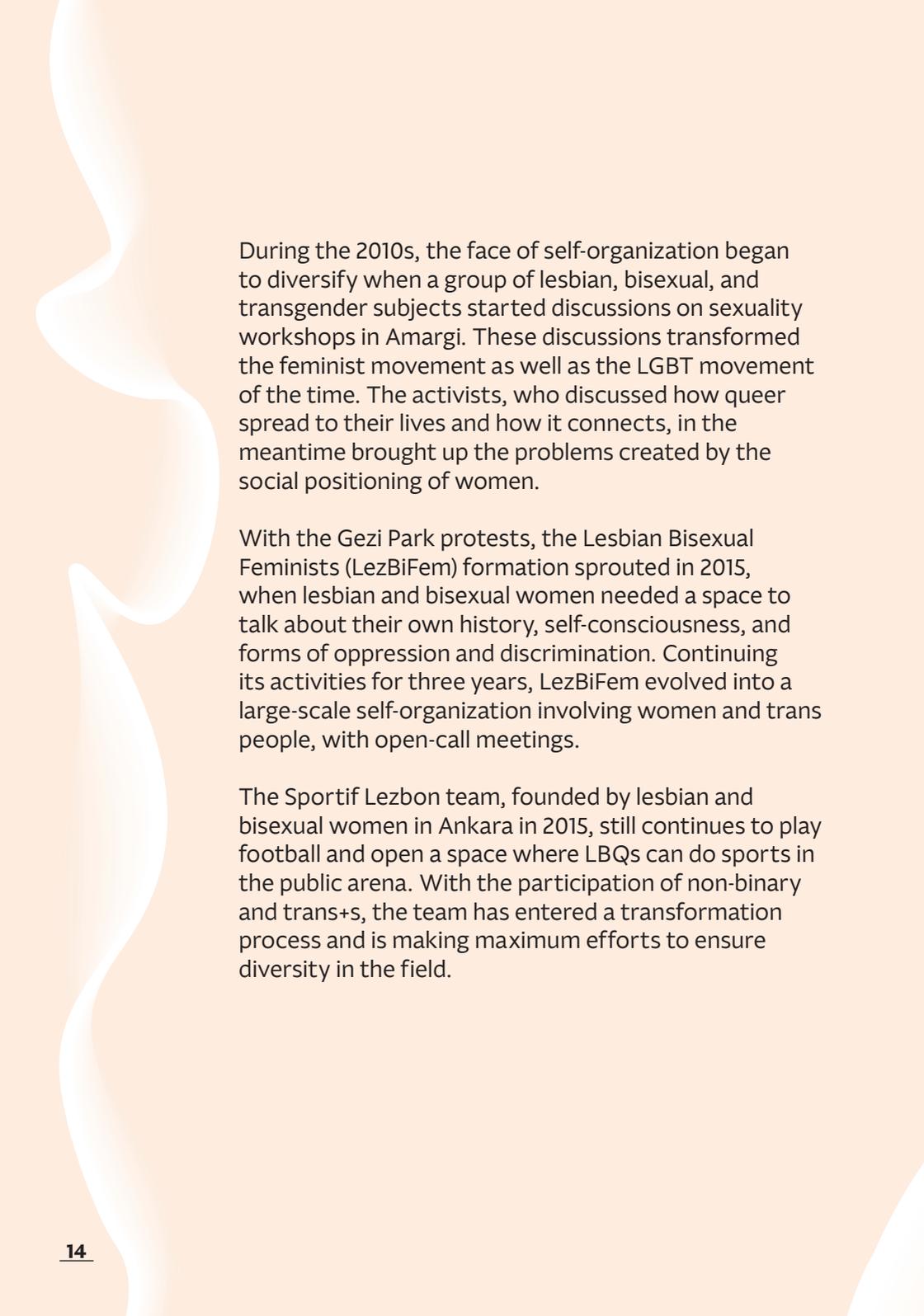
I. History and Present of the LBQ Movement

During this session, where we explored the traces of lesbian, bisexual, and queer self-organizations, the participants shared their past and ongoing organizational experiences, their intersections with the feminist movement, and their involvement in mixed-gender organizations. These transfers proceeded in a flow that did not follow a specific chronological date but demonstrated how efforts paved the way for the next.²

In the first part of the meeting, we reviewed the past 25 years and listened to the experiences of self-organizations by LBQs and working for LBQ visibility and agenda. We looked at the moments that LBQs expanded feminist debate in the areas they touched and sparked the diversification of feminist subjects. In the second part, we listened to the experiences of groups that conduct intersex studies and sports activism that create contact areas for LBQs today.

Shared self-organization experiences and testimonies extended to the oral history working group Lezbidüş, which has been active since 2016, from the journey of the Sisters of Venus, a lesbian formation that started in 1995 and continued its activities until 2002. Among these experiences, the sharing related to planting the seeds of the Woman to Woman Story Contest, which will be held for the 18th time this year, as a result of the efforts of some of the group members continued to work at Kaos GL after the dissolution of the lesbian feminist organization Sappho's Daughters, which was active between 1998 and 2000, winked at the long-term impact of self-organizations.

2. For detailed information about the self-organization and working groups mentioned in this section, please refer to The Traces of the LBQ Movement in Turkey section.



During the 2010s, the face of self-organization began to diversify when a group of lesbian, bisexual, and transgender subjects started discussions on sexuality workshops in Amargi. These discussions transformed the feminist movement as well as the LGBT movement of the time. The activists, who discussed how queer spread to their lives and how it connects, in the meantime brought up the problems created by the social positioning of women.

With the Gezi Park protests, the Lesbian Bisexual Feminists (LezBiFem) formation sprouted in 2015, when lesbian and bisexual women needed a space to talk about their own history, self-consciousness, and forms of oppression and discrimination. Continuing its activities for three years, LezBiFem evolved into a large-scale self-organization involving women and trans people, with open-call meetings.

The Sportif Lezbon team, founded by lesbian and bisexual women in Ankara in 2015, still continues to play football and open a space where LBQs can do sports in the public arena. With the participation of non-binary and trans+s, the team has entered a transformation process and is making maximum efforts to ensure diversity in the field.

The above-mentioned self-organizations find common ground in terms of carrying out studies that directly center the agendas of lesbian, bisexual, or queer subjects. Nonetheless, the formations in which LBQs are organized together but differ in the focus of the work area also create areas that provide the coexistence of LBQs.

Active since 2009, Interdayanışma [Intersolidarity] is an organization within the queer movement, working to increase intersex visibility and raise awareness. The organization, where most of the members of the organization are included with their female, bisexual, pansexual, and queer identities, is a space for LBQ intersex people to organize together.

Queer Olympix (QO) is a three-day sporting event that creates opportunities for women and LGBTI+s to play games in public in high spirits. QO is organized by Athletic Dildoa. QO organizers, a group that also includes lesbians, bisexuals and queers due to the identities of the founding team and the organizations they come from, set a quota for cis-gays and utilize methods that encourage LGBTQ participation in a mixed event.

II. LBQ Movement and Intersectionality

Although the term intersectionality has only gained widespread use in Turkey recently, we can observe its influence in the lesbian and bisexual organizations that were established two decades ago. In this session, we discussed the reflections of intersectionality on the LBQ movement through multiple discrimination and common areas of struggle.

The intersection of the LGBTI+ and feminist movements is a priority in the organizing experience of LBQ activists. With this, many social movements working in the fields of anti-militarist and anti-war movements, HIV movement, vegan movement, ecology movement, the right to the city movement, Kurdish Women's Movement, nonviolent organizations, sports activism, immigrant rights, Muslim feminist organizations are among the areas that LBQ activists are the subject of and advocate for rights.

LBQ activists convey the perspective that comes from being subject to the work they carry out in the civil society they are professionally in, the union field, social work, judicial processes, education life, psycho-social support fields, local governments, academia, and art studies. These experiences multiply intersectional field potentials.

In the context of the LBQ movement, the first intersectional line of struggle that comes to mind is established with the feminist movement. The political consciousness that feminist organizations have been built on creates a space where LBQs can gain strength. For example, while transfeminism creates an atmosphere of solidarity, it also creates a space for

discussion and expands the possibilities of feminist debate. Feminist organizations that can look critically at binary gender provide a ground that includes non-binary and trans people. Intersectionality plays an important role in people's expression of gender identity and recognition of pluralism and multiple discrimination stemming from sexual orientation, facilitating a transformation of society-imposed norms and self-organization possibilities that reflect LBQ diversity, and strengthening the possibility of inclusive organizations.

While we can examine intersectionality through the forms of organization and solidarity, it is also possible to benefit from intersectionality when looking at the commonality of power structures that are struggled against.

Social norms cause people to be discriminated against in many ways, such as their gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, class, age, and disability. Those who organize carnivorous nutrition through discourses organizing sexuality, those that organize anti-genderism through practices violating bodily autonomy, as well as those that organize anti-immigrant sentiment and ethnic discrimination through discourses organizing racism are ideologies that have the power to create norms.

LBQ activists and rights advocates can be partnered with other social justice movements through intersections in different fields of struggle. For example, lines of struggle can be created in these areas in the context of discrimination shared with many different ethnic-religious groups, including Roma people when it comes to urban transformation, and Greeks, Assyrians, Armenians, Kurds, and Alevi when it comes to funerals.

III. Challenges Faced by the LBQ Movement and Their Solutions

The session on the challenges faced by the LBQ movement and the solutions highlighted both external and internal problems that LBQ self-organizations encounter. The discussions serve as proof of the importance of identifying needs before discussing solutions. In general, the session's outcomes showed the significance of organizational structure and sustainability, as well as the challenges and requirements of building a community.

When we look at the big picture in the discussion of the obstacles in front of the LBQ movement, it is seen that the political environment, conservative social structure, class differences, and cultural differences between the city and the country stand out. Also, the fact that cis-gay men are in a more privileged position in the LGBTI+ movement does not provide sufficient opportunities for LBQ self-organization.

Looking at the history of the movement, it is seen that LBQ self-organizations are possible for the educated population in big cities. On one hand, it is argued that the LBQ movement was generally organized by the educated, middle-upper class, and urbanites, leaving some of these people out. On the other hand, it has been pointed out that this generalization creates an illusion, as LBQs are culturally middle-upper class, but economically the majority of them work in precarious jobs.

The obligation to work as a result of being from an economically lower class, on the one hand, makes LBQs

more prone to voluntary labor, on the other hand, it makes it difficult to sustain voluntary labor due to the difficulties of life. Voluntary labor, which is the main source of independent self-organizations, can become unsustainable after a while. This situation appears as one of the reasons that bring self-organizations to a standstill.

The lack of clarity and shared understanding about the purpose, structure, system, principles, and ways of doing work is another factor that causes LBQ self-organizations to disintegrate. A wide range of needs ranging from socialization to social transformation efforts in independent LBQ self-organization experiences triggers rapid reactions. This may cause people to leave the organization and disintegrate in the long run.

Pointing out ideological differences as one of the obstacles to self-organization, one participant has stated that the LGBTI+ movement is seen as a secondary issue in Van, Mardin, and Amed. They suggested that strengthening the bond between LGBTI+ organizations in metropolitan cities and the Kurdish Women's Movement could help overcome this obstacle. In this context, another participant has stated that LBQ self-organizations are viewed as unnecessary and because of this view, LBQs in the region are not aware of their own needs. The participant added that embracing needs and taking action as LBQs can be a solution.

The fact that the diversity of LBQs is not visible enough negatively affects their sense of belonging to the movement. In order to make this diversity visible, there is a need for areas where LBQs with different gender identities, expressions, and sex characteristics, including masculine women, trans women, trans men, feminine trans people, masculine trans people, non-binary people, intersex people, and lesbian and bisexual sex workers, are represented. The effect of heteronormative norms on the invisibility of this diversity is undeniable. For example, one participant pointed out that many trans women have to hide their sexual orientation due to the social role of women, and expressed the importance of acknowledging and reminding that non-heterosexual trans women exist in order to overcome this invisibility.

It has also been shown that among the factors that hinder LBQs from participating in the movement fatphobia and ageism are common in the movement. Another factor is ableism. Discussions and activities organized with an ableist perspective are often not accessible. Many activists are withdrawing from both the feminist and LGBTI+ movements due to reasons such as neurodiversity, disability, and disease. Activists who have problems due to their health or addiction experience stay out of social activities where smoking and alcohol use are common. Events and meetings designed with differentiated needs in mind can help create more engaging and accessible spaces for LBQs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this report, we tried to convey the discussions of the LBQ Meetings, which we held with the participation of a working group of 20 people between January and March 2023, on (1) the past and present experiences of the movement, (2) the reflections of the concept of intersectionality in the LBQ movement, and (3) the challenges faced by the movement and the solution possibilities.

It is possible to say that the practice of self-organization, which started as lesbian organizations in the 1990s, has evolved over the years into formations where lesbian, bisexual, trans, intersex, and queer people come together. When considering the past as a whole, it is evident that language and organizational practices are in a constant state of transformation. It can be said that this state of continuous transformation is closely linked to the development of strategies that enable LBQs to come together with their differences. Concepts and terms serve as a tool through which we can re-look at forms of organization. The concept of intersectionality provides a lens for understanding both multiple discriminations and collective struggle and brings the discussion of inclusivity with it. Opinions on what both concepts mean and how they can be applied vary.

During LBQ's discussion of the challenges to self-organization, it became clear that the solution lies in examining needs. When we consider the question of "What can be done after that?" in the context of these interconnected discussions, we can make the following recommendations:

- The LBQ movement encompasses a wide range of identities, including women+, trans+, intersex, and non-binary people. It is important to study the ways in which this diversity can be made visible and exist in safe spaces.
- Opportunities should be provided for LBQ activists from metropolitan and local areas to connect with each other.
- Dialogue environments should be created where LBQs can voice their different needs and opinions, and active listening is encouraged.
- LBQ-specific works should be encouraged, bearing in mind the transformative power of LBQ self-organizations and working groups for the LGBTI+ and feminist movements. Policies that support LBQ visibility should be internalized, and the responsibility for inclusiveness should not be placed entirely on LBQ individuals.

Appendix: Traces of the LBQ Movement in Turkey

In this chapter, we trace self-organizations that take action and produce for the sake of the togetherness and visibility of LBQ in Turkey.

Sisters of Venus

Sisters of Venus (Venüs'ün Kızkardeşleri - VKK) was the first lesbian organization founded in Istanbul in 1994. A few women who had joined Lambda during that time established VKK as they felt the need for a separate organization due to gay dominance in Lambda. While VKK held regular meetings in Istanbul, they sent written summaries of their discussions to Kaos GL.

In the March 1995 issue of Kaos GL, VKK introduces themselves and draws attention to the fact that the struggle for homosexual rights has become more visible in the last years, despite efforts to keep homosexuals out of the “heterosexual world”. In this introductory article, they share an e-mail address expressing that they want to “hear the voices of other sisters, know their presence, meet, discuss and talk” (1995) and encourage readers to reach VKK.

Sisters of Venus contributed to lesbian visibility with the articles and translations they published in Kaos during the first years of its activity. They communicated with organizations abroad and conveyed information about the struggle in Turkey. VKK, together with Kaos GL, participated in the rally held in Ankara on March 8, International Women’s Day in 1996, leading the way to raise the voice of the homosexual struggle and to carry out the “first street action of the Kaos Homosexuals” (VKK, 1996).

In a short article titled “The Power of Silence VKK” published in Kaos GL in 2002, they announced that the members of the group were no longer together, did not have a common purpose, and gifted their production to Kaos GL. Greeting future lesbians and announcing that they have archived their production, they wink from the past to the present with this farewell article, bringing to mind the hope they hold for future self-organizations.

Sappho’s Daughters

Sappho’s Daughters (Sappho’nun Kızları - SK) was a lesbian feminist group that acted in Ankara between 1998 and 2000. Three women, who needed a separate organization because gays were the majority at the meetings held by Kaos at that time, planted the first seeds of Sappho’s Daughters in 1997. Criticizing the fact that gays are the first thing that comes to mind when it comes to homosexuals, the group played an active role in transforming this perception by producing information about lesbianism.

“While explaining their policies, they state that there is a point where they should stand independently from gay men and straight women, saying, ‘This does not mean that we have turned our backs to the feminist movement and the gay movement, but on the contrary, we are in the midmost. While developing our policies, we are intertwined with both groups, we plan to be intertwined” (Ersoy, as cited in SK, 2011, p.414), they illuminate the need for lesbian feminist politics with these words.

In their early period, Sappho’s Daughters met with lesbians and sometimes heterosexual feminists at weekly home meetings, and continued their work there when the Kaos Cultural Center opened. While identifying and recording prejudices about lesbians with brochures titled “About Lesbians...” (1999), they also spoke about the lesbian experience.

This knowledge production encouraged the participation of lesbian and bisexual women in the movement, “who feel their identity, search, and struggle, but have not yet found the environment where they can release the words from the tip of their tongue to explain their policies” (Başaran, 2016). Above all, it paved the way for lesbians to get to know themselves and each other.

The Sappho's Daughters dissolved themselves in 2000, leaving an open door for lesbian and bisexual women through their email list Bilitis, where they could be informed of each other. When we consider that the internet was not as accessible as it is today in the 2000s, we can grasp the importance of the **Bilitis** email list. This email list, where "women who do not have the opportunity to reach each other face to face can share and those who are unaware of each other can engage in face-to-face practices thanks to this channel" (Ersoy, 2011, p.415), remained active until 2011.

A group that announced they would continue their work at Kaos GL after Sappho's Daughters disbanded formed Women from Kaos GL (Kaos Kadın Grubu). In 2006, the group started the tradition of the Woman to Woman Story Contest (Kadından Kadına Öykü Yarışması) to make the love of women to women visible. The contest, which will be held for the 18th time this year (2023), calls for stories that deal with "radical compassion".

Öte-ki Ben

It is a lesbian feminist organization that was active between 2000 and 2003 and stood out more as a magazine project (Mogan, 2002). It published two issues in Turkish and English during its active period. It completely refused to work with mixed LGBT organizations. Uncertainties about the formation of the Öte-ki Ben raised questions and distrust among mixed organizations and independent lesbian and bisexual activists. In order to clarify these questions, a forum called *Barriers to Lesbian Organizing*³ was organized in Güztanbul in 2002.

3. <https://kaosgl.org/haber/lezbiyen-orgutlenmesinin-onundeki-engeller>

İllet

İllet is an independent queer autonomous community formed by a group of women+, genderqueer/ nonbinary, and trans+ activists who met and produced together during the 2010 Istanbul LGBTI+ Pride Week organization, later created out of the need for self-organization. Emphasizing pleasure, sexual freedom, and empowerment, the group continued its activities until 2014.

Prioritizing experience, İllet first allowed them to put their own experiences into words, to be talked about, and to allow people to blossom into the person they are. Over time, the growing autonomous group became a kind of network.

İllet organized workshops⁴ on subjects such as body, desire, and sexuality. It would be right to commemorate İllet's work with their organized effort to open up lesbian and trans+ experiences, political criticism, and thoughts to both Turkish feminist thought and practice and to all opposition segments. İllet has taken a leading place in the opposition resistance in Turkey, both in the sexuality workshops where they come together with other LGBTIs in different cities, and in the integration of Transfeminist discourse and struggle into the culture.

The fanzine *Among Women*⁵ (*Kadınlar Arasında - 2010*), which they translated for LGBTIs and added the collage they wrote after their sexuality conversations and sex shop visits, also played an important role in empowering newly came-out subjects.

4. <https://kaosgl.org/haber/illettrquoten-eskisehirrsquode-kadintrans-atolyesi>

5. *Among Women*: <https://illetblog.wordpress.com/category/urettiklerimiz/>

It paved the way for a ‘Transfeminism’ discourse and practice that cooperated with the Lesbian Feminist stance both in street protests and in different panels, workshops, and political discussions, especially in the 8 March Feminist Night March. During the same period, they co-signed many actions and events with the Trans Men’s Initiative “Voltrans”.

Under the name of illet’s T Particles (illet’in T Parçacıkları), they released a fanzine called *Transgender is Beautiful (Transgender Güzeldir)* which is the product of a collective effort in the “do it yourself” style and has the quality of “Transgender 101.” It fulfilled the “informative” function of the political struggle by being published repeatedly with the donations collected.

While fighting against heteropatriarchal patterns, both on the street and in other areas, while simultaneously struggling with a non-trans and essentialist perception of women, illet activists managed to move the stones, although they had a lot of difficulty in moving them.

Greetings to all illets⁶, especially Transfeminist Writer and activist Ali Aligül Arıkan, whom we lost in 2013.

Noir

6. Literally means ‘trouble’ in Turkish (translator’s note).

Lesbian Bisexual Feminists (LezBiFem)

Lesbian Bisexual Feminists (Lezbiyen Biseksüel Feministler) was a formation that was born by coming together of activists who were active in the LGBTI and feminist movements, who sought a solution to the invisibility of lesbian and bisexual experiences and problems in both movements and their not getting sufficient space on the agenda. Between 2015 and 2018, the formation produced political and cultural productions in Istanbul and created public spaces where lesbians and bisexuals could come together. Through conferences, symposiums, and feminist meetings, they got in touch with lesbian bisexuals in other cities and countries, especially in Ankara, İzmir, and Mersin.

In the summer of 2015, a group intended to call for self-organization planned to hold a discussion on the text *Loving the Enemy (Düşmanı Sevmek - 2015)* as their first open call, but after the police attack on the Pride Parade, they prioritized organizing a march in Kadıköy. The slogan written on the banner, “We are lesbian, bisexual, feminist, we are not in line!”, foreshadowed the name they would later acquire.

The group, which ever-growing with open-call picnics and home meetings after the protest with a high level of participation, and discussed their common problems, soon started to hold weekly meetings. With the participation of women and trans people who identify with the lesbian and bisexual experience as well as feminist and lesbian bisexual activists, participation expanded considerably. LezBiFem did not have a fixed mass of organizers, their organizers changed over time. In this flexible structure, the care shown to not use exclusionary language in discussions and not to establish a hierarchy based on experience or knowledge was reflected in their principles (LezBiFem, 2016).

They brought the discussions in the weekly meetings to the bulletin and radio program and made them reach wider audiences. The bulletin was named Zeliş after Zeliş Deniz, who was active in the formation process of LezBiFem and one of the directors of the movie *The Prince on White Horse Don't Come In Vain (2009)*, died in a traffic accident in September 2015. In the bulletin, which was published in four issues between 2015 and 2017, the discussions of “What are the agendas of a lesbian, bisexual feminist movement?”, “Where does the need for self-organization arise?”, queer criticism, experience-based articles, articles questioning gender and orientation, film and music criticism, and memories about Zeliş took place.

LezBiFem broadcasted a radio program called Kliton⁷ on Nor Radio, the radio of Nor Zartong, the self-organization of the Armenian people, on Wednesday evenings. They opened up a range of topics from being lesbian and bisexual at work and on campus to sexuality, from the relationship with the body to polyamorous love, from war to peace, from women’s literature to queer music, from the March 8 agenda to the Pride Parade bans for a larger audience carrying the internal discussions to their radio program. They have hosted guests such as Mersin Pride Week, Pembe Hayat Queer Fest, and Ritim Kolektif. They contacted their audience through their social media accounts and included the reactions they receive in their programs.

7. Kliton: <https://archive.org/details/@kliton>

In 2016 and 2017, when the Istanbul Governorate banned Pride Parades on the grounds of “public order and social sensitivities”, LezBiFem was on Istiklal Street with creative actions. They decorated the street with rainbow colors and scattered confetti. They gave voice to the press release of the Pride March Committee both on the streets and in the videos they posted on YouTube. On the day of the march, they made street interviews with lesbians and bisexuals and contributed to the increase of lesbian, bisexual, and transgender banners in the March 8 cortege. They created spaces for daily encounters through wall writings and stickers. The heterosexist opposed February 14 and distributed leaflets on the street. After the ISIS attack, which killed 49 LGBT people at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, USA, they showed solidarity by hanging a giant banner on Mis Street with the words “We exist with love, we do not end with hate”.

On the Day of Elimination of Violence Against Women, November 25, 2017, the formation published the fanzine *Emotional Violence in Queer Relationships*, which was translated with a collective effort to look at violence from within. They organized workshops with awareness-raising questions in the fanzine. They sought answers to the questions of “What kind of violence do we use?” and “What kind of violence are we exposed to?” in romantic relationships.

In February 2017, they held the *Midwinter Festival: A Queer Feminist Convergence* meetup. Within the scope of the festival, the Trans Experience Sharing and Legal Processes of Transition workshops, the Open Microphone event, and the screening of the film *Vessel*, which tells the story of Women on Waves' struggle against abortion bans, took place. This festival, which was held in three different locations, was recorded as their last open-call event.

During the three years that LezBiFem was active, it organized both public and private events that were full of energy and with lots of protests and getting-together. Their digital assets were at risk of extinction: their account was frozen for a while due to non-compliance with Facebook community rules, and their website, which they published as a blog, was hacked.

They walked shoulder to shoulder with women's and trans movements, providing opportunities for the LGBTI movement to confront lesbophobia and biphobia, to transform mixed organizations, and for the feminist movement to go beyond the patriarchal agenda. There was a vast networking experience in a short time with their interactions beyond cities and borders and public events.

LezBiFem announced in a Facebook post in 2019 that it would no longer be an active group. The LezBifem archive can be accessed online⁸ and at the Women's Library and Information Centre Foundation in Istanbul.

8. <https://linktr.ee/lezbifem>

Lezbidüş⁹

An oral history study that came out of LezBiFem in 2016 and continues (2023). The reason we set out was the need to tell our own history as we experienced it. It was fed by making a record in our own words of how similar and also unique and creative our experiences are which each of us had to stand alone and for which we created our own method of struggles, and that we were not alone as we were told.

Part of our oral history work is recording our experiences, and the second part, which usually gets everyone excited, is to write down our dreams in history. Our question, which starts with “If you had a magic wand...”, can sometimes make narrators, including us, feel anxious about their ability to dream saying “but I can’t dream” on the one hand, and on the other hand, carries them to a hopeful place by saying “I didn’t know I could dream too” after speaking and telling.

While the dreams we tell touch upon the current conditions that surround us, they also shed light on brand-new ways, possibilities, and discussions shaped by our own subjective creativity, likes, needs, and aspirations.

I love Lezbidüş because it compiles both our experiences and dreams. Our experiences are, of course, important data for revealing and criticizing the current system, but our dreams are also possibilities that take us out of the place where we analyze violence and lead us to establish new ways, that is, to actually produce policy. These dreams are what minority identities need most in the LGBTI+ movement. New ways will be shaped by discussions through these dreams.

Yeşim

9. <https://lezbidus.wordpress.com/ekip/>

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