

# FEMINIST ADVOCACY OF NATIONALISM <sup>1</sup>

FAHRIYE ADSAY

The tendency to treat woman identity and national identity rather in an adversity context gains strength in recent years, especially among people advocating women rights within the framework of main stream Kurdish policy.<sup>2</sup> When we take a look to the news and comments related to Kurdish women politicians or political discourse written by the women politicians in person, which are reflected in the press and social media on various occasions, it is noticeable that there are efforts to render invisible increasingly the national identity of Kurdish women<sup>3</sup> (Kışanak, 2019). The efforts to render invisible national identity are based on allegations that feminism and nationalism are two notions most of the time irreconcilable, national interests or national movements always postpone or obstruct seriously women rights (Öcalan, 1999, 2000, 2001; Çağlayan, 2007; 2013; Mojab, 2005, 2005a).<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, in the context of Kurdistan and Kurds, the identity policy and nationalism are rendered synonymous with racialism, they are pulled off their political, historical and social contexts, the Kurds are recommended to avoid both of them (Öcalan,—; Demirtaş, 2015; 2019)<sup>5</sup>. I affirm that feminist interests and nationalist interests are not always irreconcilable in this write up, as it is told. I

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Ismail Beşikci Foundation for providing me with the opportunity to make this presentation on 20<sup>th</sup> of April 2019 within the frame of “Spring Academy” that it organized. Thank you.

<sup>2</sup> Through main stream Kurdish policy is meant the political movement, which holds substantially the political, cultural hegemony and representation power among the opponent Kurds in Northern Kurdistan since almost the last 40 years and which takes as reference the thoughts of Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of PKK. The reference sources and starting point of this writing are the debates conducted within the frame of nationalism and feminism (or women rights) in the Northern Kurdistan.

<sup>3</sup> Kışanak, Gültan, *Kürt Siyasetinin Mor Rengi* (Purple Colour of Kurdish Policy), Dipnot Publishing, 2019, Ankara. The book was compiled mainly by Gültan Kışanak, who was taken into custody on 26<sup>th</sup> of October 2016 and arrested while she was co-mayor of Diyarbakır Metropolitan city from People’s Democratic Party (HDP); she was sentenced to 14 years 3 months on 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2019 and she is still in prison; the book includes personal political experiences written by 22 imprisoned women, who took charge in local and general politics within the Kurdish policy. See also, comments about the punishment given to Gültan Kışanak and Sebahat Tuncel on 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2019. Example: People’s Democratic Party Diyarbakır Deputy Meral Danış Beştaş, @meraldanis: “#GültanKışanak; The most organized ideology in the World, it is the male –dominant ideology.” Accessed date: 25/01/2020. <https://twitter.com/meraldanis/status/1091303106040741888>

<sup>4</sup> For a criticism of Mojab and Çağlayan’s opinions see. (Adsay, 2017a; Adsay, 2017.)

<sup>5</sup> Sinan Şahin, Bir Uygarlık Hastalığı: Milliyetçilik (A disease of Civilisation: Nationalism). Accessed Date: <https://issuu.com/zerdustbaran/docs/milliyetcilik>. A short preface written by Abdullah Öcalan with the signature “Lider Apo (Leader Apo)” appears in the work published on Internet on 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2018 with HPG publishing label. The introduction part of the work includes the following comment “... It was Sinan (Sinan Şahin) Comrade, who perceived such analysis and perspectives as an instruction by the leadership and started first this work ... It became our obligation as his comrades to complete this unfinished work of Sinan Yoldaş, who took part most actively in all works from the foundation of Abdullah Öcalan Social Sciences Academy until his falling a martyr .” Selahattin Demirtaş (2015, 28 January), Accessed date: 15.01.2020. <https://www.birikimdergisi.com/guncel-yazilar/1161/hdp-es-genel-baskani-selahattin-demirtas-la-soylesi-ii-ozerklik-adi-altinda-minik-ulus-devletler-degil#.XigARi3BKu4>; <http://yeniozgurpoliti-ka.net/gunu-geldiginde-kimse-bagrina-tas-basmayacaktır/>; <http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/1491744/demir-tasin-tutukluluk-haline-devam-karari.html>

advocate nationalism from the window of feminist interests in the context of Northern Kurdistan.

The purpose to deal with the nationalism especially in this article, is to help alleviate shyness of advocating openly nationalism; because only a negative meaning is attributed to this notion constantly far from its context. As much as I can follow, this subject almost never comes or is brought on agenda and it is kept out of discussions in the sphere of thought and discussion environments such as seminars, conferences, panels organized by either Kurdish institutions or circles, which are thought to be pro-Kurdish. If ever this subject is put on the agenda, it is often in a condemning way for negating purpose only (Mojab, 2005a; Çağlayan, 2007, 2013; Yüksel, 2006). It is noteworthy that Kurdish academicians too, whose number has been increasing progressively, do not handle sufficiently this subject in association with insufficiency of the works contributing to the multifaceted comprehension and discussion of the matter.

As a Kurdish woman, I believe we should rather think hard on the matter and create solutions together instead of opposing feminism to nationalism. I think it is attention-grabbing or even suspicious to see nationalism put on agenda for negating purpose only or if both notions are put on agenda together, it is often against the nationalism that they are put. The main purpose of this writing is the discomfort and unease felt from a feminist understanding opposing the Kurdish nationalism and gaining weight increasingly. I hope, to bring the matter on agenda with this aspect on the occasion of the Spring Academy, will create a debate opportunity.

It is often said that feminism and nationalism are constantly adverse to each other, they have irreconcilable interests due to their very nature; so much so that any tensions, oppressions, conflicts occurring in Kurdistan are pulled off from their socio-political, historical context, different from each other, and all matters are reduced to the woman problem, as to give the impression that there is only social gender conflict.<sup>6</sup> This is mostly spoken out and propagandized by the main stream Kurdish policy; however it is not restricted with it only. It is possible to affirm that this discourse is widely admitted and there are no serious objections against it loudly spoken but few exceptions.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Tweets dated of 6<sup>th</sup> of September and 7<sup>th</sup> of December by People's Democratic Party Woman official twitter account, qualify appointment of a trustee to the elected municipalities siding People's Democratic Party a product of "monist male mentality" and "male government mentality". @HDPwomen: "...You cannot discourage women with such attacks. We will continue to struggle against women slaughter, trustee strike and male government violence." Accessed Date:14<sup>th</sup> of January 2019 <https://twitter.com/HDPkadin/status/1169995435693477888>;

@HDPkadin: 7<sup>th</sup> of December 2019: "... Monist male mentality which appoints trustees should know that we women will continue to resist. <https://twitter.com/HDPkadin/status/1203226915601092610>;

Filiz Keresticioğlu, 17<sup>th</sup> of September 2016:  
[http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/siyaset/601126/\\_Kayyim\\_aslinda\\_kadinlara\\_a-tandi\\_.html](http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/siyaset/601126/_Kayyim_aslinda_kadinlara_a-tandi_.html). See Footnote 3.

Meral Daniş Beştaş; tweet of Leyla Güven(@LeylaGuvenckd) dated 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2019 : "The trustee is an usurpation. It is the enemy of women. We will continue to struggle against the trustee."  
<https://twitter.com/LeylaGuvenckd/status/1168205310873542656>. Accessed Date: 20/01/2020.

<sup>7</sup> See for a criticism, Zengin (2019).

There are two different opinions on feminism and nationalism relationship. According to the first opinion, feminist and nationalist interests expel each other under all circumstances; there is no possibility of reconciliation between them; since, the nationalism due to its gendered “nature” has always operated against feminism (Kaplan, 1997; Yural-Davis, 1997; Enloe, 2003). As for the second opinion, it does not ignore the tensions between the feminism and nationalism but advocates that a conflict “due to the nature” is out of question (West, 1997; Herr, 2003; Kim, 2009; Al-Ali & Pratt, 2015)<sup>8</sup>. It affirms that feminist and nationalist sides can be in a mutually constructive relationship. I stand with the second opinion. For feminist nationalism does not emphasize only the role of women in national movements where there are efforts to make it invisible or does not bring itself into existence there only. It does not take as a goal “mobilization of women in the path going to independence only. From its point of view, it describes the women sacrificed by the nationalism; what is more important it describes also the women, who gain strength through their relationship with nationality and nationalism.” (Kim, 2009, r. 109). It describes anew the nationalism in favour of feminism. In other words instead of pushing or removing nationalism, it tries to control it and aims to have its say through nationalism.

### **Nationality and Nationalism**

As indicated by Deniz Kandiyoti also (2007) one of the widely admitted characteristics of the nationalism, it is its look towards two adverse directions. On one hand it introduces itself as a modern project, which will transform and melt the traditional in favour of new identities, most of the time; on the other as a resurrection project of a joint ancestor culture. Therefore, it paves the way for an extremely fluid and uncertain or distinctive space of meanings, which can be reinterpreted and rediscovered in the historical turning points of each nation. These meanings are not constant but they are prone to transformation and renewal in different historical transformation times of each society; the disputes and struggles by political actors, the debates of political sides determine the content of new meanings and definitions. Each new debate environment shall impact deeply who and what is included in the nation/nationality, who and what is excluded, the content of national union, alternative sovereignty affirmations and certainly the meanings relevant to social gender relations.

What I understand from nationality and nationalism and on what grounds I advocate the nationalism? In my opinion briefly defined, nation means to a society in modern times, what means personality (self) for an individual. It is just one of the collective identities specific to modern times. Just as an individual can establish a sound and equal relationship with other individuals when she/he has a personality solely, the societies sharing some common values and distinguished from others through their differences can share a common ground with other nationalities in equal conditions and enter into a sound relationship through their organized collective identities, called nationality. With the words of Mûcahit Bilici (2017, p.146), “people, who do not have a sense of nationality are not better than little particles and sun downer individuals, who lost their ways.” Nationality is a state, which should be reached in modern times. “It is the transformation of human being into something greater than own self through solidarity. The transformation into greater parts through wilful solidarity is also a

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<sup>8</sup> For a Kurdish translation of Ranjoo Seodu Herr’s “The Possibility of Nationalist Feminism” titled article See Derfeta Feminizma Neteweperwer. Accessed date: 21.01.2020. <http://blog.kovarazarema.com/derfeta-feminizma-neteweperwer/>

requisite of the democracy.” Otherwise, democracy is not a stage reachable by leaping over nationality, as it is alleged.

I understand nationalism as the whole of cultural, economic and socio-political discourse and activities aimed to form and restore the identity and collective personality of a society, emancipate from the oppression of colonial power or powers, obtain and maintain a political status or independence, without ignoring that it gains different contents in different socio-political and historical contexts. It can be described as defined by the South Korean Ranjoo S. Herr, the whole of ideas, discourses and activities aiming “to create an environment, where the members of a nation shall be equal and in competition to elaborate collective welfare” (Herr, 2003, p. 22). If we put in use our own (Kurdish) vocabulary, I conceive nationalism as the word “jixwerebûn” (benefit to own self) gaining collective meaning.

### **Criticisms against Nationalism**

Although nationalism has a large range of definitions and meanings, it is one of the most criticized notions at the same time. Many of the definitions made in the context of Kurdistan and Kurdish politics –including the definitions made by the Kurdish political movement –are overwhelmed with an overcritical and negating style generally. One of the most often expressed objections or criticisms is that: the point of view matching almost one to one with the views of Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of PKK, which suggests that together with nation state, the nationalism also is/ should be overpassed. (Öcalan, *A Civilization...*, Öcalan, 2011; Çağlayan, 2016; Yılmaz, 2011; Yakut, 2011; Aydınkaya, 2011; Gökkan, 2016)<sup>9</sup>. According to another criticism, at a later stage following organization of the fidelity towards national identity, the nationalism incorporates the transformation risk of the said fidelity into destructiveness and collective egoism attaining assimilation, racism, xenophobia and genocide. It always brings to the mind transformation risk of the oppressed into an oppressor. (Öcalan, 2011; Yılmaz, 2011; Yakut, 2011; Aydınkaya, 2011; Çağlayan, 2007). However, when telling about the risk, they go far beyond the lexical meaning of this word, which is “a danger alert” or “possibility of damage” and it cannot be overlooked that they behave as if racism, xenophobia, or genocide perpetration (even slaughter of women) exist obligatorily in the nature of nationalism. While mentioning these risks, either they do not mention the circumstances where these risks did not come true or negatives examples are given only selectively from historical experiences; the wars and conflicts, racist or fascist movements experienced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century are listed one after another.

The approach considering the nation state an obsolete political organization model is deceptive, at the same time it is often forgotten or neglected that, as Craig Calhoun (2012; p. 8) pointed out “at the moment, the most democratic and wealthy societies in the World, have a nationalist organization style”, the nation state is still the principal political organization model in the World scale. Moreover, it is ignored that “the World system functions through nationalism”. For “especially, in developed western countries, nationalism is so inherent in every domains

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<sup>9</sup> The work of Sinan Şahin titled *A Civilization Disease : Nationalism*, the link to which is given in footnote 5 and the article titled “Intervention of Capitalist Modernity to the Social Nature : Nationalism” by Öcalan (2011) The article is composed of subarticles titled such as, “Nationalism is a Cancer” , “Nationalism as the Religion of Bourgeoisie”, “The Nation State: The Most Dense State of Nationalism”, “ The Uterus of Nationalism: Jewish Ideology” , it may be asserted that it directed the debates about the nationalism. Also see introduction writing by the editor, “To Be Evacuated from a Nation State Prison” (2015), *Democratic Modernism*, 14, 5-6.

that it became invisible from citizenship regulation to passports, classification of literature and cinema, review of history, education systems.” In other words to be a nation / nationality is so normal, so natural that they are like fishes, which cannot feel the water. As fishes in the water, they might be unaware of the water; although we are out of the water, we cannot notice it. In their countries nationalism became a norm and brought the normality with itself. Somehow they are treated by ourselves, who are out of the water, as if they were totally free from nationalistic feelings or they have never been involved with the nationalism; the institutionalized state of the nationalism is unnoticed / made unnoticeable. Presently, they are born with the most fundamental rights that we are / shall be striving to death for the sake of it. Whenever societies who are colonized or whose collective identity is oppressed, claim something about the rights of their sovereigns, even if the slightest thing or they clamour against the sovereign states; they start to be considered as nationalists or they are brought on the agenda in this manner. The nationalism is described as a host of problems and condemned as a solely destructive policy style. Such perspective is almost equal to forestall the organized and collective struggle of a basically subordinate community and tell them to “shut up”. Certainly the most interesting fact is that not only those having their say in this established order but also a considerable part of the Kurds, we discuss nationalism as a part of a host of problems mostly or we do not discuss at all.

On the other hand, if a notion is mentioned solely on the basis of the risks and possibilities that it might create, then condemnation of feminism through a similar reductive discourse by men, who do not want compromise their privileged position, might be shown also as an example of such approach and they may be right from the point of view of such logic. What is the roughest critical approach to the feminism? The allegation that feminism means misandry or it bears the risk of transformation into misandry only. On the other hand, it may be counted among the risks, the transformation of feminism into woman essentialism, “woman naturism” thus emptying the historical social content of the social gender problem.<sup>10</sup> It may give way to the invisibility of women national identity and their problems arising from their identity or it might be used knowingly as an instrument to render invisible national identity and their problems arising from their identity. At present, strong symptoms of these risks in the context of we, the Kurds are not totally absent. In this case, it can be argued that to the extent the advocacy of women siding against feminism is a correct choice, then the advocacy of Kurds siding against nationalism also shall be a correct choice.

The democracy, which is considered the best method at present for a nation to maintain itself peacefully within a country, presents also serious risks. It is not a remote threat for the democracy to turn into fascism at any moment. Apart from historical examples, what happened in Turkey recently is a very relevant example. However, since no one knows how to replace the democracy, nobody opposes or can oppose openly democracy. No solutions seem to exist other than redefine permanently democracy, debate the methods to make it more efficient and functional, try to repair it by criticising through basic law principles. In my opinion, for us the Kurds, nationalism is also as much as the democracy a notion without alternative. I believe we sufficiently tried anything, which has the potential to replace it ( pan Islamism, leftist ideology,

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<sup>10</sup> For example Yüksel Genç (2016) who keeps apart woman awareness from power by saying “the male awareness produces the power”. It is possible to see frequently such discourse in publications such as *Jineoloji* magazine and news agencies such as *Jin News*.

internationalism, brotherhood of people etc.) For the moment, we have two options ahead of us, to give up our Kurdish collective identity and putting it into practice, to be released from the heavy burden brought by it through Turkization or insist on remaining Kurdish. If our choice is the second, we do not have to refrain from defining such choice as nationalism.

### **Definition of Nationalism in a Manner Compatible with Feminism**

Another point unnoticed is the fact that the nationalism functioned as a kind of liberation ideology in colonized or dependent countries. Nevertheless, as if they wanted to hinder its potential to become visible and debatable, a stereotype like “but all nationalisms are bad” is brought up repeatedly. However, exactly at this point we should see in ourselves the right to define the nationalism from our point of view. Apart the definition I made above, we can take a look to the different definitions existing in the literature.

A distinction can be made between the legitimate nationalism and illegitimate nationalism, taking advantage of ethnocentric (ethnic centred) nationalism and polycentric (multi centred) nationalism definitions that Ranjoo S. Herr (2003, p.7) conveyed from Anthony Smith. The ethnocentric nationalism bases its legitimacy on a remote past, a common lost culture remaining from ancestors. Herr cites as examples expansionist Germany and Japan during the World War II; we can evaluate perfectly the Turkish, Persian and Arab nationalisms, which are close to us, in this category. Polycentric nationalism searches its legitimacy within the political conditions of today and tries to rely on these conditions. It alleges that every nation has the right to reproduce itself and take its respectable place within the family of nations, it has the right to ascent to the status of equals. Herr, cites as examples in this category the nations colonized like us. An Australian, Gisela Kaplan –she is rather distant to nationalism and insists on that nationalism functions against the feminism-distinguishes the expansionist country from the nationalisms, which target welfare and social development (Kaplan, 1997). Likewise, we can add there the distinction between colonialist and anti-colonialist nationalisms. Nationalism in colonialist countries serves to establishment of oppression and continuation of the status quo; as for the colonized countries, on the contrary it serves as a freedom ideology. To evaluate both of them in the same category, omitting this fundamental distinction is at best a sign of cruelty or ulterior motive.

### **Feminist Criticism of the Nationalism**

As for the criticism made by the feminism front to the nationalism; one of the causes of tension between feminism and nationalism is the premise that nationalities have an eternal essence. This type of nationalism approach is often expressed through “the family metaphor”. The similarity established with the family implies that the nation is also “natural” like the family. It indicates that the hierarch relying on the obedience of women and children is also “natural”. Another cause of tension is the fact that most often the female body symbolizes the nation and its borders. These borders are open to the abuse of foreigners. Therefore, not only such border should be put under protection, but also fortified like the fortification of national borders.

The sexuality of women belongs to the nation rather than themselves. By the same token rape of women by foreign powers, becomes the pollution symbol of the nation. An action against the women meant much more than violation of the personal rights. The third point is that the nationalism is imagined necessarily through sexist terms. Through this imagination is repaired

the wounded dignity of a nation, which was defamed and castrated as a result of a foreign power domination. The fourth point, although women have participated actively to the political struggle and promises have been made to ameliorate their situation after independence, following the success of nationalist movement women could not obtain sufficient rights (Herr, 2003; Jayawardena, 1986; Kim, 2009; Enloe, 2003). All of these things are yes, the signs of male dominant feature of the nationalism; there is almost a total agreement on these criticisms the feminist literature. However, feminist nationalism also enters into activation exactly at this point. I will try to clarify this below.

Returning to ourselves, the only power, which can organize today the women among the Northern Kurds, forming a public opinion with its practice and discourse is almost the mainstream Kurdish policy solely. When we look the feminist criticisms produced by this front, it is possible to say that they cover all of the criticisms I described above. Then, what we should do as Kurdish women? Shall we question or even curse only the male dominant origins of nationalism, set aside our collective identity or Kurdish identity and its demands, focus on women emancipation only? My answer to this is no. If the aim of women movement or any feminist movement is to elevate the welfare of women, assure women have in every domain the same conditions and opportunities with men then it shall be asked in the first place to determine the causes and conditions, which deprive women from these. What are these causes in our specific conditions? Since the women movement, which alleges to be against the nationalism put most of the time patriarchy in the first place, let's deal with it.

### **Collaboration of Nationalism with Feminism**

We, the women we are suffering much from patriarchy, it is true. However, even if we put struggle with the male domination as our first target, I believe we are obliged to make at least a strategic collaboration with the nationalism. Likewise, the history of the feminist movement tells us a lot of things in this subject. It may be stated that in many countries, which struggled for their independence, feminism was born nested in the nationalism or in the atmosphere created by it. (West, 1997; Jayawardena, 1986). So, it is difficult to hold the Kurdish feminism out of this generalization. Likewise, the right of women to elect and be elected was given, contrary to what expected, not in established countries, cradle of democracy but in countries pursuing independence struggle, in result of collaboration between feminism and nationalism. For example New Zealand, when it was still under the domination of England, women obtained their right to vote for the first time in the year 1893 and in the year 1918 the right to be elected. Australia, immediately after obtaining its independence in the year 1902, recognized the right of women to elect and be elected. Finland, while it was a dukedom attached to Russia, before its independence, recognized the right of women to elect and be elected in 1906 (Kaplan, 1997, p.19; Szapor, Gottlieb and Wernitzig, 2017).<sup>11</sup>

More recently, in 1980's South Korea, the cooperation of the nationalist Mujing movement and South Korea feminist movement, paved the way for both democracy and feminist rights (Herr, 2003; Kim, 2009). Many similar examples can be cited. However, in Quebec at the beginning there was a contrary situation. Due to the fact that Quebec was Catholic, Canada Protestant, the sectarian emphasize of early period Quebec nationalism performed against the women rights; women could not obtain the right to elect and be elected until the year 1940. However,

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<sup>11</sup> See also, Encyclopaedia Britannica. Accessed Date: 15/01/2020. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/woman-suffrage>

in Canada this right was recognized in the year 1917. Altogether, recently Quebec due to social agitation mixed with nationalism has left behind Canada in terms of women rights. Likewise, it may be mentioned that in Ireland also the sect difference with England, performed against the women rights following the independence (Le Clerc and West, 1997). However, the results obtained in both of the examples cannot be ascribed to the nationalism only, it is more appropriate to evaluate them as the result of religious approach at this period, trying to legitimize itself through the nationalism.

Likewise, in many South Asian and African countries, which gained independence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the collaboration between the feminists and nationalists during the course of independence brought some amelioration to women rights other than the basic rights such as to elect and be elected (West, 1997). However, it is also true that in some places the expectations of the feminists were not sufficiently satisfied. Thus, it is appropriate to underline on the basis of true-life experiences also that if feminists take only the negative examples and reach the conclusion that nationalism shall never satisfy feminist demands, this conclusion shall be reductive as well as deceptive. Yet, it is possible to reach the following conclusion, which is more constructive and clears the way for debates: "The feminist targets are not realized as the natural outcome of the participation of women in political struggle; they are realized through aiming at the target of gender ideology itself." (West, 1997, p. 216). Thus, feminists should cope more with the nationalism subject, poking around it.

On the other hand, in order to avoid reductionism a little bit, perhaps it will be appropriate to turn to the patriarchy itself. Once, it should not be difficult to agree unquestionably that the patriarchy is much more established and rooted than nationalism. The patriarchy may be traced back at least to the era, where humanity passed to established life or even earlier to the hunting and gathering era. Yet, interpretation of the nationalism only through its interaction with the patriarchy, explain all negative aspects of the patriarchy through nationalism, if not malevolent, includes a serious mistake. On the other hand:

Patriarchy cannot be thought independently from other systems such as racism, capitalism, colonialism and neo-colonialism. The patriarchy has a more comprehensive feature crossing all of these systems; or we can put it this way, although different systems such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, social class and nation have their specific ontological bases and operating systems, they are also nested together substantially and each of them must be apprehended in its interaction with the other systems. Therefore, each effort to describe the pressure towards women, must take into account the other modes of pressure within their specific socio-economic and historical conditions. Likewise, women are living within historical and socio-economic contexts; it is inevitable that their acquisitions as well as sufferings be in interaction with all these contexts (Yural-Davis, 2003, pp. 6-8).

### **Feminist Kurdish Nationalism**

It is not likely that a feminist understanding, which opposes nationalism, on the basis of criticisms not all that convincing, can elevate the wealth level of Kurdish women. It is hard to believe that through performing woman essentialism, idealising the nature of woman and pulling off the gender problem from its historical-social context shall have much benefit other than increase confusion. Since a feminism standing against the nationalism, neglecting its context, cannot define or notice at best the domination models suffered as a whole by the Kurds. Moreover, it can be easily argued that such an approach opposes only the patriarchal domination among other forms of domination, neglecting the other forms.



Yet, it is possible to be a nationalist also by opposing the patriarchal aspect of the nationalism. If feminism in the context of Kurdistan aims to ameliorate the welfare of women, it can prepare the environment, which will carry onward the rights of Kurdish women by performing a strategic cooperation with nationalism, despite its reserves. Let alone the human rights of the women at the centre of feminist perspective, such cooperation shall protect the basic right to live of Kurdish women in person. For, it is hard to imagine the feminism without nationalism can defend even the right to live of Kurdish women. If the Kurdish feminism does not think about the Kurdish women exposed to various types of oppression starting with killing of Kurdish women for only being a woman, imprisonment, dismissal from their jobs, it should be emphasized that this cooperation is of vital importance.

Certainly, this cooperation should also include condemnation of the patriarchal and gendered discourse entangled with nationalism, discourse aiming to make sovereign religious or traditional conservatism relying on nationalism. Transformation and redefinition of the nationalism in favour of the feminism might be possible this way. It is appropriate to give some examples from the tension lines between feminism and nationalism within this frame.

One of these tension lines is the conservative understanding that we can rather place within an ethnocentric frame; while defining the national role distribution it codes the women as the bearer/ transmitter of the national culture. The meaning for us: The Kurdish language is learnt first in the family from the mother; it is continued and transmitted. Likewise, oral culture is also transmitted mainly by women from one generation to the other. Likewise, it is often said that as the schooling rate of women increases, the number of children learning Kurdish language decreases, a serious decline occurs in the elements linking the generation's one to the other and transmission of the oral culture. Since, the Kurds lack institutions, which might reproduce and transmit the joint culture, such role of the women is reminded each time with an emphasis promoting idealisation. This discourse may be interpreted as anxiety to see harmed the existing gendered role distribution rather than an anxiety originating from the lack of institutions, which will reproduce the common values. Rather than aiming to create institutions, which should fulfil these roles, the women, which are the transmitter of the common culture, are "idealized"; they are recommended to maintain their role or at least this is wished. For, Kurdish women allegedly sourcing the Kurdish culture are overwhelmingly deprived of modern education or their movement area is very restricted. This role of culture transmission can be maintained by women, who cannot leave their private space or are excluded from the effect and oppression sphere of governmental institutions. We know it at least from our experiences or observations. The great majority of those, who have learned Kurdish within their family, as a matter of fact, Kurdish is learned mainly in the family, owe it generally to the fact that their mother did not receive a modern education or live an urban life. It is obvious that the women, who found the opportunity to come out from the family or private life, could /did not maintain such a role generally.

While reasoning about the language matter, sometimes I catch myself thinking the following way: Thank God my mother was not educated or a urban woman, so I could grow up speaking Kurdish. Then I am flinching and come to my senses: what a simplifying, egoist and shallow point of view! Then the following question comes to my mind. Why my mother should be deprived of education and urban life, for me to learn Kurdish? For example, did the Turks learn their language only this way? Is their language transmitter only their mother or family? No. There are organized institutions, which elaborate, reproduce and transmit the Turkish language,

culture and collective identity and there is also the Turkish state, which is composed of these institutions as a whole. These institutions are the institutions, whose domain of influence we cannot escape outside, albeit mothers continue to talk Kurdish in the house, as much as they want. A clear result of this domain of influence is my obligation to speak with you in Turkish at this moment. We as much as them, learn our language first from our mothers (whereas from now on every Kurd cannot learn Kurdish from his/her mother, this is another matter of debate), however, the result is as clear as the sky is blue.

Then what should be the attitude of a Kurdish feminist nationalist in the face of such discourse? Imprison women to the private domain as much as possible, hold them far from the government institutions or public domain and institutions, which are the reproduction sites of the Turkishness, is not a solution, of course. Women are charged alone with the task either reproduction or sustenance of the language and culture of a nation; which is one of the major causes of inequality and also it is injustice. The women have the right to say no to this and invite men to share this burden. Even if you imprison women in their private domain, you cannot hold away from the private domain the modern technology, where Kurdish language cannot exist yet. Therefore, the solution is to create the institutions according to a nationalist target, starting with the schools in the first place. The answers to be given by the feminists, might be stronger preservation of the institutionalization target, based on self-administration of the Kurds and recommend a political or activity domain in this direction.<sup>12</sup> This target may be admitted as the principal introverted target of nationalism. Therefore, basically this is the exact point, where feminists should enter into insistent and patient debates with conservative nationalists and such an attitude shall open a considerable space, where the feminist movement shall have its say over the nationalism, fray out its sharpness, transform it into the favour of women and redefine it.

On the other hand, while the roles of women and men are changing so much parallel to the socio-economic change, why the role of motherhood or child care responsibility should not change or be redefined? This may be advocated within a feminist nationalist discourse also. The existing roles are condemned to change, in any event. If, we shall not speak from an essentialist and ethnocentric nationalist understanding, many social roles and elements are re-definable. Nationalist Kurdish feminists continuing a debate on this way, may contribute to grind patriarchal feature of the nationalism.

A second line of tension is the Kurdish women figures, who were able to leave the gendered role distribution determined during the whole history and were brought to agenda by essentialist and conservative nationalists. People who are anxious with the current gendered role distribution or essentialist nationalists, who do not want attribute any negativity to Kurds often put these figures before the women to imply that Kurdish women were free and equal

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<sup>12</sup> Although institutionalization efforts such as Kurdish Institute, Dîbistanên Azad (Free Schools), Kurdish television, Kurdish publishing cannot be underestimated; they do not decrease the need of such debate. It can be said that excessive criticism of nationalism dominating the discourse of the movement and projections of such criticism on the daily legal politics, are shadowing the institutions. As put by Firat Aydıncaya in his remark “The Kurdish movement does not start from *an ethnic nationalist epistemology*... Sometimes, it brings to the forefront Kurdishness (the italic is mine, F.A.) .” In my opinion it makes questionable the above mentioned institutions too. See Aydıncaya (2011).

during the whole history because there is not any freedom or equality problems. The first names, who come to mind are Fata Reş, Lady Adile, Mestûre Erdelanî, Meyan Hatûn, Lady Zerîfe, Lady Hede more recently Leyla Zana etc. And it is said that we, the Kurds are not a society anxious about the woman, who comes to the forefront or assumes different roles, here are the examples! Thus, on one hand they try to hide the gender inequalities existing in our day with these examples, on the other they suggest in a minor key that there is no need of a separate women organization, elaborated feminist discourse. On one hand they expect us to be proud with such aspect of our history, on the other hand they expect these figures be admitted as the examples of eternal equality.

If a feminist nationalist approach reacts against such a slinky discourse by ignoring or neglecting these historical figures, this might be as much deceptive. On the contrary, to adopt these women in a different manner than the conservative approach, bring them forefront as they truly deserve and reach different conclusions might be a more accurate strategy. Van Bruinessen (2005), in an article, which treats this matter, told that women leaders owed their role to their husbands, after all these examples cannot be generalized for the position of women in Kurdish society. It is true. However, it is possible to be discontent with this and advance the discussion. These examples are telling us many more things. For example, Lady Adile undertook many of the Caf tribe<sup>13</sup> duties, while her husband was still alive and continued for long years even after the early death of her husband. Although she was a Yezidi, Meyan Hatun was the mir of Yezidis effectively for forty four years between the years 1913-1957. Both of these women, no matter to whom they owed their roles, could fulfil their duty for long years, what is more important we should not neglect that they were accepted without facing any serious competition or reaction. If we look from another point of view, in a society identified with strong patriarchy most of the time, the fact that the above-mentioned women maintained their rulership position, might serve as a legitimate basis for power sharing requests in our days. Relying on our past, looking to the leadership or rulership practices of women we can reach the conclusion in favour of women that they are not different than men in essence. On the other hand, we can bring to the forefront these examples as premises invalidating, as early as these days, the definitions, which identify men with mind, women with emotion; not as the examples of eternal equality (Adsay, 2014, s.91). They may be put on agenda as basis for the equality demands of nowadays rather than clouding these demands.

## **Conclusion**

Even if potential failures cause doubts, if Kurdish feminists do not consider themselves as individuals free from every type of social ties, they should continue the dialogue with different nationalists in order to be able to have their role in the transformation of nationalist discourse or “to resist against a shallow homogenization pulse and struggle for the ‘nation ’or for richer definitions of the potential political community” (From Gyanendra Pandey, Chatterjee, 2002). We are in an era where “different cultural encounters change continuously the national culture. Feminists are one of the most important social players behind the transformations.” (Herr, 2003) Active participation, insistent and patient efforts by feminists in debates to be performed with nationalists, shall have certainly an important role in the recognition and establishment of equal level human rights of women and men from the feminist perspective. For, feminism has

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<sup>13</sup> Caf tribe live in the southern part of Kurdistan.

the capacity to transform not only the women awareness but also men awareness, at same time. Should this transformation cover also the patriarchal aspect of the nationalism, this might be realized through the insistent and patient efforts of feminists. Therefore, even in the most critical conditions, the Kurdish feminism should pursue the patriarchal nationalism and should /be able to see in itself the right to oppose from its own point of view and redefine it. Otherwise, the feminists shall have abandoned to the monopoly of conservative nationalists the construction or continuation of nationalist discourse and waived their role in the formation of national culture. In the context of Kurdistan, to oppose completely nationalism and think about feminist rights can be advanced, can be interpreted, if not, a strong egoism, a product of strong manipulation. In other words, the feminists appear like aligned with people perpetually accusing the Kurds of performing nationalism but in truth instructing the Kurds to renounce their collective identity. For, just as the feminism has a crucial role in the emancipation of Kurdish women, nationalism too has a crucial role in the emancipation of the entire Kurds.

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