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## Critique of a Hegemonic View of Feminism: A Reflection

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## **Abstract**

This article examines and reflects on a critique of mainstream feminism as a form of hegemony in feminist perspectives asserted by Kurdish women in Europe. The critique of mainstream feminism as a hegemonic viewpoint came up in conversations with women who are part of the Kurdish diaspora in Europe. This essay is a part of a larger ethnographic study that I carried out between 2017 and 2018. In order to show the context of the critique, I examine data drawn from excerpts of interviews and field notes from the ethnographic work. Having analyzed this data, I identified the need for a discussion of the term “mainstream feminism,” which was recurrently used by the informants of the study. I also discuss and reflect on the reasons for asserting a critique of mainstream feminisms and how my informants perceive such as a form of hegemony.

*Keywords:* mainstream feminism, Kurdish women, Western feminisms, hegemonic view, critique

## **Critique of a Hegemonic View of Feminism: A Reflection**

In this article, I assert a critique of the mainstream feminisms in Western countries as a form of hegemony. The subject came up in conversations with Kurdish women during an ethnographic study of Kurdish women in Europe. I draw my data from excerpts of interviews and field notes, from which I extracted some critical comments on mainstream feminism. This paper is part of a larger study that I have been working on for the last three years as part of my doctoral dissertation. Although this article will not have as many details, I want to give the reader a taste of my research by providing some understanding of the main topic, as well as showing a small part of my findings and, especially, sharing my reflections.

First, I will situate the reader by giving background information about the Kurdish people's history and about those who are the informants in my study. Though that particular section is not part of my original findings, I consider it important to include here. I have documented research into the literature on the Kurdish liberation movement and the history of the Kurdish people through books that talk also discuss geography and politics. Informal writings and presentations at seminars and conferences have also been part of my documented sources. Oral communication through various formats (seminars, presentations, talks, etc.) is, in fact, an important part of how the history of the Kurdish people has been transmitted. In addition, informal writing, like blog entries, social media posts and news, have similarly added to the discussion of the Kurdish question in the recent years. I consider these facts important to mention when setting up an overview of the Kurdish context.

After briefly describing the history of this study, I provide some details of my method and how I processed my data. Later, in the section *Mainstream Feminism: An Ongoing Discussion*, I draw some connections between my main topic and other scholarship by giving a few examples of critique of the attempts of homogenizing feminism or, in other words, using mainstream feminism as a form of hegemony. Then I give two more examples of authors more specific to my topic on the view of Kurdish women.

In the section *A Critique of Feminism*, I discuss what kind of feminism is subject to critique by my informants. Over the course of the article, I use different terms, like “mainstream feminisms” or “Western feminisms.” I start by referring to examples of critiques of Western feminism in the history of feminism in academia, where the term Western feminism was first used. I include three segments that represent evidence for the main statement, the critique of a mainstream feminisms’ hegemonic view in Europe and the rest of the Global North (or Western societies), and I discuss each excerpt. Later, I use mainstream feminism, since it is a more relevant term in the framework of my study. Finally, I provide some conclusions.

My theoretical work stands in solidarity with the Kurdish women and the Kurdish resistance and, therefore, I consider this reflection a necessary part of my study. My ultimate aim is building a conceptual foundation for a stronger coalition to contribute to conversations and dialogues within feminism. I do not see my work as something that will remain theoretical, however. I would like to see how it contributes to a larger debate, not just in scholarly circles. I hope this article gives the reader an eagerness to keep learning and exploring the topic.

## **Kurdish People's History: A Story of Struggle**

The Kurds are a people native to Kurdistan,<sup>1</sup> which is in the Middle East, specifically in the region known as Mesopotamia or the Fertile Crescent. Throughout the region, there exists a diversity of ethnic, religious and identity groups, with many languages spoken. Kurdistan is also considered the largest stateless nation in the world. As a historically geostrategic place of passage with trade routes and natural resources, it has been colonized by many over the centuries, and its land and people exploited.

Through a series of international treaties in the period between wars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the region was split into four countries, giving territories to the states that we now know as Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. According to 2014 figures from the Kurdish Project,<sup>2</sup> there are around 30 million Kurdish people living in these four countries. Because of the difficulties involved in having census of the Kurdish population, it is unknown whether the numbers are too high or too low. At the same time, there are many Kurds outside these borders. Some of them were left behind in other countries formerly part of the Soviet Union, like Armenia, while others are refugees or have not been repatriated. As a product of the division of Kurdish territory, they are considered minorities in these individual countries. Yet despite this status, there exist strong links between their people. The sense of community beyond the borders was achieved partly due to political work by many that dedicated themselves to the Kurdish cause.

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<sup>1</sup> "The name Kurdistan ("Land of the Kurds") first appeared in Arabic historical writing in the twelfth century, referring to the region where the eastern foothills of the Taurus Mountains meet the northern Zagros range" (Ayboga, Flach, & Knapp, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> The Kurdish Project is "a cultural-education initiative to celebrate Kurdish culture and build bridges between Kurds and the West through grant-making, campaigns, storytelling, information, and news." (The Kurdish Project, 2019)

Kurdish people have been undermined in the four parts of Kurdistan. They have not only been colonized, split and displaced, but also they have been victims of massacres over their history; the Dersim Massacre is one example.<sup>3</sup> Perpetrated by the Turkish army in 1937, there was, in the Turkish province of Tunceli,<sup>4</sup> a massive attack against the Kurdish population that would later spark resistance movements.

In the 1970s, in the context of social malaise, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) was created as a political party in Turkey. Party members wanted to open both a discussion on state-driven workers' oppression and a push for change. Over the decades of the 1970s and 1980s, many young working-class people joined the PKK, demonstrating the social unrest within society. The analysis we read of the struggle is not only about the class element, but since a large number of the young students in the group were Kurds, the struggle includes an ethnic element as well. Following the example of many leftist national liberation movements in colonized territories at the time (a similar example is the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional in Mexico<sup>5</sup>), the PKK, through an armed struggle, was the first to put the Kurdish question on the table.

Many women joined the PKK seeking alternatives for the society they were living in. Some of them were looking for gender emancipation and an escape from the traditional role of women, but they also wanted to contribute to bringing freedom for the Kurdish people and liberate them from state violence. This first generation of women was the one pushing to open the discussion about gender.

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<sup>3</sup> For extended information on the Dersim Massacre, see Kieser (2011).

<sup>4</sup> Originally Dersim, it was renamed in 1935 (Kieser, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> The Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) rose against the Mexican state in 1994, claiming autonomy for indigenous communities (Berg, 2012).

As the movement became more and more popular, the state persecution became harsher and more violent. Any trace of support for the cause was harshly punished. So the historic struggle is closely related to collective punishment and resistance.

The analysis of power originating from the Kurdish resistance has blended into still existing political parties, organizations, and mass society in general, and even though the PKK was dissolved, the persecution continues. Even today, there is persecution of anybody considered connected to it, even from similar ideologies. For instance, in August 2019, several People's Democratic Party(HDP)<sup>6</sup> elected mayors were removed from office by the government. The removal was justified as a fight against terrorism or separatism.<sup>7</sup>

More recently, the described analysis of power was incorporated into a tangible model of society where the ideas on liberation are articulated in the form of a political project called Democratic Confederalism (Komun Academy, 2018). This is not only a theoretical framework, it conveys an analysis of three main elements of power: sexism, capitalism and state oppression. Democratic Confederalism is also a political project to reorganize society according to values that distance themselves from a capital-ruled society. Its main principles are anti-capitalism, radical socialist democracy, and anti-patriarchy. According to this philosophy, oppressions are interlocked and all the elements (sexism, oppression of Kurds and other minorities, and oppression of the working class) have to be fought against simultaneously.

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<sup>6</sup> The HDP is a Turkish political party with representation in a national and local level formed by an alliance between Kurds, socialists and the new social movements. "The HDP aims to radically transform the state, empower social movements and bring a peaceful resolution to the Kurdish conflict" (Yörük, 2018, p. 119).

<sup>7</sup> Turk (2019) explains the events in a September 6, 2019 letter to the *Washington Post*.

The long-lived resistance movement is part of the Kurdish people's history. Therefore, it is part of the history of the people I shared spaces with: my informants, who, due to this collective worldview, might feel like they share more with their Kurdish peers in the homeland than with the feminist mainstream in the Western countries where they live. At the very least, the Kurdish women that I interviewed share a critical perspective of mainstream feminism in Western countries. This does not mean that they are not feminists, nor does it mean that all Kurdish women have the same opinion or perspective. We cannot talk about Kurdish women as a homogeneous group, so I am not trying to represent the vision of the entire community. This is why I limit my discussion to those who I interacted with in common spaces of exchange and were willing to share their views.

Additionally, I am not depicting conflicting ideologies. It is very complicated to present the blend of ideologies and tendencies that feminisms presume. However, my premise does not aim at presenting a dichotomy. It is not about two opposing perspectives, and I do not think the perspective of my informants contradicts the feminist perspective in Western countries. This is why I try to find a more specific term that does not imply that Kurdish women's perspectives are not part of feminisms in the West.

### **History of this Study**

Between 2017 and 2018, I took part in interactions with women belonging to the Kurdish diaspora, not only in my hometown of Barcelona, but also when travelling to different cities in Europe to attend meetings, seminars and conferences. I started a personal journal describing my experiences and impressions in such spaces shared

with other activists. After a year taking part and learning about Kurdish history in my free time, I felt ready to start conducting interviews. I asked some of the women I met for personal interviews. Some of them agreed to a recorded interview, but others did not wish their voices to be recorded—although those women agreed to private conversations with me taking notes. Additionally, some of the comments I gather here are from seminars that were later recorded.

I often collected observations for my field notes during public events I attended, such as the international conference *Revolution in the Making* that took place in Frankfurt, Germany in October 2018. Since there is a large Kurdish community in Frankfurt, many women that identify as Kurdish attended the event. I used that opportunity to ask people for interviews.

After all I had learned, and having decided to center my research on Kurdish women and the diaspora, a reflection on positionality was necessary. A self-reflection of my position and my identity is something I had not done that often, but it becomes necessary when studying Diasporas and especially when research requires studying historic processes that have contributed to the current status quo. It is not only necessary as an academic, since interrogating oneself becomes essential in situations of coalitions. Through a personal reflection, who I am and where I come from became something much deeper and complicated and cannot be summarized in a few sentences. I believe, however, that genealogies of thought (as genealogies of feminist thought) and people's history can lead to some answers.

Furthermore, in terms of feminist solidarity, accountability is a useful tool to build coalitions. Some readings on coalitions and feminist accountability shed light on

possible dilemmas (see, for example, Russo, 2019; Fujiwara & Roshanravan, 2019).

This accountability can start with my acknowledgement that, even though I cannot say that I hold a powerful position in society, my worldview has not been marginalized: I acknowledge that I am an individual—a citizen of the European Union with access to resources—in a society that subscribes to a normativity that is hegemonic and predominating.

### **Method**

For the type of study that I was conducting, it made sense to adopt ethnography as my method. Ethnographies study communities in a systematic way to understand social relations and cultural phenomena.<sup>8</sup> The materials that I had been gathering through a research journal were suitable to be part of an ethnographic study.

After many months of notetaking, I began my work “on the desk.” I started coding my data, both field notes and interviews and identifying the ideas that came up the most. I noticed that one of the recurrent ideas was a critique of mainstream feminism<sup>9</sup> as a form of hegemony. All of this made me reflect on my own positionality. I worked through the data, then began to articulate my ideas around them. I grouped the data under different conceptual statements. Each of these statements have three different pieces of evidence from field notes and interviews. This article is built around a reflection on a set of data connected to the same concept. At the same time, there are

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<sup>8</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) pointed out that there is not an exact definition and its use has developed over time as social sciences have developed. They gathered some features of what ethnographers usually do, which includes observing people’s actions within a group in a natural setup and collecting these data for analysis.

<sup>9</sup> The term “mainstream feminism” is not ideal to describe this situation. That can imply that it is majoritarian, but it is rather predominating because it has been imposed. In fact, a part of what I am interested in discussing is in finding a better term that more accurately accommodates the diverse experiences.

excerpts from field notes or parts of interviews from three people. For confidentiality purposes and for their safety, I use pseudonyms to anonymize the personal information of the informants.

### **Mainstream Feminism as Form of Hegemony: An Ongoing Discussion**

The discussion of mainstream feminism and its monopolization of the feminist discourse has existed for a couple of decades. Chandra Mohanty (1984) opened up a discussion with her article “Under Western Eyes,” coining the term “hegemonic Western feminism.” For my purposes, the term hegemonic Western feminism is useful, but only to a certain extent. For starters, I already mentioned my doubts regarding the tag “Western.” I do not think it is an ideal term for several reasons; however, there is currently a lack of a better term. Still, the terms that the Kurdish women I interviewed used added more specific information: they asserted that they are skeptical of the types of feminisms that attempt to homogenize feminist views.<sup>10</sup>

What Mohanty (1984) called “hegemonic Western feminisms” might have similar connotations. From her perspective, there were things that feminist academia could improve; as a scholar herself, Mohanty (1984) wrote a critique to start a conversation with other scholars, intellectuals, and activists committed to feminism about the hegemonic perspective of Western feminisms in order to point out biased portrayals about non-Western women. She specifically noted that those portrayals reproduced victimizing stereotype.

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<sup>10</sup> Dirik (2015) pointed out that “the Kurdish women’s feminism in the region has often been quite complicated.” She refers to Turkish feminism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a trend that subscribed to Turkish nationalism, tended to homogenize its perspective, and marginalized Kurdish women.

Other authors have also problematized mainstream feminisms as a form of hegemony. In the framework of UK and US feminisms, Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (1981) challenged white feminists who claimed sisterhood based on similar claims from all women. Angela Davis (1981) criticized racism in the claims of early feminism. These authors aimed their critique at “white feminisms” and offered examples of challenging a feminism trend that sees itself as hegemonic.

The Kurdish scholar and activist Dilar Dirik (2015) highlighted the ways that what she calls mainstream feminisms have often presented a depoliticized view of Kurdish women by ignoring their ideologies and political views. Dirik (2015) analyzed the Kurdish liberation movement view and its critique on Western feminism. The quote below is extracted from her 22-minute presentation; however, in this article I have considered her use of the concept of mainstream feminism and her explanation of it:

The Kurdish liberation movement’s outlook on women’s liberation is of an explicitly communalist nature . . . it criticizes mainstream feminism’s common analysis of sexism in terms of gender only as well as its failure to achieve wider social change by limiting the struggle to the framework of the persisting order [the] cause of the mainstream feminism’s main tragedy is falling into the trap of liberalism. (Dirik, 2015)

In saying this, Dirik (2015) assumes “mainstream” feminist analysis only takes into account the category of “woman.” An analysis that only takes into account one social category (woman) would be lacking an intersectional perspective<sup>11</sup> and the multiple factors that influence the experience. She uses the term “mainstream” again when

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<sup>11</sup> According to intersectional theories, one social category like “woman” does not operate alone. There are always multiple categories operating simultaneously, like gender, race and class (Crenshaw, 1989).

mentioning “the mainstream feminism’s main tragedy.”<sup>12</sup> Here she links a mainstream feminist perspective to a liberal ideology<sup>13</sup> (as opposed to a radical ideology).

Anja Flach (2007), drawing from her experience with the Kurdish women militias, also studied what other authors wrote on Kurdish women and found that the portrayals were biased and lacking empirical data. According to Flach (2007), at the time she did the study, there was little on the role of women in the large corpus of the Kurdish liberation struggle. She wrote

Also, to women in the liberation struggle, there is only sparse information. Most of the works on the PKK [Kurdistan’s Workers Party] lack the ability to portray the women’s struggle, and they do it in a static manner and ignoring the profoundly radical implications both in ideology and in the everyday culture of the fighters.<sup>14</sup>  
(p. 46)

In her work, Flach (2007) detailed how some works had adopted a Eurocentric perspective<sup>15</sup> even while describing the Kurdish women’s struggle. In contrast to those studies, she used an ethnographic method and conducted extensive research on Kurdish history and politics to depict the context of the women she wrote about in a more accurate way. In her dissertation, she discussed motivations, identity and gender relations of the Kurdish women that joined the militias.

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<sup>12</sup> Dilar Dirik’s lecture was recorded and can be watched on YouTube.

<sup>13</sup> A liberal feminist ideology or liberal feminism focuses on individual liberties, whereas a radical feminism questions the entire social structure and how it creates oppressions.

<sup>14</sup> There is no English version of this book, *Frauen in der kurdischen Guerilla* (Women in the Kurdish guerrilla). I translated the quotation into English to my best ability.

<sup>15</sup> A Eurocentric perspective is concerned with what happens in Europe and is permeated by the so-called Western social values. It considers the European subject as the analysis reference. When something has a Eurocentric perspective it sometimes dismisses narratives that do not align with the set of values that come from Western societies.

There are many authors that have contributed to this discussion; however, for reasons of space, a discussion on each contribution cannot be provided here. Nevertheless, I do consider the two authors that I mentioned, Anja Flach (2007) and Dilar Dirik (2015), relevant because they both observed feminist perspectives in Western countries and presented their views on Kurdish women. Together, they present a timely discussion and insight into how feminist scholarship works, as well as having an extensive knowledge of the history of the Kurdish resistance and the role of women in it.

### **A Critique of Feminism, but what Feminism?**

When I realized the coincidence in most of my interviewees' statements—a critique to feminism—"What feminism?" was a logical question. Since feminism is not homogenous, I problematized the use of the term without further context. In fact, scholars often talk about feminisms with a pluralization that attempts to point out the diversity under a big umbrella. However, that might not be enough to embrace all that is under it. It is still too broad a term, because there are multiple narratives, trends, genealogies, perspectives, movements, and ideologies with different backgrounds, different contexts and different goals. Drawing a genealogy of feminism is not easy, since there are so many movements with mixed elements.

So when these critiques of feminism came up in interviews and other conversations, I tried to picture something that could encompass these denominations. My informants often used the term "mainstream," "institutional," or "academic." Other times they would refer to European or Western feminisms. Since I sometimes heard these terms used interchangeably, I started to wonder what feminism they were

referring to, since such a critique appeals to and concerns me in multiple ways as a European feminist engaged in feminist Western academia.

At some points, my informants used the term “Western feminism” when discussing the critiques of the Kurdish women who interacted with me. If I used this term to describe a vision in opposition to the vision of my informants, this makes me feel uncomfortable, because it would imply that their vision is not Western.<sup>16</sup> It is not up to me to determine that<sup>17</sup>. However, a few theoretical conceptions should be discussed before picking a different term. If we use “mainstream feminism,” that can be confused by implying that it is a majoritarian view, which is also not the case. What I am looking for would be a term that implies that this view is hegemonic because it has been imposed through historical processes and has often counted with more resources than other feminist perspectives.

For that matter, the term “institutional feminism” might be more appropriate. Institutions create a framework that tend to keep their representatives away from daily problems. Traditionally, representatives of those institutions in Europe primarily exemplify certain sectors of the population: middle-class and white people who are documented and have citizenship. Other populations are still considered minorities in institutional positions. Therefore, these other narratives have been marginalized next to a predominating narrative.

A critique of feminism, in general terms, is probably connected to the outcomes of institutionalized feminism. Not only is a predominant narrative adopted and other

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<sup>16</sup> Being part of the Kurdish diaspora in Europe implies that the Kurdish people were not necessarily raised or even born in the Middle East. Some of them were and some of them were not.

<sup>17</sup> In this article, the term “Western” in connection to feminist schools of thought in the geographical area called Western countries or Global North.

narratives based on different experiences that are not hegemonic left aside, but power relations embedded in society are enhanced by the resources and legitimacy that an institution has, unlike non-institutionalized feminism. Feminism, as a term, is incredibly broad and has been stretched to an extent that it often needs a specification of its context and whose perspective is being talked about.

### **A Critique Addressed to Mainstream Feminism: The Hegemonic View of Feminism**

What my informants referred to when they offered critiques of feminism is a hegemonic view of feminism. With this expression, I mean that hegemonic experiences have been imposed by the mainstream perspective and, therefore, have been considered the dominant feminist perspective. This traditional view of mainstream feminism was equated with institutionalized or scholarly feminism.

In my own research, I documented three times where informants commented on how they felt this mainstream feminist view in Europe corresponded to a hegemonic Western perspective. The first situation happened in summer 2018. I was at a seminar on Democratic Confederalism where Leyla presented a lecture. Leyla, a Kurdish woman in her mid-thirties, puts a lot of energy into her presentations and as much information as possible. I had met her the previous year, so we had already had a few conversations. Leyla had been implying there might be a critique of feminisms in Western countries while she talked about Gender Studies scholarship in Europe. She said that she had tried to be part of a Gender Studies department in a university, but that she had not found it inclusive, mixing her critique, particularly of feminist academia

in Europe, in general terms. As it was not the first time I heard that, I had been thinking about how we might define the feminism she was referring to.

I asked myself what feminism Leyla was talking about. Was she simply talking about European scholars in the gender studies field, or about European feminists in institutions, or feminists in Europe in general? As I tried to imagine some kind of framework where we could group these items connected to the exclusion Leyla mentioned, I wanted to connect those questions to my own reflection. During a break from the seminar, I asked her in private to share what feminisms she was referring to, since there are so many trends to address in just the European context. She said, “When we criticize feminism, we are referring to mainstream feminism. I know we share a lot with Latin American Feminism, post-colonial feminisms and radical feminisms.”

Leyla used the term “mainstream” feminism to clarify the target of her critique. Mainstream can be considered as “mainly accepted,” representing trends in institutions and mass media, as opposed to being marginal or peripheral. As we talked about gender studies and feminist academia, their critique, in this case, was focused on a Western, scholar-based type. It would make sense to potentially connect her critique to “institutional feminism,” meaning a type of feminism that has both resources and acknowledged legitimacy and is less marginalized than other perspectives.

Leyla also said “we,” so she might have been referring to other Kurdish women or, at least, Kurdish women who share that same ideology. This indicates that there is, to a certain extent, a shared feeling, an opinion we can consider as collective. She also implied that the group of people that share the ideology of mainstream feminism envision a framework they are distancing themselves from. Leyla also points out that

this group has things in common with feminist perspectives that are not necessarily part of that mainstream or hegemonic view. It would be too extensive to describe every single one of the trends she mentioned. However, I can point out something they share, or at least, the common points she implied. As I said, mainstream here is used in opposition to marginal or peripheral and having traditionally had less space in the institutions and mass media. One of the things Leyla pointed out is how mainstream feminisms have left out other trends that have traditionally been considered more peripheral rather than central.

Leyla also specifically mentioned “Latin American feminisms, post-colonial feminisms and radical feminisms.” Similar to the experience Leyla relates, the trends that be grouped under decolonial feminisms are not part of “mainstream feminism;” they are not central. They have not been represented in the institutions that work under a (mainstream) feminist framework. Yet, not being part of the central experience and not being represented as such is at the core of her critique; in this way she finds points in common with other trends of feminism that have also been left out from being counted among feminisms in mainstream trends in the Western countries.

In other interviews, I asked whether European feminism had failed in providing alternatives regarding struggles against oppression. I had heard skepticism about the European feminist analysis around Kurdish women and that is why I meant to be very specific with my question.

In one such interview I spoke with Rojbin, a middle-aged woman who has travelled a lot and knows the reality on the ground very well, having observed how feminist groups work in Europe. We had a relatively long interview, where we talked

about different topics, especially about feminism in Europe. When I asked, she was very straight with her answer.

My main critique of European feminisms would be that they are just focused on Europe. And it is a selfish position . . . in the outside world that they thought that solution can just happen in Europe. . . . It was a very individual habit to think just for Europe. I've seen women in other parts of the world. However, some of them raised awareness on the Palestinian issue of women and in African countries. But they even they saw the women as victims.

Rojbin makes several points here. First, she talks about European feminisms as only concerned with the experiences of the European women. This means that, from her point of view, feminists in Europe do not pay that much attention to the situation of women outside of Europe, like those in the Global South. They focus on the problems that European women face in the Global North in their daily lives and do not think about power relations that affect women outside Europe. However, by saying, “some of them raised awareness on the Palestinian issue,” she implies that if they do, they often take a patronizing role towards women in those other places outside of Europe.

Second, when Rojbin says, “they thought the solution can just happen in Europe,” she might mean, generally speaking, the solution to women’s problems or, in a more abstract way, the solution to patriarchy—if we consider that patriarchy is a global social system in which men hold primary power over women. The way she phrases this makes me think about the perspective of first-wave feminists. First-wave feminism addressed suffrage and focused on the experience of middle-class and non-migrant women in Europe and North America, or in a Western Global North context. Rojbin said

that European feminists think that the solution can just happen in Europe. That could mean that she perceived that the feminist perspective of an earlier stage still has strong effects on feminism today, and that even though this biased vision was pointed out during other stages, like the third wave, that biased vision is still present.

Furthermore, by thinking in a European framework, North-South relations can be dismissed. Globalization processes affect experiences in the Global South in a different way than in the Global North. There are theories that specifically address this issue, for example, decolonial feminism.<sup>18</sup> Decolonial feminist theories assert that feminist demands can be closely tied to the effects of colonization by some societies over others and have not always been addressed. In other words, a feminism that is not specifically decolonial can become blind to the experiences of the subjects of colonization. The focus is on deactivating a colonized analysis of feminism, in other words, a feminism that does not take into account the historic processes of colonization. The trend in Europe that Rojbin referred to has a lack of the vision, according to her point of view.

Also in 2018, I met Roj, a young Kurdish woman who lives in Western Europe. I asked if she felt that feminism in the European context had not been able to fight many oppressions and if she felt it needed some kind of radical change. She gave me a very insightful perspective since she has taken part in feminist organizing in her city. Growing up in a European country, Roj had experienced an “identity clash.” As she put it, “Being a Kurdish woman in Europe, so being a migrant, being Kurdish and being woman has obviously been very difficult, because you also have like identity clash.”

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<sup>18</sup> Lugones (2010) is a proponent of decolonial feminism.

Roj walked me through her experience of living between two cultures. Her description and word choice were very insightful. She was also able to easily identify and describe the contrast of experiences. Perhaps it was the fact that she had grown up in a Western European country, but her words were key to understand simultaneity, which for me had remained a theoretical concept. I describe simultaneity as living between different cultures. It is often experienced by individuals who are part of diasporas. It is having simultaneous experiences of how to socialize and how to relate to everyday situations.

Because of Roj's ability to describe contrasts so well, I wanted to ask her about her perspective on criticisms of feminism. I hoped she could perhaps give me more information about this specific subject and the critiques feminism in Western countries. I asked if she thought that feminism in Europe was in bad shape, as I had heard these exact words from someone else, and whether she also felt that it had not been successful in fighting oppression. She stated:

I think feminism has limited itself in the West. . . . it has made very important interventions, but the interventions have been, in some ways, not always, of course, but in some ways copying male-like methods to achieve that and therefore . . . you know . . . even though it has made interventions, the biggest difference has been that is women doing it. But the methods in achieving and obtaining the analysis, the evaluation hasn't been radically different.

First, she uses feminism in general terms, not specifying a specific movement or organization. From the context, we could infer she refers to the genealogy of hegemonic feminism in relation to the history of society (“[feminism] has limited itself in the West . . .

it has made very important interventions”). She means that it has been traditionally seen in a certain way. In this sense, I think the nuance to take into account is her choice of verb tenses. The use of present perfect tense and the term “intervention” might indicate that she is talking about the past but not necessarily about the present or the future. As she names it, there has been a tendency to “limit itself in the West” (Europe and North America). However, when she speaks about the West, she probably refers not only to the geographical space, but also to the hegemonic Western thought that has predominated in Europe and North America and used as a guideline to create societies in the geographical West. This type of feminism has been not only central but also has had a tradition of focusing on the white middle- and upper-class women’s experiences, excluding other segments of race and class. It has not considered other experiences or demands as central to a feminist analysis.

Furthermore, from Roj’s comments I observed her feelings that the feminist mainstream perspective has often been reduced to adapting more women to the existing system and not challenging it. That corresponds to a rather liberal view. In contrast, what we know as radical feminism, as the etymology of the word “radical”<sup>19</sup> indicates, aims at questioning and challenging the roots of the societal structure. A feminist perspective that considers itself radical should question a structure rather than adapting individuals to the existing structure of power. Roj implied that feminism in the West should have a more integral perspective, one that aims at questioning the whole

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<sup>19</sup> A radical feminist ideology or radical feminism would be all those trends that with their actions and thought question the whole status quo of the society as inherently oppressive. In radical feminism, the analysis is not centered on the individual liberties, but rather in collective liberties.

structure of society rather than limiting itself to do “interventions that copy male-like methods.”

### **Conclusion**

Even within movements driven by feminist ideology we can perceive power relations, and the aspirations to make feminism homogenous and impose a view have been harshly criticized (Davis, 1981; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981). Sometimes feminism has even been co-opted by the system it criticizes and used for particular interests to perpetuate the given order of the society. For instance, profit-centered companies have adopted supposedly feminist politics that might benefit individuals but that do not really question the status quo of society.

I am aware that other feminist authors have brought up some of the same issues pointed out here about feminisms in Western countries.<sup>20</sup> So have my informants in their questioning of European feminists, including how feminism has been so much focused on Europe, according to Rojbin; or how it has limited itself to the West, according to Roj. For instance, describing Western hegemonic feminism in the way Chandra Mohanty (2015) does reminds me to what my informants referred: the perspective of the scholars, politicians and women in powerful positions in public institutions. In these types of institutions, a particular way of operating predominates. There, feminism tends to their draw its representatives away from society in a framework that reinforces stagnancy. However, the fact that this framework is part of the academic feminist corpus and feminist academics are theoretically aware of it does not mean that these lessons have been fully incorporated into feminism in Western countries. This academic

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<sup>20</sup> As pointed out, Moraga and Anzaldúa (1981) challenged white feminists by questioning the claims of sisterhood by white feminists, who assumed that all women had similar experiences.

framework, from my point of view, is not only stagnant but sometimes it can be isolated from society. Progress in feminist theory is not always shared with society or, rather, is not as accessible as we scholars might think.

Hearing the Kurdish women's critique was an enriching experience, since as an academic I, too, face the risk of staying in an isolated and stagnant framework. In academia, it is relatively easy to lock oneself in this dynamic of theoretical stagnation and isolation. My interactions with the Kurdish women's narrative have continued to be a very inspiring experience. Before even starting to theorize from the praxis, I learned the true meaning of being in solidarity with the Kurdish people, but not without struggling to find my own place in it. I reflected on my position and my role. I started to establish feminist coalitions. This essay has been an exercise in collecting and reflecting on the critique I received, and trying to imagine a more concrete recipient of the critique. However, this essay is just a brick in the wall, a piece in the puzzle I want to keep building. In the future, I want to keep reflecting on feminist praxis and what building coalitions means.

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