

Coalition or Solidarity? Or Maybe a Different Approach: The Relationality between the Free Women's Movement of Kurdistan and the Feminist Movement in Turkey

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Within the existing literature, feminist philosophy texts discuss the relation between feminist movements along two main axes. One group, called second wave feminists¹, insists on the concept of solidarity by claiming relations among women should be based on their commonalities such as sisterhood, womanhood or experiencing the patriarchal system in similar ways. The other group, composed mainly of post-colonial feminists, poses a critique of the concept of solidarity and instead proposes coalition relations based on intersectionality. Feminists who favor coalition relations prioritize the differences among women rather than commonalities, claiming that different contexts create different forms of womanness and that focusing on similarities alone creates hierarchical relations among women by ignoring some forms of womanness. Post-colonial feminist philosophers argue that to be able to relate equally everyone needs to reveal their differences, which can then be unraveled by taking the intersectionality of different conflicts into consideration, i.e. womanness cannot be made sense of isolated from other conflicts such as race, ethnicity, class or colonialism. However, solidarity relations ignore the significance of the particularities of different parties, while coalition relations underestimate the importance of commonalities among different parties.

In this article, I focus on the relation between the Feminist Movement in Turkey (FMT) and the Free Woman's Movement of Kurdistan (FWMK) to investigate the relationality between feminist movements through the concepts of solidarity and coalition. Although I believe the critique posed by post-colonial feminists points out a significant aspect of feminist relationality, I argue that these two concepts emphasize two significant aspects of a relation, namely equality/commonalities and freedom/differences. Any relation reduced to either of these aspects cannot form a productive/creative relation. Therefore, using or emphasizing only one of these concepts amounts to falling into a trap of liberal political theory. Inspired by Marxist approaches and based on the conducted interviews, feminist and post-colonial readings of the concepts of freedom and equality require us to use these concepts co-functionally because neither can be realized without the other.

To support this claim, I begin the article with a discussion on that the FMT in the western Turkey and the FWMK in the Kurdish region² are two movements that emerged in two different public spaces. Following this discussion, I claim that these movements should be considered as two separate movements, which is not to say they should be accepted as homogenous entities. Next, I pursue a conceptual discussion on the concepts of solidarity and coalition before concluding with an analysis of the relation between the FMT³ and the FWMK⁴ since the 1990s based on the historical context as well as interviews I conducted with various women and feminists. Ultimately, I argue that there exists an implicit liberal crack within feminist philosophy between thinkers who favor solidarity relations and those who prioritize coalition relations. Based on the conducted interviews, feminist activists do not make a clear-cut distinction between the two kinds of relations, which are in need of each other to form creative/productive relations. If the interviews are analyzed through a post-colonial, feminist, class-conscious perspective, this article puts forward two main claims: (1) solidarity and coalition relations cannot be realized without the other and the prioritization of these relations can only be determined historically. (2) Since the beginning of the 2000s it seems the FMT and the FWMK have started building a flourishing relation that is realized on a more horizontal ontology, allowing both movements to express their differences.

My claim to write on the relation between the FMT and the FWMK is based on two different sources: (1) the post-colonial feminist philosophy literature which provides radically pragmatic conceptual tools to think about this relation, (2) six in-depth interviews conducted with politicians, activists from NGOs, union activists and academics from Diyarbakır, İstanbul and Ankara. Because relations contain multiple aspects, to be able to limit the relation between the FMT and FWMK to an article, one needs to focus on certain concepts. Post-colonial feminist philosophy literature provides this conceptual framework through two central concepts: coalition and solidarity. Yet it is not sufficient to analyze a historical relation just conceptually. One needs reveal the particularities of the relations through historical and ethnographic data as well. Historical sources (Bozarıslan, Çiçek, Öcalan, Beşikçi) provide a background for the relationality of the two movements. Yet in addition to the historical sources, the in-depth interviews are indispensable to open up the particular conflictual and/or collaborative moments of this relation in the last twenty-five years.

While writing on this subject, I also had to consider my own positionality with these movements. Linda Alcoff states that, "certain privileged locations are discursively dangerous" as the work produced by an 'outsider' writer is mediated through her lenses (Alcoff 7). Yet, it is impossible to claim that each group of people should write and speak only for themselves, since we cannot easily separate groups from each other. The intersectionality of subject positions makes it impossible to separate groups from each other in clear-cut ways. Moreover, I believe that my six-years of engagement with the FWMK as an activist at two different institutions (Woman's Academy and Eğitim-Sen (Eğitim ve Bilim Emekçileri Sendikası- Education and Science Laborers' Union) provides me a positionality not only as an outsider but also as an inside-speaker of this subject, and this in-betweenness provides a necessary critical distance from the FWMK and simultaneously sufficient experience to write about this subject as an insider.

Two Different Public Spaces

The Kurdish region⁵ and the western part of Turkey compose two separate public spaces both politically and socio-economically. The socio-economic maps released since 1960s indicate a socio-economic boundary between the Kurdish region and the western part of Turkey⁶. In 1960s the industrial companies in the Kurdish region consisted just 7.6% of the overall industrial companies in Turkey. In the same period the northwestern part of Turkey contained 47.2%, and the Aegean part possessed 19.6% of the overall institutions. (Çiçek, "Kürt Meselesi"23) Furthermore, "Research on the Graded Rankings of the Settlement Centers" (Türkiye Yerleşme Merkezlerinin Kademelenmesi Araştırması) in 1982 indicates the continuation of the vertical relationality between the center and the periphery of Turkey. Çiçek argues that in 1980s "... Istanbul [was] is the only primary polarized region. One [could] can see four other secondary polarized regions dependent on Istanbul (Ankara, İzmir, Adana and Gaziantep) and eleven tertiary polarized regions (Bursa, Diyarbakır, Elazığ, Erzurum, Eskişehir, Kayseri, Konya, Malatya, Samsun, Sivas and Trabzon)."("Kürt Meselesi" 24) The map published in the 2003 Socio-Economic Development of Turkey study divides up the Republic of Turkey into four distinct regions. The fourth region, which is the least developed, includes the whole Kurdish region in Turkey. 9 August 2015. <<http://www.kalkinma.gov.tr/Lists/Yaynlar/Attachments/341/2003-05.pdf>> Moreover, published in 2011 the New Incentive System report divides up the country into six regions, the least advantaged of which once again coincides with the Kurdish region. 9 August 2015. <<http://www.tarimsalhaber.com/projeler/illerin-kalkinma-performansi-izlenebilecek-h3779.html>> Thus, one can claim that since 1960s there persists a socio-economic inequality between the Kurdish region and the western part of Turkey.

In addition to this socio-economic variance, one can also claim a political division between these two public spaces. First of all, the Kurdish/Kurdistan issue is a subject that transcends the national boundaries of the Republic of Turkey. As Beşikçi also emphasizes this problem is an inter-state and international problem. (20) Particularly the Barzani movement in the Iraqi Kurdistan, the recent developments in the Kobanê region of the northern Syria and the trans-national and international aspect of the Kurdish issue plays a dynamic and constitutive role in the construction of the Kurdish region in Turkey. Second, there is a colonial relation between the Turkish state and the Kurdish region, signaling a history of economic exploitation of resources and labor, cultural exploitation and deprivation of the political autonomy of the Kurdish region. (Beşikçi, Öcalan, Gündoğan). In this colonial context, in 1970s the left-wing movements in Turkey and in Kurdistan dissociated from each other based on ideological disagreements on the issue of Kurdistan, colonialism, internal colonialism and anti-imperialism. This separation deepened after the 1980 coup d'état. The left-wing movement of Turkey was eradicated through the despotic power of the Turkish state and the oppositional movement in Kurdistan remobilized itself in the Kurdish territory through armed struggle. The mobilization of the PKK⁷ (Partîya Karkerên Kürdistan- Kurdistan's Workers Party) in this period, and the 30 years long bloody war in Turkey along with its the destructive consequences have led to the formation of two distinct socio-political public spaces in terms of normative, discursive and institutional priorities.

The separation between DBP (Demokratik Bölgeler Partisi- Democratic Regions Party) -DTK (Demokratik Toplumlar Kongresi- People's Democratic Congress) and HDP (Halkların Demokratik Partisi- People's Democratic Party) -HDK (Halkların Demokratik Kongresi- The People's Democratic Congress) can be considered as re-organizational projects considered to respond to these distinct public spaces. The Kurdish movement created a dual institutional structure that can fit in these two distinct public spaces. On the one hand, DBP-DTK refers to the Kurdish region and HDP-HDK addresses the public space of overall Turkey. HDK which is affiliated with the HDP represents the democratic, liberatory and egalitarian peoples of Turkey and the Kurdish region. HDP's main agenda is democratization of Turkey and as of 07th June 2015 it is represented by 13% percent of the population. Its electorate consists of many different groups, such as radical leftists, feminists, Islamists, nationalists, social democrats, conservatives; who support the democratization of the Turkish state. Another political formation focuses exclusively on issues related to northern Kurdistan through the DTK and DBP. These two political currents, the former organizing in Turkey and the Kurdish region and the latter organizing only in the Kurdish region, are relational with each other but are at the same time autonomous (Çiçek, "HDP: focus of the left wing"). Thus, based on the aforementioned maps, researches on the socio-economic distinctions and the political formation composed of the HDP, DBP and PKK, one can argue that there are two socio-economic and political realms in the Republic of Turkey, one belonging to northern Kurdistan and the other belonging to Turkey. In this divided public space the FMT and the FWMK possess different characteristics.

The FMT and the FWMK are different movements in four different aspects; they have separate starting points, different priorities, their understanding of the public and the private realms are different from each other and they are composed of distinct populations⁸. These four aspects lead to two main conclusions. First, the FMT and the FWMK are two separate movements that emerged in two different, albeit related, public spaces. Second, each movement is composed of women with different socio-economic and political backgrounds and these distinctions naturally have an effect on the subjectivities of women. In the FMT one can see more middle-class/upper-class, educated women struggling along two main axes of gender and class. However, in the FWMK, although there are many educated, middle-class/upper-class activists, there are also a vast number of women from the lower classes prioritizing a struggle against colonial conditions as well as along gender and class lines. Thus, if it is arguable that there are two different movements formed in two different public spaces, it is legitimate to question the relation between the FMT and the FWMK historically by focusing on two main concepts: coalition and solidarity.

Soldarity vs. Coalition Debate

In this section, I pursue a theoretical discussion based on the concepts of solidarity and coalition. To that end, I will look into the motivations of different, internally heterogeneous movements to relate with each other and explore on what basis they ultimately come together. As Cole and Luna ask, "What goes on when diverse groups 'get into a room' that results in either 'fussing' or generating useful new strategies and tactics? How do groups work together productively across power asymmetries to achieve common goals, and what practices are necessary to ensure meaningful participation by the most disempowered constituencies?" (Cole, Luna 72). These questions as well as an analysis of

the respective subjects and priorities of the FMT and the FWMK will be the focus of this section.

Solidarity

Solidarity is a concept that dates back to the 1970s, particularly in the U.S. and the West, and to the 1980s in Turkey. The major premise of the concept is that women's relations can be formed through common characteristics because even though women live in different contexts, they share enough to communicate through commonalities, which most often center upon womanhood or sisterhood. Consciousness-raising groups have historically aimed to transform women's conditions in their daily lives. This transformation was accomplished through sharing experiences via women's commonalities. One guide to conducting consciousness-raising groups suggests "that groups should meet regularly, should be comprised of six to ten participants, and should pay close attention to questions of transportation, food, and child care so that no one is excluded from participation" (qtd. in Keating 88). Through discussions of their lives, women have sought to overcome the political divide between the public and the private spaces and to unravel the political aspect of the private realm. By problematizing the politicized nature of private life, participants simultaneously have intended to deconstruct and transform the hierarchical relation between public and private space. They also have examined the relation between theory and practice as well as the hierarchical formation within feminist organizations, wherein some women were seen as leaders and the rest as the masses. The concept of solidarity has evolved alongside with consciousness-raising groups that can be considered as spaces to form solidarity among women in small groups through face-to-face interactions.

In line with the goals of consciousness-raising groups, feminists consider solidarity as a concept that allows for the creation of non-hierarchical spaces through coming together and telling each other what we share and how we share certain experiences. Reflective solidarity theorized by Jodi Dean and other feminists as a means of communicating whereby participants try to understand each other rationally and through mutual respect, is helpful here. This kind of communicative rationality, in the Habermasian sense, enables women to "take a responsible orientation to [their] relationship," and Dean asserts that such solidarity is only possible via our differences. (Dean 8) Thus, such a solidarity does not ignore differences but emerges from them, which makes rational communication possible and desirable. Nonetheless, although Dean suggests that solidarity relations do not create hierarchical or exclusionary relations, there are many critiques of this approach in the existing literature.

Coalition

Many of the critical perspectives on second wave feminism and the relation of solidarity have been put forward by post-colonial feminists (Lugones, Mohanty and Sandoval). In place of solidarity relations, they have advocated coalitional solidarity/coalition based on intersectionality. Their critique of solidarity can be summed up as follows:

First, women's search for commonalities to form an all-inclusive collectivity among each other can be alienating and discomfoting for some groups of women. Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues that "such moments of identification—the 'me too' moments so common in accounts of consciousness-raising—can be dangerous for feminists" (qtd. in Keating 92). Inevitably when searching for commonalities valid for all women or for many women, a vast number of women are simultaneously excluded. The lowest common denominator for all women typically boils down to womanness or sisterhood. Yet, even the experience of womanness can differ from person to person, or culture to culture and sometimes from one geographical context to another. Furthermore, these different experiences of being a woman can sometimes conflict with each other, which will be discussed in the next section.

Second, feminists building relations of solidarity based on commonalities sometimes view differences as a form of betrayal to the feminist movement. In her criticism of solidarity, Chela Sandoval claims that "the recognition of differences from the inside of this unity were either ignored or seen as acts of betrayal" (Sandoval 66). Thus, it is argued that solidarity relations create one form of womanness that is prioritized over all others. Alternatively, in the coalition relations advanced by post-colonial feminists such as Lugones, Mohanty and Patricia Hill Collins, the differences among women should be taken into consideration as embedded characteristics or conflicts within contextual conditions. In this way, the context enables one to see the relationality of the differences rather than seeing them as isolated characteristics or conflicts of a certain group of women. Thus, feminist philosophers who support coalitional solidarity based on intersectionality emphasize the significance of the multi-dimensionality of people's lives and the heterogeneity within and between movements/groups, which can be made sense of through their contextual conditions.

The context is critical both to see the relationality of differences and to increase communication among groups. For Maria Lugones, it is primarily the colonial separation among women that makes the context such a significant analytical tool. She states that "...the sex/gender systems that colonizers used to organize labor in Europe would not work in colonial contexts. (Bailey 66) In a similar vein, one can claim that there are two different sex/gender systems, one in northern Kurdistan and the other in the western Turkey, due to the colonial relation between the Turkish state and the Kurdish region. Because of this, some subjects, such as birth control, carry different meanings for women in Kurdistan than for women in Turkey. While access to birth control is a common demand of women living in the western part of Turkey, many Kurdish women see it as a mechanism of population control of women's bodies by the state. In other words, the colonial context in Kurdistan gives different meanings to the practices in the western part of Turkey. Viewing such differences as dependent on contextual conditions can create a more fruitful and creative communication among different groups of women. The SFK activist (Sosyalist Feminist Kollektif- Socialist Feminist Collective) in İstanbul states:

At some point, when we came together with some Kurdish women we asked the following questions: "Do you have anti-patriarchal struggle within your own movement?; What do you think about the PKK discourse on increasing the birth rates?" We received some hesitating responses from them, and based on their

responses we decided that if we are going to struggle together then these questions should be replied without hesitation. When I evaluate those discussions retrospectively, I don't think that our approach was the right one. It was stagnating. Personal Interview, 23 July 2015.

The emphasis of philosophers on contextual conditions differs depending on the context in which they work, yet none of them argue that the existence of differences in different contexts precludes the discovery of common points among different groups. For Mohanty, the focus is on global capitalism and its intersection with colonial conditions. Brown, on the other hand, along with Lugones reminds us that the fact that all women have different genders does not negate the existence of gender but merely indicates that gender cannot be isolated from its context. As Elsa Barkley Brown cautions, “[W]e still have to recognize that being a woman is, in fact, not extractable from the context” (qtd. in Bailey 22). Indeed, different contexts reveal the ways in which differences relationally construct each other. Lugones claims that “the logic of categorical separation distorts what exists at the intersection, such as violence against women of color...It is only when we perceive gender and race as intermeshed or fused that we actually see women of color” (Lugones 2007, 193). Kimberlé Crenshaw calls this multiplication of conflicts “compoundedness” (Crenshaw 2000), while Ann Phoenix and Pamela Pattynama call it “complex ontology” (Phoenix and Pattynama 2006), and Gloria Anzaldúa refers to them as “kneaded” (Anzaldúa 1990a, 103). They claim that feminists insisting on solidarity based on commonalities miss the point that conflicts cannot be added to each other but are rather multiplied, thereby creating various combinations such as racialized gender conflicts or gendered racial conflicts. Lugones states, “Intersectionality reveals what is not seen when categories such as gender and race are conceptualized as separate from each other.... So, once intersectionality shows us what is missing, we have ahead of us the task of reconceptualizing the logic of the intersection so as to avoid separability” (2007, 192-193).

This sort of an approach on the one hand makes different kinds of conflicts visible and unravels the intertwinedness of them, as in the examples mentioned above (e.g. instead of racial and gender conflicts, there are racialized gender or gendered racial conflicts). On the other hand, such approaches also enable us to problematize notions of “oppressed” and “oppressor” in two fundamental ways. First, there are not only oppressed and oppressor groups; some women are oppressed because other women are in a privileged position. Barkley Brown argues that “we need to recognize not only differences but also the relational nature of those differences . . . white women and women of color not only live different lives but white women live the lives they do in large part because women of color live the ones they do (1992, 298). For instance, Aksu Bora in her book *The Class of Women* puts forward that (based on the interviews she conducted with domestic cleaner women and women who let their places cleaned) women from two different classes have segregated experiences at least just as strong as the different experiences between a man and a woman. Secondly, both the “oppressed” and the “oppressor” are heterogeneous entities in themselves, which is to say that often the very same person is at once both oppressor and oppressed. Sojourner Truth expresses this medley in an explicit way “There is a great stir about colored men getting their rights, but not a word about the colored women; and if colored men get their rights, and not colored women get theirs, there will be a bad time about it. So I am for keeping the thing going while things are stirring” (qtd. in

May 98). Because of this heterogeneity, sometimes one type of strategy can aggravate a conflict for a group of women but it can be recuperating that very conflict or another one for another group of women.

Likewise, Lugones contends that we need to “risk our ground” to form a coalition relation. This strategy has been proven effective in the improving relations between the BİKG (Barış İçin Kadın Girişimi- Initiative of the Women for Peace), the Socialist Feminist Collective-SFK and the FWMK in recent years. While the BİKG and the SFK are part of the FMT, they are relatively sensitive to the colonial conditions in northern Kurdistan and have tried to form a new relationship between the FMT and the FWMK. The BİKG, which is composed of feminists from almost every feminist group in Turkey but draws most of its members from the SFK, functions as an intermediary group between the FMT and the FWMK. If, in time, a coalition relation develops between the FMT and the FWMK, both groups would “risk their grounds”. The FMT would risk losing its privileged position in Turkey as a group of educated, socially accepted feminists and would also jeopardize their relations with many comparatively more nationalistic feminist groups. For its part, the FWMK would once more risk being misunderstood by feminists in Turkey, being excluded from the feminist movement and being reduced to an ethnic movement. To put it bluntly, coalition relations are often uncomfortable.

Another debate surrounding coalition relations is on what basis a coalition can be formed. Some argue that forming coalitions based on identities is problematic because any identity claim is based on something more or less ahistorical (Butler). Yet, one can counter this argument by pointing out that identities are historical constructs subject to change as anything else, making it possible to form coalitions based on identities. Moreover, if identities are accepted as contingent constructs (Bruebaker 166, 167) and if there is an ethnic conflict based on identity, then the relationality can be formed through identities. From a different perspective, it can be claimed that because a primary strength of coalition relations is that they prioritize the historical context of conflicts, coalitions should be based on agendas. However, it seems problematic to make a conceptual distinction between identities and agendas based on conflicts given that identities are contextual and agendas at times emerge within ethnic context, which sometimes makes it impossible to exclude identities. It can be argued that whichever conflicts or axes of conflicts are chosen to relate with each other, none should be normatively chosen; they should be radically pragmatic at certain historical moments.

The question of why different groups form coalition relations among each other is also an ongoing debate among feminist philosophers. Judith Butler claims that building coalition relations involves a kind of dispossession of privileges, which is complimented by Simone de Beauvoir’s explanation that one uses one’s own “privilege to protect and advance the rights of those who are oppressed by that privilege” (Deslandes 3). Similarly, Julia Kristeva brings up the idea of “‘strangerhood’ among citizens, [and she] urges citizens to cultivate an awareness of the ‘otherness’ that they each contain; and this cultivated awareness of one’s own otherness is what becomes the basis of connection with actual others” (Lyshaug 85). Iris M. Young, on the other hand, suggests that “wonder” is the source of the motivation to relate to the other. (1997) Reagon explains this motivation in terms of self-interest. She states that trying to form a homogenous space is both impossible and

exclusionary and therefore vulnerable as homogenous entities cannot sustain. In order to survive, groups should relate to each other (Lyshaug). Finally, Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman call this motivation “active friendship” and pose a critique of self-interest as a motivation:

The only motive that makes sense to me for your joining us in this investigation is the motive of friendship, out of friendship... Self-interest has been proposed as a possible motive for entering this task. But self-interest does not seem to me to be a realistic motive, since whatever the benefits you may accrue from such a journey, they cannot be concrete enough for you at this time and they may not be worth your while. I do not think that you have any obligation to understand us. You do have an obligation to abandon your imperialism, your universal claims, your reduction of us to your selves, simply because they seriously harm us. (24)

Most of these ideas point out a significant aspect of building coalitions. Yet, if one takes into consideration the context of the Kurdish women’s movement as a movement arising from colonial conditions and carrying out a socialist, ecologist agenda in the Middle East, then Lugones and Spelman’s concept of active friendship seems to be the most functional one. This is the case not only because active friendship encompasses some elements of the other theories philosophers have put forward to explain coalition relations but also because it is presented in a vertical context in which imperialism rules. Seen from a post-colonial, class-conscious and feminist perspective, the relations of solidarity and coalition⁹ cannot be realized without each other. To form a productive/creative relation among groups/people/movements, one needs to share both similarities and differences.

The Relationality between the FMT and the FWMK

The six interviewees addressed the significance of the political context to any evaluation of the relation and formation of these two movements. Another common point made by the interviewees was that the relations between the two movements should be evaluated differently for the 1990s as opposed to the 2000s.

The 1990s—Silence due to Conflict

The relation between the two movements in 1990s carries its roots from the 1980s. One of the interviewees from SFK states that the establishment of the İHD (İnsan Hakları Derneği-Human Rights Association) in 1986, and the experiences of the Diyarbakır, Mamak and Metris prisons¹⁰ were not part of the discourse of the FMT. Moreover, activists from İstanbul and from Diyarbakır state that particularly in the second part of the 1980s there were two distinct experiences in the two regions, namely the Western part of Turkey and the Kurdish region. At the feminist meetings held in 1989 particularly at the congress titled “Not Tomorrow But Now”, the FWMK shared their experiences as women from Kurdistan but there was no response from the FMT to form solidarity relation with the FWMK. These kinds of moments seem to pave the way for the silent period of the 1990s.

The activist from the women's shelter in Diyarbakır and a union activist working on the women's commission of Eğitim-Sen in Diyarbakır described the conflictual nature of the relationship between the movements in the 1990s:

In the 1990s feminism in Turkey garnered its legitimacy from the system and there was a disconnect between the movements for this reason. The FWMK has removed the FMT from its political agenda. Personal Interview. 1 July 2015.

The union activist added:

We had serious difficulties in expressing ourselves in the women's meetings held in Istanbul in the 1990s. They were saying that our struggle was just an ethnic struggle. We had these kinds of cleavages. We were trying so hard to explain that there was war in Kurdistan. As they were not living in the war, they could not internalize it. In our public statements we could not even convince them to use the words "war" and "Kurdistan." Personal Interview. 1 July 2015.

As briefly discussed in the beginning of this article, in the 1990s the political and social environments in the Kurdish region and in the western Turkey were quite different from each other. In those years, there was an intensification of the war in the Kurdish region and the Kurdish political movement was engaged in an anti-colonial struggle. At the same time, while women in the Kurdish movement started becoming a more autonomous group in the 1990s, relations¹¹ between Kurdish women and men have fluctuated between conflicts and solidarities and coalitions depending on the conditions within the Kurdish movement. The activist from the SFK describes that period as a silent time that would eventually give birth to renewed communication between the two movements:

What were the women's realities in war? We didn't know. There was *silence* on that subject. (Emphasis belongs to the author.) On March 8th, 1993, feminist women in İstanbul created a public discourse on the mass rapes in Bosnia. We wrote a statement titled 'A Banal Rape to 50,000 Women.' We distributed them and let it signed by people. We explained the patriarchal nature of the war and the military. But we haven't touched upon the war going on in Kurdistan. What was really going on there? What were the women living there? We didn't know. Personal Interview. 23 July 2015.

All in all, despite some nuances activists from both of the movements describe 1990s in similar ways. Both parties maintain that the FMT has insisted on avoiding the reality of the war in the Kurdish region which was the main reason for them not to be able form a productive/creative relation with each other.

The 2000s—Starting to Engage with Each Other Again

Most of the women interviewed saw the last fifteen years as a period in which the FMT and the FWMK began relating to each other in more nuanced ways. Naturally, however, the end of the tumultuous 1990s did not bring about an immediate solution to the conflictual relations between these two movements. The campaign¹² called "We are

nobody's honor, our honor is our freedom." was one of the conflictual moments between the FWMK and the FMT. The SFK activist thinks that

This campaign was good as it did question the concept of 'honor' yet it doesn't call for a struggle of women against the oppression by men and to make a claim on our bodies, futures and lives. To expand the definition of honor so that it contains the public, the nation and the tribe relegates patriarchy as a systemic oppression mechanism outside of the scope of analysis. I think the claim of the FWMK which states that women's body politics and liberation is socially constructed is a weak side of the FWMK. Personal Interview. 23 July 2015.

As the union activist recalled the year 2009 "The FMT criticized our campaign called 'We are nobody's honor, our honor is our freedom.' This statement aimed to dispossess honor... How can we transcend this problem without resolving it?" Personal Interview. 1 July 2015. There were mainly two kinds of criticisms from the FMT against the campaign. One of them stated that such a statement reproduces the concept of honor due to the usage of the word "honor" within the campaign statement and for this reason it is problematic. To this critique, Kurdish women responded like the above quote, i.e. using the concept of honor does not entail reproducing the concept, on the contrary this statement deconstructs the very meaning of honor by equalizing it with freedom. The second kind of critique was like the one stated by the SFK activist. It is similar to the first critique in the sense that it does claim that this statement is not a deconstruction of honor rather it can be considered as questioning of honor or expanding its meaning and also it excludes many other aspects of women's oppression or independence or liberation such as patriarchy. Kurdish feminists responded to this critique by reminding the FMT that a campaign cannot encompass everything, on the contrary campaigns should focus on a goal rather than trying to touch on everything and the aim of this campaign was to deconstruct the concept of honor and to replace it with the freedom of women. It seems like the critiques to this campaign are also related to the population composition of these movements. The FMT as a middle/upper class, educated movement considers that this campaign statement is either not sufficient to pass the relevant message or reproduces the patriarchal concepts such as honor. It can be claimed that the FWMK's comparable heterogeneity and bottom-up approach to mobilizing can also help explain why the movement at times includes certain feudal social control mechanisms such as honor, chastity and marriage in its discourse.

Similar to the FWMK activists who claimed that the FMT did not pay sufficient attention to their reality and discourse, the SFK activist states that in 2000s they were left alone by the FWMK,

...except the campaigns which originated in the west and focused on peace the FWMK has never participated in our work... One can claim that since 1990s Kurdish women pursue a women's politics which focusses on the war. Yet the fragmented structure of the women's movement [the FMT] and their agenda on body, labor, legal equality could not match with the FWMK's agenda, and the FWMK has an immense responsibility on this. Personal Interview. 23 July 2015.

Thus, the SFK activist claims that the disconnection persists to a certain extent in 2000s as well. The woman working at the women's shelter in Diyarbakır stated, "At the Shelters and

Consultation Centers Convention¹³ (Siğınaklar Kurultayı), there were feminists who rejected starting a discussion on the village guard system, [and] there were even feminists who supported the village guard system.” Personal Interview. 6 July 2015.

These two quotes from two different movements touch on the same subject. There are two different movements emerged, in two different public spaces, and their priorities different from each other. Yet one should not miss the point, that these two separate realities are not equal with each other. One of them is more disadvantaged as it deals with the war conditions. It seems that not paying attention to the war in Kurdistan was the first breaking point between the two movements. Thus, the insistence on avoiding the reality of the war in Kurdistan by the FMT, i.e. the one-sided exclusion of the war from the feminist discourse created a mutual disconnect that started in 1990s and has continued until 2000s. Thus, in spite of improved ties, the conflictual relationship between the FMT and the FWMK has persisted in the 2000s.

Nonetheless, the interviewees stress that relations between the FMT and FWMK in the 2000s cannot be reduced to conflicts alone. The activist working at the Metropolitan Municipality in Diyarbakır said

These years we go through certain encounters. We have different experiences. Through these bodily encounters by collectivizing our experiences and through understanding each other around certain principles, we can form solidarity relation in time. Yet in colonial societies, to be able to come together one should confront the past. The FMT still does not go through this confrontation. At times, there are individual confrontations but at the institutional level there are none and that is necessary. The FWMK transforms the women in Turkey. One of the triggers of this transformation is the encounters of some of the feminists with the Kurdish guerrilla women. Many feminists talk with the guerrilla women and there are many others from Turkey joining the guerrilla movement. In addition to this, some intermediary groups are important. One of them is the BİKG. Relations formed in life are valuable. Personal Interview. 5 July 2015.

The municipality activist claims that an equal solidarity relation within colonial conditions can only be formed if there is institutional confrontation followed by bodily encounters. Only after such a confrontation can the two sides form an equal relationship that does not eradicate the differences. The union activist explained, “We started struggling together but not with the intensity we would like it to be. This also shows that our movement is universal. We are not only engaged with the problems in Kurdistan.” Personal Interview. 1 July 2015. The union activist has been stating in her quotes throughout the article that the FWMK has difficulties to express its own particularities in 1990s, and that they had an unequal relationship with the FMT and their differences were not taken into consideration by the FMT. Yet in the quote above, she states that they have universal concerns, and not only interested in the problems of Kurdistan. The woman activist working at the shelter similarly stated:

We share our knowledge and experiences. After the separation of the 1990s, we have achieved many things regarding women’s lives at the institutional level. This

year, “The Shelters and Consultation Centers Convention” (Sığınaklar Kurultayı) was held in Diyarbakır. Many feminists in the FMT saw the women’s positions in our institutions and at the same time that women’s positions in these institutions are guaranteed by institutional arrangements and they are not vulnerable... Now that our relation is more equal, we want to struggle with them without forgetting our differences. The FMT is successful in struggling against sexist legal arrangements. We all together rejected the establishment of The Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centers... Personal Interview. 6 July 2015.

Each of these quotes speaks to the growing engagement at the border of these two movements, right where they overlap each other. On the one hand, the conflictual tense relationship persists yet on the other hand, there are some confrontations that enable both of the heterogeneous movements to understand each other. Moreover the silent period which prevailed in 1990s seemed to create an equal basis for these movements to start a new communication. Only after this equal basis can one start touching each other, sharing experiences and knowledge, i.e. improve a new relation. The next section will seek to answer the question of whether the relations between the FMT and the FWMK can be best explained through the concept of coalition or solidarity.

Solidarity or Coalition? Or Maybe a Recollection of a New Subjectivity?

While the existing literature creates a significant conceptual divide between solidarity and coalition relations, the difference between the two did not seem to be so pronounced to the women I interviewed. The women in the Kurdish region did emphasize their different conditions, but they did not shun away from saying that their movement has a universal aspect as well. For instance, the union activist from Diyarbakır emphasized how her conflicts as a woman and as a Kurd in the society are intertwined:

I joined the movement first as a Kurd and then in the movement with the consciousness of being a woman, I have become part of the women’s movement. But they are parallel to each other. You cannot isolate the women’s movement from the Kurdish movement. Personal Interview. 1 July 2015.

This activist in her earlier quote stated that the FWMK in particular and the Kurdish political movement in general has universal aims. Here, she emphasizes the intersectionality of the conflicts in the society and how her gender is formed in an ethnically conflictual environment and how they cannot be isolated from each other, i.e. how her differences as a Kurdish women in the northern Kurdistan has its own peculiarities, differences. Along similar lines, the municipality workers’ quote below indicates the importance of the relationality of differences which will result in the transformation of the whole. She stated that “the feminism of Turkey ignores us, but the FWMK wants to transform the whole of Turkey by relating to other movements. And the FWMK has an immense transformative power over Turkey.” Personal Interview. 5 July 2015. In other words, although the conflicts in the Kurdish region are relationally constructed and thus carry their own particularities, the FWMK aims to transform all of Turkey in relation to other movements which requires some kind of equality.

At this point, it seems none of the women interviewed have a clear preference for a relation based on solidarity as opposed to coalition, or vice versa. One of them said, "After we touch each other, get closer to each other and institutional confrontation, we will build up solidarity. Organizations such as the BİKG are significant bridges between the two movements." Personal Interview. 5 July 2015. She also argued that solidarity could only be formed after the people get to know each other through their differences and engage with each other's problems. With a seemingly similar aim in mind, the union activist described how she views feminism, saying

Every woman is a feminist. If one says, I exist, I am a woman and I have rights, then she makes feminist claims. We are not totally independent from feminism. Feminism cannot be reduced to capitalist feminisms. We struggle for all oppressed women. Personal Interview. 1 July 2015.

Gauging from these activists' nuanced outlooks, sometimes, as was the case in the 1990s when communication between the FMT and the FWMK became impossible, there is silence. This silence may be useful to initiate new channels of communication at a later time. Indeed, it seems that the FMT and the FWMK are now on their way to forming a productive/creative relationship based on both solidarity and coalition.

Even though activists from both of the movements state that they were left alone by the other side, to claim that this problematic communication is a result of mutual responsibility of both of the movements would create another liberal trap (like the one between solidarity and coalition) to make sense of this relation. As shortly discussed in the previous section, liberal political theory assumes that every individual is free and equal and based on this assumption people are expected to fulfill some responsibilities and entitled with some rights. Yet the post-colonial, feminist and marxist critiques claim that equality and freedom are not assumed values rather conditions to be achieved via certain socio-economic arrangements.

The FMT and the FWMK are two heterogeneous groups that do not possess equal conditions with each other. The FWMK is more disadvantaged due to the ongoing war in the Kurdish region. In this sense, it would be unfair to hold both of the movements equally responsible due to ignoring each other's realities and discourses. It seems that in the 1990s the FMT had not risked its ground (in Lugones' terms) to form an equal relationship with the FWMK by not taking a critical stance towards the Turkish state. Taking a critical stance towards the state requires the FMT facing the realities of the Turkish state which accepts some people as citizens but the others (the Kurdish population in this case) as traitors, terrorists, outsiders, or secondary citizens and deprives them of their basic rights. It seems because of the lack of this critical distance of the FMT towards the state, the FWMK has not paid sufficient attention to the agenda of the FMT which resulted in the silence of the 1990s and in the partly conflictual nature of the relationship of 2000s.

Yet the silent period enabled the FWMK to pursue its own goals and to create one of the most engaging women's movements of the Middle East which realizes itself at different levels. One part of the movement struggles on the mountains as guerrilla forces. The other parts are scattered at different institutions ranging from municipalities to NGOs and worker

unions consisting of the activists from almost every family in the Kurdish region. The distant relation of 1990s enabled the two movements to come together on equal terms in 2000s¹⁴. As some of the activists maintained that now is the time for encounters so that each party can touch the other and confront with the past to open up a new future without forgetting the wounds of the past. Thus, oozing the past wounds through the present encounters would enable confrontations that are necessary for creative/productive future relationships. It seems like these confrontations through encounters have started between the FMT and the FWMK in 2000s. Both of the movements have started risking their grounds to build an active friendship.

Conclusion

In this article, the relation between the FMT and the FWMK was discussed in relation to the two concepts of solidarity and coalition. Contrary to the implicit claim in the feminist literature, that feminist movements should relate either through solidarity or coalition relations, based the conducted interviews and inspired by Marxist conceptual framework, I argue that in practice these two relations are impossible to separate from each other. Even though an analytical separation is possible, relations based on either of these concepts would be crippled because differences and commonalities are two indispensable aspects of a relation.

If one considers the liberal understandings of freedom and equality, defined as concepts whose relation creates a tension between each other. Freedom is conceptualized as the “absence of external impediments” but grows more limited the more equal individuals become. This is the case because in liberal political theory the human subject, as the self-interested individual, becomes freer the more she is isolated from other people and the more she achieves her individual ends, while the “other” is considered an external impediment. Therefore, the more distanced people are from each other, the freer they are considered to be. Freedom in contemporary political theory corresponds to the differences of individuals. Parallel to this logic, the reason multi-cultural theorists prioritize freedom over equality is so that the particularities or differences in a community will not be eradicated.

Meanwhile, equality in liberal political theory is defined as being as free in the society as other people. Yet, to be equally free, one must sacrifice individual freedom. For this reason, equality is considered a secondary concept that limits freedom. In contemporary liberal theory, communitarians such as Michael Walzer prioritize equality to increase socio-economic and political equality in the community. However, they fail to solve the riddle of how equality can be expanded without accepting the community as a homogenous entity in which particularities/differences/the freedom of the people can be secured simultaneously. Equality, considered as the commonalities among people, corresponds to solidarity relations, which are based upon the search for common aspects to connect with one another.

Feminist and post-colonial critiques of the liberal understanding of freedom and equality have derived from Marx’s approach. Humans, according to Marx, are considered as not only self-interested individuals but also social ensembles with potentialities.

Furthermore, because they are social ensembles, they cannot be free and equal as isolated individuals but only socially. Marx claims that as social beings, to be able to satisfy our potentialities freely we must live in an egalitarian social and economic system. Therefore, to Marx, equality and freedom are two conditions to be sought after (not assumed, as in liberal theory) that do not create a conflictual relationship but rather complement each other. To be able to be free, one needs to be equal with others, and vice versa. Parallel to this, to be able to express our differences in any relation, we need to share equal (socio-economic) conditions with others because only equal socio-economic conditions can provide a basis to express our potentialities, which are our differences. There are going to be times where either of these aspects (commonalities or differences) is prioritized over the other, but this prioritization needs to be determined by the historical conditions rather than normatively.

Based on this conceptual discussion, it was argued that in the 1990s the FMT and the FWMK had a conflictual relationship mainly because the war reality was ignored by the FMT, and war was the main priority of the FWMK. Even though a silent and conflictual period in 1990s continued to a certain extent also in 2000s, a more affirmative and equal relation began between the two movements, allowing both movements to show each other their differences as well as their potentialities. The conflictual nature of the 1990s was followed by a long period of disconnect between the movements. In this while, the FWMK has organized within the Kurdish region and when the two movements start meeting at certain events in the beginning of the 2000s again, the relation transformed itself into a more equal relationship, and it is this equality that enabled the differences reveal within their relation even though slowly. For this flourishing relation to turn into a productive/creative future relation requires bodily encounters of each parties so that they can talk about the past mistakes, wounds, conflicts and constitute a space for institutional confrontation that is required particularly in the colonial geographies. Only after such confrontation can they form horizontal relations with different facades of the intersections of conflicts.

Notes

¹To categorize the feminist history with concepts such as the first wave, the second wave and the third wave has been criticized with the justification that all of these waves have commonalities among each other. Taking this critique for granted, I still think that using them can at times be functional without forgetting that these historical and conceptual distinctions always contain transitions and are not separated from each other in clear-cut ways.

²Throughout the article northern Kurdistan, the Kurdish region and the northern Kurdish region refer to the same area that is the mostly Kurdish populated lands within the borders of the Republic of Turkey.

³The FMT for this article's purposes consists of all of the feminist groups organizing in Turkey. But the ones particularly significant for this paper's purposes are the BİKG and SFK. The FWMK for this article's purposes consists of the women's movement that arose from the Kurdish political movement in the 1990s. There were some other organizations in the Kurdish region such as KAMER that emerged in the 1990s. Some feminists claim that they had significant liberatory and egalitarian impact in the Kurdish region (see. Tekeli). The FWMK did not build any relation with them, reasoning that they were state-sponsored women's organizations imposing the state's policies on Kurdish women and ignoring the reality of war and colonialism in Kurdistan. Their impact on the women in northern Kurdistan was pretty limited compared to the FWMK, for this reason they are outside of the scope of this article. For a detailed discussion on this, see the feminist journals *Pazartesi* and *Roza*.

⁴The aim of this article is to discuss the relation of two different feminist movements, namely the FMT and the FWMK. According to my understanding of feminism, the FWMK is a feminist movement, yet as the women in Kurdistan want to be named as a women's movement, I do not use the feminist naming for them.

⁵When I use the Kurdish region I mean the Kurdish political region. For a discussion on the differences between the political and the cultural Kurdish regions please see Çiçek, Cuma. *Ulus, Din, Sınıf: Türkiye'de Kürt Mutabakatının İnşası*. İstanbul: İletişim, 2015. Print.; Çiçek, Cuma. "HDP: Focus of Left-wing Opposition beyond Pro-Kurdish Mobilization." *Open Democracy*. 15 June 2015. Web. 5 Oct. 2015.

⁶See Five Years Development Plans

⁷The Kurdistan's Workers Party was formed in 1974, under the leadership of Abdullah Öcalan, in Ankara, as part of the Dev-Genç organization. They described the Kurdish situation in the Middle East as a classical colonial movement and accepted Kurdistan as a colony of Turkish bourgeoisie and Kurdish landlords working in collaboration. In 1979, they made their first attack on another Kurdish tribe and in 1984 they started guerilla warfare which is considered as the 29th Kurdish rebellion in the region, initially attacking military headquarters in Eruh and Şemdinli. Since 1984, the Turkish army has pursued operations in

Turkey and approximately 30km beyond the Iraqi border. Between 1984 and 2000, around 35,000 people died due to this war (Bozarslan 111).

⁸For a detailed discussion of these differences please see Tekeli, Çağlayan, Jongerden-Akkaya.

⁹There are a number of critiques that have been raised regarding coalition relations based on intersectionality (Gimenez 2001, Zack 2005, Davis 2008, Nash 2008, Hunter, Rosemary and Tracey 2009). This discussion is too long to pursue in this article, it seems that evaluating coalition and solidarity as two entirely separate concepts is a liberal trap for feminist philosophy which will be further discussed in the last part of this text.

¹⁰Three of these prisons in Turkey are known with the torture practices by the Turkish state on the political prisoners after the 1980 coup d'état.

¹¹For a detailed discussion of the transformation of gender relations within the Kurdish movement, please see *Analar Yoldaşlar Tanrıçalar* by Handan Çağlayan.

¹²The campaign titled as “We are nobody’s honor, our honor is our freedom.” started in 2009 by the FWMK to deconstruct the concept of honor and reveal its function in the society as a social control mechanism. Additionally, the campaign aimed at emphasizing freedom as the most significant value for women.

¹³Shelters and Consultation Centers Convention is a meeting held among various women’s organizations since 1998 that provides an opportunity to demonstrate a united front to oppose violence towards women, and it also creates an opportunity to share knowledge and experiences. The attendees of the convention consist of activists both from the FMT and the FWMK.

¹⁴Since June 2015 the political atmosphere in the Kurdish region has abruptly changed. The people in certain cities such as Cizre, Diyarbakır, Muş, Hakkari, Nusaybin started organizing around self-defense and self-governance structure because of the attacks of the Republic of Turkey to these cities and to the Rojava region. Since June 2015 there is an ongoing extraordinary political context where 113 civilians are killed by the Turkish state. <<http://www.imctv.com.tr/ihd-24-temmuzdan-bu-yana-113-sivil-olduruldu/>>. In September 2015 BİKG visited Cizre which was under curfew for 9 days long, and they were one of the most active feminist groups organizing for peace in different parts of the Western part. Even though the political context changed drastically, it can still be claimed that the recent political changes did not affect the relation between the FMT and the FWMK yet.

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