

A DEBATE ON THE
CONSTITUTION OF SUBJECT IN FEMINIST THEORY AND POLITICS



TUĞBA BAYKAL

BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY

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A DEBATE ON THE CONSTITUTION OF SUBJECT
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Tuğba Baykal

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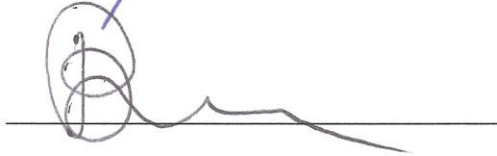
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The thesis of Tuğba Baykal
has been approved by:

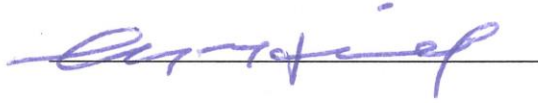
Assist. Prof. Yıldız Silier
(Thesis Advisor)



Prof. Berna Kılınç



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ABSTRACT

A Debate on the Constitution of Subject in Feminist Theory and Politics

The category of the “subject” in feminist theory and politics has been a heated debate since the beginning of the feminist movement. Considering “woman” as a theoretical subject and women as material beings in the world, the possibility, necessity and usefulness of the category of “woman” will be argued in this dissertation. I will discuss the subject of “woman” in feminism with respect to these problems, first in a historical context. Then I will present Judith Butler’s theory which opposes the necessity of the category of “woman” for feminism and her criticism of feminism as “identity politics.” Next, I will present the problems with the usage of this category based on specific examples in the history of feminism (ambiguity of protective policies, problem of recognition and LGBTI+ movement, differences among women and intersectionality). I will conclude by explaining this tension between feminist theory and politics that feminism gets its strength from, and makes feminism a self-critical, productive, and challenging movement.

ÖZET

Feminist Teori ve Politikada Özne İnşasına Dair bir Tartışma

Feminizmde özne kategorisi tartışması hareketin başından itibaren hem teoride hem de politikada sıklıkla tartışılabilen bir konu olmuştur. Teorik bir kavram olan “kadın” ile dünyada var olan maddi varlıklar olarak “kadınlar” ayırımında bulunarak yapılmış olduğum bu çalışmada feminizmde “kadın” kategorisinin imkânı, gerekliliği ve kullanışlılığı tartışılacaktır. Bu problemler çerçevesinde, feminizmin öznesi olarak kadın kategorisini öncelikle olarak tarihsel bir bağlamda tartışacağım. Ardından feminizm için kadın kategorisinin zorunluluğuna itiraz eden ve feminizmi kimlik politikası bağlamında eleştiren Judith Butler’ın teorisini sunacağım. Daha sonra ise feminist politikadan kimi örneklerle (korumacı politikaların belirsizliği, tanınma siyaseti ve LGBTI+ hareket, kadınlar arası farklılıklar ve kesişimsellik) bu kategorinin kullanıldığı durumlarda ortaya çıkan bazı problemleri aktaracağım. Feminist teori ve politika arasında var olan bu gerilimin ise feminizme güç veren ve onu kendi kendini eleştirebilen, üretken bir hareket olmasını sağlayan bir durum olduğunu öne süreceğim.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Feminists from Turkey while writing *Kadınların Kurtuluşu Bildirgesi* (The Declaration of Women's Liberation) in 1989, were arguing about whether exploitation or oppression should be mentioned first in the text, and whether women's bodies or labor should be underlined (Amargi, 2011). Socialist feminists and radical feminists offered different positions. And after long discussions they came up with a text starting with "We, women are oppressed and exploited" (Sosyalist Feminist Kaktüs, 1989). After almost thirty years, a panel was organized with the title of "Who is the subject of feminism?" in Istanbul, and some feminists who were present in the discussions attended this panel as well. (Çatlak Zemin, 2019). The panel was on the importance of the category of women for feminism, and after thirty years there was still a heated debate on how to define it. Why has that debate been so important? What kind of change could it generate for women's lives? What is the significance of the feminist discourse in feminist politics? How do feminists construct the category of women from different perspectives? When feminists in Ankara were claiming that "We, women are oppressed and exploited", who represents this "we", and can we claim that this statement refers to all women? If it does not, which subjects are excluded? All these questions encouraged me to think more on the issue of the subject in feminist theory and politics. Hence the aim of this study will be to examine the possibility, necessity and usefulness of the category of woman for feminist politics.

In the light of the questions mentioned above, in the second chapter I will try to review how the category of the feminist subject was constructed both theoretically

and politically in the history of feminism until 1990's. I will devote the entire third chapter to Judith Butler's important book *Gender Trouble* (1990) since it sparked an enormous debate both in feminist theory and politics. Feminists have been questioning the category of woman in terms of inclusivity. However, Butler furthered the discussion questioning the necessity of the woman subject for feminism. In this respect I will present the constitution of subject, the possibility of agency, the deconstruction of identity, and criticism against feminism as an identity politics in Butler. I will elaborate on major debates in *Gender Trouble* with respect to the category of woman. In the fourth chapter I will focus on the historical and actual examples of the possibility, necessity and usefulness of the category of woman in feminist politics. Considering the interwoven characteristics of theory and politics in feminism I will try to scrutinize the political implications of the theoretical problems discussed in the third chapter. The strengths and limitations of various feminist perspectives as tools for feminist politics will be analyzed on three controversial issues: the ambiguity of protective policies for women, the problem of recognition of the LGBTI+ movement and the differences among women.

Contemporary feminism historically and theoretically, as both grounded in modernist and post-modernist currents has a two-fold characteristic. Early feminists demanded equality for women as equal citizens of the state, whereas second wave feminists theoretically criticized the modernist epistemologies of the subject as autonomous and rational beings. Hence the tension between its modernist values and postmodernist argumentations precludes classifying contemporary feminism as either modernist or post-modernist. And its subject as well should be thought within that ambiguity (Hekman, 2016, p.12-13) Thus the subject within contemporary feminism is treated both as socially and historically constructed and as endowed with a

political agency. Gender is both the outcome of the representation, but at the same time the very process of the self –representation. Claiming this dual characteristic, I will take that “ambiguity of gender” as the condition of feminism (Lauretis, 1987). Hence the purpose of this thesis is not to solve that ambiguity, but further study its operation in feminism. I will claim that the strength of feminism comes from its compelling us to be both critical and self-critical at the same time.



CHAPTER 2

HISTORY OF THE FEMINIST SUBJECT

From the very beginning of the nineteenth century that it emerged, it could be claimed that the history of feminist theory and movement has been shaped according to which policies feminists have prioritized, which problems of women have been put forward, and which subjects were made visible through these struggles. The periodization of feminist history into waves as monolithic entities was often questioned as not being universally valid, not capturing the diversities within the waves and the continuities throughout the waves (Amargi, 2011). The feminist history before 1990s, is generally periodized within two waves in terms of their principal focuses on equality and difference respectively.¹ Despite to these shortcomings, I will also use this periodization, namely first-wave and second-wave feminisms, since they have been identified with the claims of equality and difference, and the debate on these claims has been an important constituent of the feminist politics. But not limited to that, I will also present the discussions in 1970s and 1980s on the nature of patriarchy and its relationship with (in) capitalism. Furthermore, the feminist objections to the assumption of the universal woman category and to the claim of a unified feminist subject, will be addressed as the attempts to overcome the dualities of the universal-particular and equality-difference and hence an attempt to transgress the existing frameworks of the waves.

¹ Josephine Donovan argues that although the application of waves is functional in distinguishing the first and second-wave feminisms, she states that such a numbering of waves could be misleading, especially considering the third and fourth waves. Moreover, she writes what it is called, as the first wave of feminism, was not really the first wave of feminism, since there are feminist waves in Western Europe in the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries (Donovan, 2016, p.14-15). For the third-wave feminism see also *Becoming the Third Wave* (Walker, 1992), for the fourth wave see *All the Rebel Women* (Cochrane, 2013).

2.1 From equality to difference feminism

Eighteenth-century thinker Mary Wollstonecraft's writings had a great impact on the early phases of the feminist movement. Influenced by the enlightenment ideas of her time, Wollstonecraft wrote that women should be educated in order to be rational and autonomous human beings, which will also make them good wives, mothers and citizens (1792). In her well-known book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Wollstonecraft asserted full citizenship for women like the men. During her time, boys were educated in humanities, natural and social sciences, whereas girls were taught domestic works like sewing, cooking etc. Opposing this, Wollstonecraft insisted on educating girls like boys in order for them to become rational citizens of the state.

Inspired by the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, feminists started to claim that women and men can be both rational and autonomous citizens, and thus women as well deserve equal education, at a period of time in Western societies when married women were considered as the property of their husbands, while the single ones as the properties of their fathers. Feminist struggles throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, centered mostly on the legislative changes such as the right to vote, access to education and the right to have property. Hence the main pillar of the first-wave feminist movement was the aim of achieving equal rights as men. They struggled for the constitution of women as the active, rational, autonomous, modern subjects; full citizens like men. In that framework, equality was considered as a matter of having equal legal rights, for which the state was assumed to be responsible, and thus the social and political demands of the first-wave feminist movement tended towards the state.

Although second-wave feminism, as a movement, started in the 1960s, Simone de Beauvoir's seminal book *The Second Sex*, first published in 1949, is worth mentioning as a precursory study in the feminist thought for the following decades. Dissenting from the naturalist explanations of being woman, Beauvoir argues that woman is always established as an "other" in opposition to man. Her well-known statement "one is not born but rather becomes a woman" (1972, p.330) emphasizes that woman is constructed in history, society and culture. Beauvoir's writings focused on how women are oppressed through being condemned to home, maternity and domestic labor. Examining mothers, wives and prostitutes in her book, Beauvoir explains how women are held in a monotonous existence being deprived of creative works. Although the concept of 'gender' was not used in feminist writings at that time, it could be claimed that the core of the concept of gender can be found in her writings. While Beauvoir as a humanist thinker aimed at equality of women with men, she also questioned the meaning of being a woman, the otherness and the constitution of differences. The second wave of feminism would rise on this ground of women's difference.

The American feminist writer and activist Carol Hanisch's slogan "The Personal is Political" (1970, p. 76) became the symbol of the second-wave feminist movement, which is usually demarcated from 1960's to late 1980's. Extending feminist politics from achieving legal equality to women's daily life issues, feminists focused on sexuality, women's reproduction rights, abortion and women's role in the house. In this context Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963, is one of the major works identified with the second-wave feminism. Addressing American middle-class housewives' problems in their daily live routines, the book had an important impact in USA among women, sold more than three

million copies in three years following its publication (McCrum, 2016). While her feminism could be labeled as mainstream, there were other radical feminists whose works made tremendous impact within feminism (Millett, 1970; Firestone, 1971). Second-wave feminism in France was shaped within the leftist, libertarian ambience at that period.

However, initially addressing the middle class heterosexual white women's problems, women exposed to specific oppressions and exploitations, like black women, lesbians, and working-class women, became not visible under the category of "woman" in the movement. But during 1980s, it had received important criticisms (Wittig, 1978; Davis, 1981; Lorde, 1984; Mohanty, 1986). Starting from 1970s materialist and socialist feminists, laying stress on the "women's unpaid labor" in the house and their unequal position in the paid labor force, sought to analyze the systemic characteristics of patriarchy and its relationship with capitalism. Before examining these criticisms, I will briefly explain the different conceptions of patriarchy.

2.2 Theories of patriarchy

Socialist feminists began to argue about the role of capitalism in women's oppression and exploitation. They criticized feminist equality strategies for mainly laying stress on the middle-class women issues, leaving working class women's problems aside (Booth et al., 1972; Dalla Costa & James, 1972). Mainly adhering to historical materialism, they tried to show the dynamics between women's domestic labor and capitalism. Referring to Engels' conception of family in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1986) socialist feminists argued that family is the unit where the workforce is produced and reproduced. Family playing an important

role in the capitalist mode of production, they acknowledge that women are exploited in family life, but it was capitalism that is responsible for that. Focusing on how family works for capitalism, socialist feminists consider the family essentially as a conservative institution that helps to preserve capitalism. Hence feminism should also aim at demolishing capitalism, since the legal equality on sexual freedom and reproduction rights would not be enough to overcome women's oppression.

However, the theories of the woman as a subject, exploited within the capitalist mode of production, but not by men, were also criticized among feminists due to reducing women's oppression to capitalism (Hartman, 1981, p.5-6). The main critique was that although the theory accepts that women are oppressed, it is not clear in the socialist feminist argument why women were oppressed and exploited in that particular way, but not men.

The term patriarchy is often used in feminist texts to refer to the unequal, systematic gender relations not reducible to interpersonal relations. Feminists tried to explain women's condition as related to that system. However, what was exactly meant by patriarchy or the patriarchal system was a question of debate. Whether it is a system separate from capitalism or whether capitalism and patriarchy cooperate with each other were questions that feminists began to discuss in the 1970s and 1980s (Delphy, 1977; Young, 1981; Hartman, 1981). Herein, I will briefly touch on three key figures (Delphy, Hartman, and Walby) to present how the feminist subject is understood and constructed in relation to patriarchy.

Christine Delphy, a French materialist feminist published the article "The Main Enemy" in 1977. There she proposes the idea that women not only oppressed but also exploited by men. She applies materialist analysis to gender relations and theorizes the concept of a patriarchal mode of production, which exists in households

between women and men. She defines housewives as a class that is exploited through the patriarchal mode of production and insists on the idea that the family is a domain of the economic exploitation. In her article “Sharing the Same Table: Consumption and the Family” (1979) she questions the universally recognized function of the family as related with consumption but not with production. She objects to the conventional understanding of economics, which reduces economics to the market relations and thus makes the women’s labor non-economic, as their labor in the households is out of these market relations. In contrast, Delphy defends that women’s unpaid domestic labor is the proof that the marriage contract between women and men is actually a labor contract. Contrary to socialist feminists, defending housewives as constituting a class, Delphy’s main enemy is patriarchy within which women’s labor is exploited. Thus, the category of women constituted through exploitation. And from this point of view, feminism should aim at dissolving that patriarchal mode of production. However, that approach could be criticized, since from this point of view the spouse of a black man who works in a factory is in the same class with the wife of the owner of that factory. The woman who works as a housekeeper belongs to the same class with the woman who pays her for doing housework. That is to say that the differences among women were neglected within the concept of housewives as a class.

In 1979, another important materialist feminist Heidi Hartman wrote “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism, Towards a Progressive Union” in which she discussed the relation between Marxism and feminism as related with the theory of capitalism and patriarchy. Different from the socialist feminist argument, she proposes that patriarchy and capitalism are two distinct systems which correlate with each other. Hartman tries to explain the ways in which these two systems

cooperate and conflict by giving historical examples. She claims that, for a better understanding of women's condition, feminists should analyze both the contradictions between the patriarchal system and the capitalist system, and how they cooperate with each other as well.

Sylvia Walby wrote *Theorizing Patriarchy* in 1990 in which she elaborates the ongoing changes within patriarchy through examining patriarchy as consisting of different social structures, which are relatively independent but also interrelated with each other (1990, p.20). She offers an analysis of patriarchy in different levels of abstraction, which would prevent us from approaching patriarchy as a homogeneous structure. Walby tries to capture the differences between women by not taking patriarchy as a monolithic unit, but as composed of six structures, which both affect each other, but also have some autonomy. These structures are paid work, family household, the state, male violence, sexuality and cultural institutions. Walby also adds that women from different classes, ethnicities or sexual orientations experience these structures differently. For instance, family's role for white women might differ from black women. Walby defends that there has been an ongoing change in each structure of patriarchy, which caused a change in the form of the patriarchy; that is from private patriarchy, dominant in the eighteenth century to public patriarchy, the form of the twentieth century. In private patriarchy, it is the husband or father who directly oppresses women. Although women have more access to the public sphere in the twentieth century, their exploitation continues in a different way, within public patriarchy. In private patriarchy women were not allowed to work in many workplaces, which Walby calls "an exclusionary strategy of patriarchy"; however, in public patriarchy although they are not excluded totally, there is a gendered segregation in the labor field, and the subordination of women's labor remains.

Women are being paid less and they usually work in less respected jobs. This change from exclusion to subordination happens in all structures of patriarchy when patriarchy changes its form from private to public.

Among dual systems, feminists who argue that patriarchy is a separate system from capitalism, the most common argument is that the oppression of women has existed before capitalism. Could we say that patriarchy is immanent to capitalism, if it precedes capitalism? However, it is claimed that it is not possible to differentiate the mechanisms of patriarchy from social relations of capitalism in most of the cases (Young, 1981). For instance, if we think of top models and their representations, how are we going to explain women being forced to be thin and buying fashionable clothes? Capitalism promotes consumption through gender, and therefore distinguishing patriarchal oppression from how capitalism works is not possible. Moreover, if the gender inequality is considered as not being immanent to capitalism, then how could we explain the persistence of gender inequality still today under capitalism? We may ask as well why more women, as cheap labor, are not employed within capitalism, if capitalism's principal aim is to make profit.

On the one hand patriarchy cannot be reduced to capitalist relations; on the other hand we cannot ignore their specific historical articulation. Hence the fact that patriarchy and capitalism seem to be cooperated in some points, however sometimes presenting contradictory dynamics shows that this articulation is a historical one. And materialist feminism, taking the category of women as being historically and socially constructed within patriarchal relations, sought to explain women's oppression in relation to patriarchy. In aiming to provide with a systemic analysis of that oppression, they treat women as an oppressed group against men, and try to

understand the common ground, which enables that oppression. In this framework, women's differences from men render their oppressed and exploited positions.

In the same period 1970s, a very different thought, namely "cultural feminism," put forward based on the embracement of women's differences from men by attributing greater value to the former (Rich, 1976; Daly, 1978). It laid emphasis on women's distinctive properties as valuable features. Being passive and emotional, characteristics dispraised within the male culture were re-evaluated and were considered as precious, which should be appreciated. Against male supremacist culture that defines women in a depreciative way, they embrace women's own culture. Cultural feminism, not questioning the relation of the oppression of women with the economic system, proposed a feminist agenda by advocating women's peaceful culture against the male-dominant culture. They emphasized that women are different from men especially because they are mothers and care givers. However, this position could be criticized as being essentialist and reproducing the hegemonic cultural representations. "There is a self-perpetuating circularity between defining woman as essentially peaceful and nurturing and the observations and judgments we shall make of future women and the practices we shall engage in as women in the future" (Alcoff, 1988, p. 413-414). Cultural feminism is important to the extent that it gives way for acclaiming the values of peacefulness, sensitivity and solidarity, identified with women, rather than trying to achieve the values determined by men. However, the risk of biological essentialism and reproducing women's positions as mothers and housewives are the problematical points of that approach.

Influenced by the works of Lacan and Derrida, during 1970s in France a new feminism emerged in a dialogue with linguistics, literary theory and psychoanalysis,

called as post-structuralist feminism.² The names to be highlighted are those of Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Júlia Kristeva, who conceptualized women's writing (*Écriture féminine*). The notion of writing as a subversion of logocentrism, thus of "phallogocentrism" is of the concept of *écriture féminine*. For Cixous, Western thought was a systematic repression of the experience of women, which led to their suppression and marginalization. Cixous (1975/1976) points out that the binary oppositions that form the basis of Western culture are not present only in common sense, but also in scientific, philosophical, literary discourses. Hence "écriture feminine" is one that exceeds phallogocentrism. (*The Laugh of Medusa/* 1976). Irigaray (1974/1977) criticizing patriarchal aspects of history of philosophy in general, states that women are in need of a new language discourse and questions the possibility of this language in her writings. Julia Kristeva contributed to the questionings on the status of woman in psychoanalysis, linguistics and literary theory; although she does not consider herself a feminist studied the category of the subject. It could be summarized as emphasizing on women's writings as an aim in French post-structuralist feminism, the system of language is explained in relation to women oppression.

2.3 Beyond equality vs. difference

As mentioned above, second-wave feminism had received important criticism because of mainly addressing the middle class heterosexual white women's problems. In this regard, one of the critical turning points within the feminist thought

² Although post-structuralist feminism influenced by psychoanalysis has a great importance in the theory of identity and subjectification in feminist philosophy, I will not argue it in detail due to time and space limitations. The study of French post-structuralist feminism requires a depth of readings and books which includes various philosophers and psychoanalysts that I have not included within the scope of this study. For further readings in Turkish: Direk, Z, *Cinsel Farkın İnşası*,2018)

was the problem of the representation of non-Western women by the Western women within the context of colonialist discourses. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984) criticizes that in her well-known article, "Under the Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" objecting to the representation of "third world women" as a unified category, as always being the "victim." Regardless of their class, race, and ethnicity, Western feminism analyzes these women "as a singular monolithic subject" (1984, p.333) in opposition to Western women. Third world women were the ones, who are represented as uneducated, family oriented, religious and sexually abused, subjugated subjects in this colonialist discourse, whereas Western women, are constructed as educated, sexually free and liberated subjects. Mohanty gives the example of being veiled, which could mean different things in different contexts and does not necessarily signify men's control over women's body (1984, p. 346-347). She also argues that the concepts of family, marriage and sexual division of labor which Western feminism takes as universal should be analyzed within different socio-historical contexts:

"If such concepts are assumed to be universally applicable, the resultant homogenization of class, race, religious, cultural and historical specificities of the lives of women in the third world can create a false sense of the commonality of oppressions, interests and struggles between and amongst women globally. Beyond sisterhood there is still racism, colonialism and imperialism." (Mohanty, 1984, p.348).

Criticizing cultural feminism, which ignores geographical and historical differences among women, Mohanty argued that a transnational feminism, which does not disregard these differences, should be built to form a real solidarity among women from different geographical and sociological backgrounds. Thus, feminists should avoid universalistic generalizations about the meaning of being a woman.

Black women, claiming that their experience as a woman differs greatly from white women, criticize the universal category of ‘woman’ described in feminism. Because feminists’ campaigns were generally focused on middle-class white women’s problems, it failed to encompass black women’s problems. From this, the very concept of intersectionality emerged and was used in Kimberle Crenshaw’s article, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics” (1989). Crenshaw, realizing that feminist theory only embraced white women’s experiences and when it came to anti-racist theory, it only embraced black men, she stated:

“Black women encounter combined race and sex discrimination implies that the boundaries of sex and race discrimination doctrine are defined respectively by white women's and Black men's experiences. Under this view, Black women are protected only to the extent that their experiences coincide with those of either of the two groups.” (Crenshaw, 1989: 143).

Accordingly, the scope of intersectionality, as a concept, is both to empower black women in the legal field (by highlighting invisibility that officially recognized categories infer) and to criticize feminism and anti-racism (by showing how they lack the ability to support political issues of minorities).

With the rise of gay and lesbian liberation movements, the critique of heterosexism in relation to patriarchy became more prominent for lesbians within the feminist movement. Criticizing feminist movement for being heteronormative and indifferent to lesbians’ problems, some radical lesbians split up from heterosexual feminists and formed lesbian separatist groups.³ Monique Wittig is one of the most

³ The French feminist journal *Questions féministes* (Feminist Questions) dissolved because of the different perspectives on heterosexuality in 1980. *Nouvelles Questions Féministes* (New Feminist Questions) was founded in 1981 by Delphy headed by Beauvoir, whereas Wittig and separatists continued to be organized under the name *Front des lesbiennes Radicales* (Radical Lesbians Front).

important lesbian separatist feminists. For Wittig (1992) the claimed sexual difference between “men” and “women”, considered as natural, functions as a mask serving to the “heterosexual contract”. Thus categories like masculine/feminine, male/female all serve to conceal that these differences actually have an economic and political ground. Her well known statement “the category of sex is the political category that founds society as heterosexual” (Wittig, 1992, p. 32) demonstrates that sex is a category constructed for the reproduction of the heterosexual regime based on the exploitation of women by men. In this heterosexual regime, the lesbian subject posits a subversive location such that they cannot be considered as being women, since women is a category constructed through women’s specific social relations with men. That is to say, women have meaning only within heterosexual systems.

Wittig writes:

“Lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is not a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically. For what makes a woman is a specific social relation to a man, a relation that we have previously called servitude.” (Wittig, 1992, p.108).

The separatist feminists claim that the lesbian subject is the only possible feminist subject could be criticized for reducing the construction of the category of women to heterosexuality. Moreover, the possible political outcome of this position was calling women to give up being in relation with men. And in fact, from the lesbian separatist point of view, emotional and social relationships with men were considered as a cooperation with the enemy and heterosexuality “as a form of collaboration with patriarchy” (Johnston, 1973). This view is problematical, as it

(Martel, 1999, p.119). In 1971 in USA, The Furies Collective was established as a communal lesbian group (Makers, 2013). The Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group was founded in 1977 in England to defend political lesbianism (Bindel, 2009). For their position, see one of their pamphlets written in 1981, <https://materialfeminista.milharal.org/files/2012/10/Political-Lesbianism-The-Case-Against-Heterosexuality-LRFG.pdf>

forms hierarchies among women, constituting the “ideal feminist” as lesbian, while describing all other women as collaborators. Notwithstanding, Wittig’s theoretical position, problematizing heterosexism, aiming to denaturalize the category of sex, was an important contribution to feminist thought, which would move on this path in the following decades.

At this point it should be mentioned that Christian Delphy (1993) as well insists that the relation between sex and gender (sex, sexuality and reproduction) should be examined, although that was not her main focus in her earlier work *The Main Enemy*. While for many feminist thinkers, the question is simply how ‘sex leads to gender’, and thus they never ask why sex must lead to a certain social classification, Delphy opposes the view that sex precedes gender. She argues that the hierarchy and the dichotomies come first between the dominants and the ones who are dominated (which is men and women in this context) and only then, these dichotomies are assigned to various biological differences (sex markers like vagina and penis) to stabilize them. In her words, “that gender precedes sex: that sex itself simply marks a social division; that it serves to allow social recognition and identification of those who are dominants and those who are dominated” (Delphy, 1993: p. 5). Thus, here in Delphy’s framework, gender is not conceptualized as an add-on to sex. Both Wittig and Delphy opposed to an essentialist understanding based on that sex is associated with nature which will lead to an important debate for the feminists in the 1990s.

Throughout its history, feminists have encountered many problems while doing politics. Which conceptions, theoretical frameworks, and political strategies would be necessary and/or useful, have been widely discussed, and hence many controversial points have arisen out of these debates within feminist politics. As

mentioned above, first-wave feminism was identified with the equalitarian demands in the name of civil rights, while the second wave feminism, albeit not uniform, was labeled mainly pondering on the difference (sexual difference, subordinated position as difference, difference to be praised). In this regard, the debate commonly referred to as equality vs. difference should be mentioned, since it has political importance about demarcating the appropriate feminist demands to be put forward. Whether demanding equality of women with men or doing politics on the grounds of women's different position has been the dilemma. Or putting the question in another way, without giving up either, how could women, with their differences from men, be equal with men? Referring to the early feminist Marry Wollstonecraft, Carole Pateman (1989) has called this tension between equality and difference, thus the contradictory social position of women as the "Wollstonecraft dilemma" (p.196).

Some feminists tried to offer new perspectives to overcome that equality vs. difference duality, which seemed to be a dilemma for feminism. An important article was written by the feminist historian Joan Scott (1988) about that ongoing debate in feminism. In her article "Deconstructing Equality Vs Difference: Or the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism," she objects to that binary opposition between equality and difference, and states that feminism can give up neither equality nor difference. Theorizing equality and difference as a binary opposition brings forth mutually exclusive political choices forcing feminists to choose one of them. She claims that feminists should problematize this duality by historicizing and deconstructing it, like the other binary oppositions of Western philosophical tradition, and post-structuralist theory could be helpful in this regard. Equality should not be considered the same as ignoring differences, but at the same time difference should not be embraced as if it is a normative construction. She proposes:

“The critical feminist position must always involve two moves. The first is the systematic criticism of the operations of categorical difference, the exposure of the kinds of exclusions and inclusions - the hierarchies - it constructs, and a refusal of their ultimate ‘truth’. A refusal, however, not in the name of an equality that implies sameness or identity, but rather (and this is the second move) in the name of an equality that rests on differences - differences that confound, disrupt, and render ambiguous the meaning of any fixed binary opposition.” (Scott, 1988, p.48).

In this first chapter of the thesis, I tried to review how the feminist movement has approached the feminist subject and how the politics are shaped accordingly.

Feminists have pursued to find theoretical and political solutions to all these problems that I have summarized above. In this regard, it is revealed that the concept of woman could not be formulated in an essentialist, universalistic or ahistorical way. However, furthering the discussion, Judith Butler questioned its relevance for feminism bringing with a controversial approach to the problem of the subject in her seminal book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1999; 2nd ed.), which I will elaborate in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3
ON THE NECESSITY OF THE SUBJECT FOR FEMINISM
AND THE PROBLEM OF AGENCY

3.1 *Gender Trouble* and feminist politics

In the first section of this chapter, I will focus on Judith Butler's major theses, mainly based on her groundbreaking book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990; 2nd ed. 1999), regarding the notion of gender, constitution of the subject, possibility of agency, the deconstruction of identity, and her criticism against feminism as identity politics. *Gender Trouble*'s impact was decisive in reorienting feminist and LGBTI+ movements from 1990s.⁴ It was a major contribution for the production of knowledge in different fields of the academy, especially for feminism, queer theory, philosophy, politics and ethics. In the second section, I will examine some of the major debates on *Gender Trouble* gathered around the theoretical and political possibility, necessity, and/or usefulness of the notion of women for feminism and will discuss the question of the subject considering Butler's responses towards them.

3.1.1 Performative gender

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler opposes an essentialist view on gender and the sexed body and rejects the distinction of sex and gender as two different categories.

She states:

⁴ Mentioning the impact of *Gender Trouble* on the emergence of third-wave feminism and queer movement would not be overrating her work, since it has sparked off the embracement of the ambiguity, multiplicity and "transversity" both in theory and politics.

“if the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called ‘sex’ is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all.” (1999, p. 10-11).

She objects to the mainstream understanding, which identifies gender with culture and sex with nature. While the perception of sex as natural denotes biological determinism, the notion of gender as construction can lead to another kind of determinism, this time not biological but a cultural one. In this sense she criticizes Gayle Rubin’s well-known article, “The Traffic of Women: The ‘Political Economy’ of Sex” (1975) which asserts that the maintenance of sex/gender distinction establishes the existence of only two genders, the masculine and the feminine, and thus it suggests that the process of gender construction is limited to sex. That is to say that there are immutable biological characteristics that constitute an essence to which culture attributes the signified, whereas the signified never questions the hard core of gender identity, namely biology (Butler, 1999, p. 93-94).

Butler also criticizes Beauvoir noting that the question of the freedom of choice for the constitution of gender identity is tackled within her theory. However, in fact the persistent limitation of practices considered as masculine or feminine constrains the ‘woman’ to behave in a feminine way and the ‘man’ to behave in a masculine way. She asks:

“Can ‘construction’ in such a case be reduced to a form of choice? Beauvoir is clear that one ‘becomes’ a woman, but always under a cultural compulsion to become one. And clearly, the compulsion does not come from ‘sex’. There is nothing in her account that guarantees that the ‘one’ who becomes a woman is necessarily female.” (Butler, 1999, p. 12).

In Butler’s theory, there is no given sex prior to gender. “Gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which ‘sexed nature’ or ‘a natural sex’ is produced and

established as 'pre discursive', prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts" (1999, p. 11). Thus, the production of sex as pre discursive is the very effect of the presentation of gender as a cultural construction. Gender is not something built on sex; it is rather the sum of doings, which construct sex. Inspired by John L. Austin's concept of "performative utterance", Butler argues that gender is performative, in other words, gender is composed of modes of actions associated with femininity and masculinity. The fundamental disciplinary rule of the gender identity here is heteronormativity, which establishes heterosexuality as the regulatory principle of sexuality. One of the main consequences of the repeated reproduction of the performance of heteronormativity is the concealment of this disciplinary rule. By being repeated through time, it ends up gaining a status as "natural" and therefore "universal".

If it is the performance according to heteronormativity that creates the illusion of the natural feminine and masculine, the deconstruction of the "natural" identity can also be the performance of the subject. But, in this case, the behavior of the subject should disconcert and destabilize the alleged coherency between sex, sexuality and gender. For this reason, the drag queens are subversive in a heteronormative world, precisely because they incite this confusion. The drags reproduce the feminine completely in a stereotyped way but performed by an anatomically male body. By this way, they expose the possibility of dissonance among sex, sexuality and gender, destabilizing the feminine and masculine identities. That destabilization challenges the hegemonic gender norms making room for subversive performances.

3.1.2 Constitution of the subject

Butler applies 'interpellation', the concept of Althusser, to gender. As ideology constitutes the subjects through interpellation in Althusser, here the bodies are constituted discursively within linguistic acts. Attending to the call of an authority will lead to the performative process, which constitutes the subordinate identity. Subordination, therefore, requires the respondent to recognize the authority. Thus, the identification is an effect of subordination to the norm. Following the Foucauldian perspective in which the discourse is constitutive, productive and performative of the generalized subjectivities and of social practices, she argues that the subject operates as a linguistic category that is always in the process of being built within power relations. No individual becomes a subject without first having been subjected or passed through a process of subjectivation. It is a subject that is not sovereign. It is constituted by a primary submission to power, which goes through internalized values and norms since childhood, through the processes of socialization.

In Butler's view, "the subject is not determined by the rules through which it is generated because signification is not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition" (1999, p. 185). She proposes a theory of performativity as an explanation of subject formation. Gender is not a being but a doing. We become gendered through performing certain actions, there is no I prior to this discourse of gender. We are becoming men and women within repetitive actions that we perform. It is to say that there is no stable identity of the self. To Butler, acts are crucial, not the subject, because there is no subject that premises this act. Borrowing from Nietzsche, she argues, "There need not be a 'doer behind the deed,' but that the 'doer' is variably constructed in and through the deed" (1999, p. 181). She refuses a

“volitional subject” who comes before these repeated acts. Gender is based on representation; thus, it is performative.

3.1.3 Deconstruction of identity

Since we become gendered through repetitive acts that we perform, and the gendered identities are not descriptive but normative, if we define the term woman, the experiences that do not fit into this definition will be excluded from politics and representation. The performative character of gender has called another important point into question: the viability of woman as a common, universal identity, as a consistent subject of feminism. Butler asks: “Is the construction of the category of women as a coherent and stable subject an unwitting regulation and reification of gender relations? And is not such reification precisely contrary to feminist aims?” (1999, p. 7).

The legal structures encode categories of identity in terms of the coherence required by the heterosexual matrix. In this sense, would not reaffirming the identity of the ‘woman’ as the subject of feminism be precisely contributing to maintain the stability of the hierarchical relations between male and female that is established within this matrix? In addition, the presumption of a female identity may, unintentionally, exclude subjects who do not fit the normative requirements of that category. After all, who is ‘the woman’? How to define it? Whatever the answer, the definition will lead to an identity embedded within the gendered relations by the power-knowledge matrix to which feminism seeks to oppose. Accordingly, for Butler, the category of women (politically) should not, in fact (theoretically) cannot be defined. It always ends up with the exclusion of some subject/subjectivities; it would indeed contradict with feminism as an emancipatory project. On the contrary,

“feminist critique ought also to understand how the category of “women,” the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought.” (1999, p. 5).

To denounce this exclusion of some subjects, it is required to question the alleged coherency among sex, gender and sexuality. Since the identities are exclusionary, feminism needs to deconstruct, denaturalize all these categories including the gender identity. In this sense, a political action committed to the dismantling of hierarchical gender relations should focus not on the identities - products or effects of power - but on the processes of production of these identities. “To trace the political operations that produce and conceal what qualifies as the juridical subject of feminism is precisely the task of a feminist genealogy of the category of women” (1999, p. 9).

3.1.4 Possibility of agency

Inspired by Foucault, but in the light of performative theory of language, Butler characterizes agency as a practice of articulation and resignification immanent to power. The possibility of agency, understood as the capacity to act, exist within subjection and subordination. That is to say that change takes place within the very dynamics of power, which can reiterate forms of resignification and produce new effects. However, this is not liberation, but a "critical subversion" or a radical resignification. The conceptualization of the subject and agency in Butler is aimed to transcend both constructivism and determinism by presenting the subject as both created and constrained in the social interaction. It addresses the constitution of the subject in relation to power, inscribed in repetitive representations, discourses and institutional practices in specific socio-cultural contexts. And in this sense, agency

should be understood as the possibilities of variation or subversive repetition enabled by the same constructions and discursive practices:

“Paradoxically, the reconceptualization of identity as an effect, that is, as produced or generated, opens up possibilities of “agency” that are insidiously foreclosed by positions that take identity categories as foundational and fixed. For an identity to be an effect means that it is neither fatally determined nor fully artificial and arbitrary... Construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally intelligible.” (1999, p. 187).

3.2 Critiques of *Gender Trouble*

The reception of *Gender Trouble* has been quite controversial bringing about a heated debate. But among all the intense debates it engendered, one of the important repercussions was the one among Judith Butler, Seyla Benhabib and Nancy Fraser in the journal of *Praxis International* (1991), which was later published as a book under the title of *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange* (1995). In this section, after I address the discussion among Butler, Benhabib and Fraser, I will deliberate about the theoretical and political possibility, necessity, and/or usefulness of the notion of women within/for feminism.

Benhabib objects to the possibility of a conceptual and political alliance between feminism and postmodernism, since, for her, “a strong version” of postmodernism embracing the following three theses of “the death of man, the death of history and the death of metaphysics” is not compatible with the political purposes of feminism (1995, p. 29). Moreover, it would undermine the very possibility of feminism as an emancipatory political movement, since it would primarily eventuate in “the death of the autonomous, self-reflective subject, capable of acting on principle” (1995, p. 29). In this sense, she criticizes the (lack of) a notion of subject, identity and autonomy in Butler. Can we reduce the gendered identities to

performative acts and signifiatory processes? Could resignification be a solution to end women's subordination within patriarchal structures? Benhabib asks:

“If this view of the self is adopted, is there any possibility of changing those ‘expressions’, which constitute us? If we are no more than the sum total of the gendered expressions we perform, is there ever any chance to stop the performance for a while, to pull the curtain down, and let it rise only if one can have a say in the production of the play itself? Isn't this what we struggle over gender is all about?” (1995, p. 21).

Although she acknowledges that the gendered subject is “heteronomously determined”, she asserts that this subject still struggles for its autonomy (1995, p.21).

Women are not “merely extensions of their histories”, in contrast, they are both in the position of author and character at the same time (1995, p.21). Indeed, feminism as an emancipatory project cannot be imagined without autonomy and agency. In brief, while Benhabib acknowledges postmodernism's ‘weak version,’ to the extent in which it enables questioning the essentialist premises, foundational reasoning and universalistic claims; on the other hand, she argues that “it should not lead to a retreat from utopia altogether.” (1995, p. 30).

Butler, in response to both Benhabib and to the others who accuse her by ‘killing the subject’, clarifies her views on the notion of subject, agency and the possibility of politics. She notes that to refuse to assume the notion of subject beforehand or deconstruct the notion of a subject does not necessarily mean to negate it, rather, it is “a way of interrogating its construction as a pregiven or foundationalist premise” (1995, p. 42). She also reiterates that agency is only possible when the subject is not taken for granted, but instead when it would be examined as a construction. In this sense, she questions the postulate that any theory of politics needs a subject beforehand, and hence calls for a feminist politics, which would problematize that premise. She acutely points out that “to claim that politics requires

a stable subject is to claim that there can be no political opposition to that claim” (1995, p. 36). Thus, in contrast to those who assert that her theory leads to a kind of political nihilism in which the subject lacks the capacity to act, she argues the very position which advocates the anteriority of the subject impounds the political domain.

Butler states that she would not oppose to that necessity, “if there is some political necessity to speak as and for women” (1995, p.49). However, she remonstrates the fact that this necessity immediately leads to a debate on the “descriptive content”, thus the normative characteristics of the category of women. Based on this, she concludes that “identity categories are never merely descriptive, but always normative, and as such, exclusionary” (1995, p.50). For the critical feminist theory, there is a constant need for questioning the content of the category of women. Which women are included and excluded, whose voices can be heard are important questions, since there is not a monolithic category of women. Any universalistic claim in this sense would serve to silence, to colonize the women, who do not fit into the established normative category. As Fraser also rightly puts, “the assumptions underlying such universal claims should be genealogized, framed by contextualizing narrative and rendered culturally and historically specific” (1995, p. 70).

While Fraser in the same article “False Antitheses,” claims that she agrees to some of Butler’s critics such as on the issue of universality, she also brings other severe criticisms to her. What does Butler’s theory suggest about the capacity of transformation of social movements and of political collective identities? Is there any room for collective action? If the presumption of the gender identity inevitably ends in exclusion, should we retreat from feminism as an emancipatory project? On this

aspect, Fraser seems to agree with Benhabib's point of view on the importance of autonomy and agency. She asks, "Can we construct practices, institutions, and forms of life in which the empowerment of some does not entail the disempowerment of others? If not, what is the point of feminist struggle?" (1995, p. 68). She propounds that Butler does not, moreover, her framework cannot provide us with any useful tool about these political issues, because of the incapacity in her conceptualization of the notion of emancipation.

"At the deepest level, she understands women's liberation as liberation from identity, since she views identity as inherently oppressive. It follows that deconstructive critique - critique that dereifies or unfreezes identity- is the privileged mode of feminist theorizing, whereas normative, reconstructive critique is normalizing and oppressive. But this view is far too one-sided to meet the full needs of a liberatory politics. Feminists do need to make normative judgments and to offer emancipatory alternatives." (1995, p. 71).

In a similar way, Martha Nussbaum, in her well-known article, "The Professor of Parody: The Hip Defeatism of Judith Butler" (1999) draws attention to the lack of a normative dimension in Butler's theory and the consequent problems for its social and political implications. Considering some of the norms such as justice as "positive", as serving "a social good", she claims that in Butler's theory there are not any "positive" attributions to the notion of normativity. And she claims that Butler's framework is not capable of explaining "in any purely structural or procedural way" why the subversion of gender norms, on the one hand, is "a social good" while on the other hand the subversion of justice norms renders "a social bad" (1999, p. 42). This argument alone does not seem to be very pertinent, since the distinction of determining "good" and "bad" is already a normative decision, established by Nussbaum and "social good" in this sense does not constitute a theoretical pillar of Butler's theory.

What can be questioned in Butler's theory, however, are the effects of the lack of any normative notion. We can interrogate the political implications of not doing any distinction based on normative judgments. As Jackson accuses Butler of reducing the social to the normative (2001, p. 290), we can question the place and basis of resistance within this framework. Resisting to what, to everything that is social? This brings us to Nussbaum's other main criticism towards Butler, which is worth pondering. Butler embraces parodic acts as forms of resistance in the sense that one turns against the norm so as to destabilize power relations from which s/he emerges. Nussbaum sums up this as saying that we can resist through these parodic and subversive acts. However, she asks: "What should be resisted, and on what basis? What would the acts of resistance be like, and what would we expect them to accomplish?" (1999, p. 41).

3.3 Gender as self-representation

This discussion may be interpreted as focusing on the questions examining the theoretical and political possibility, necessity, and/or usefulness of the notion of women within/for feminism. Although Butler, Fraser, and Benhabib agree on the fact that the concept of woman could not be formulated in an essentialist, universalistic or ahistorical way, its relevance for the feminist movement is still open to debate. While Butler proposes to destabilize the concept, Benhabib and Fraser point to the need of the political subject, namely women as the subject of feminist movement. On the one hand, Butler abstains from applying any kind of normative notion; on the other hand Nussbaum and Fraser emphasize that feminists should introduce normative judgments. Does feminism really need a unified category of women? Considering all the differences among women, can we still talk in the name of women? In this

regard, it would be helpful to refer to the conceptualizations of Lauretis and Alcoff on gender and gendered subject.

Teresa de Lauretis makes a distinction between woman, as the theoretical subject, and women, as historical and social beings (1987, p.9). Thus, she tackles the tension between the constructed character of the notion of woman and women as historical beings, “engendered in social relations”. However, that tension, contradiction or in her words “ambiguity of gender” should not be taken as an obstruction, in contrast, it is the very condition of feminism both as a theory and practice.

Lauretis (1987) thinks of gender in line with Althusser’s conception of ideology. Like Althusser’s subject, Lauretis asserts that the subject of feminism is also a theoretical construct. “However, unlike Althusser's subject, who, being completely ‘in’ ideology, believes himself to be outside and free of it”, the subject of feminism “is one that is at the same time inside and outside the ideology of gender, and conscious of being so, conscious of that twofold pull, of that division, that doubled vision” (1987, p. 10). That is to say unlike Althusser’s claim that ‘ideology has no outside’, there is outside of gender. Thus, the social representation of gender affects its subjective construction and the subjective representation of gender affects its social construction. In her words, “the construction of gender is the product and the process of both representation and self-representation” (1987, p. 9). The women are socially perceived as women, but they also represent themselves as women. Gender in this sense means both the outcome of the representation, but at the same time the very process of the self-representation. “We cannot resolve or dispel the uncomfortable condition of being at once inside and outside gender either by desexualizing it (making gender merely a metaphor, a question of difference, of

purely discursive effects) or by androgenizing it (claiming the same experience of material conditions for both genders in a given class, race, or culture)” (1987, p. 11).

Linda Alcoff (1988), with similar concerns, offers a conception of gender as “positionality”. She highlights two points that refer to the concept of positionality. First “the concept of woman is a relational term identifiable only within a (constantly moving) context; but, second, that the position that women find themselves in can be actively utilized (rather than transcended) as a location for the construction of meaning, a place from where meaning is constructed, rather than simply the place where a meaning can be discovered (the meaning of femaleness)”(1988, p. 434). In this aspect she both criticizes the post-structuralist view which considers gender merely as a fiction and also the culturalist feminism based on an essentialist understanding of the woman subject. Accusing the constitution of the subject in post-structuralism as “nominalist”, she claims “gender is still relevant because we are taking gender as a position from which to act politically” (1988, p. 433).

Positionality here serves to express both the constructed and active political character of gender. Lauretis and Alcoff aim to conflate the woman, the constructed gender with the political agency of women. Feminist subject as a historical being has an agency and seek to represent herself through different positionalities. In this regard it becomes crucial to contemplate the different positionalities within the framework of women’s experiences and practices in feminist history.

CHAPTER 4
THE POLITICAL POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS
OF THE CATEGORY OF WOMEN

As discussed in the second chapter, *Gender Trouble* brought an important contribution to the production of knowledge in different fields of the academy, especially for feminism, queer theory, philosophy, politics and ethics. But not only in academy, its impact was decisive in reorienting feminist and LGBTI+/queer movements from 1990s. Since that framework perceives all identities as necessarily exclusionary, it suggests that both feminist and queer movements should deconstruct and denaturalize all these categories including the gender identity. In short, the idea of the deconstruction of identity and the refusal of any politics based on identities were the pillars of that theory.

Since feminism is not only a theory but also a political movement that targets radical social transformation, the knowledge it produces is aimed at both analyzing and changing gender inequality. Thus, it is important to ponder on which kind of political questions, tactics and strategies that feminist theories imply. Examining the political implications of a theory would show us the strength of that theory for feminist movement, and it could give way for new theories accordingly. That is to say, the political domain, the feminist practice is where the theory is to be confirmed. A theory is useful to the extent that it is able to highlight and respond to specific kinds of problems, which have been obscured by the already-established frameworks. In this chapter, I will try to scrutinize some of the political implications of the theoretical problems discussed in the second chapter, namely the possibility, necessity, and/or usefulness of the notion of women for feminism.

When we talk about identity claims, we are talking within the discourse that produces that identity itself. Thus, there is always the risk of reproducing the hegemonic discourse. However, a feminist movement cannot ignore women's material conditions. Thus, it cares about both ameliorating women's conditions and at the same time seeking for ways to demolish the dynamics enabling these conditions. I will try to dwell on the compatibility of these two concurrent concerns, on the tension "between woman, as the theoretical subject, and women, as historical and social beings". In this regard, the possibility of the cooperation of the claims of equality (ideal) and difference (historical) in feminist politics will be examined as well. The strengths and limitations of the mentioned perspectives (the ones leaning on gender categories and the others refusing any identity) as tools for feminist politics will be examined through the following three controversial issues. The first is the discussion of whether the demand for special protective policies and laws for women is compatible with the goal of feminism to transcend the gender categories. The second point to be examined is whether the demand of LGBTI+ movement for recognition, albeit their strong criticism of the binary categories and the gendered processes of identity formations, lead the movement to be trapped in another kind of identity politics. Lastly, I will give the example of black feminism as an attempt to constitute themselves as subjects as different from the (universal) woman assumed by white feminists, and explain intersectionality as an analytical tool to apprehend the articulation of multiple differences.

4.1 The ambiguity of protective policies for women

Social security benefits specific to girls, social assistances targeting women and mothers, maternity leaves, prohibition of women's night work in certain sectors such as industry, implementation of positive discrimination and gender quotas could be

cited as the protective laws and policies specific for women. However, there is a significant debate among feminists on the effects and limitations of these policies. Do they have any emancipatory role in the feminist project, or do they serve the reproduction of women's conditions by underlying their oppressed position has a significance among feminists? To what extent can these protection policies, applied considering the unequal material situation of women, be emancipatory? Do these policies aim to bring gender equality compatible with the goal of feminism to transcend gender categories? I will try to deliberate on this issue through specific historical and actual examples.

Women are different from men, but they want to be equal to man in certain respects. This is accompanied by a paradoxical situation of women's political standing. Women demand to be equal citizens like men. However, the very concept of citizenship is constructed by men through the exclusion of women. Referring to the early feminist Marry Wollstonecraft, Carole Pateman (1989) calls this tension between equality and difference, the contradictory position of women as citizens as the "Wollstonecraft dilemma" (p.196). "Theoretically and historically, the central criterion for citizenship has been 'independence', and the elements encompassed under the heading of independence have been based on masculine attributes and abilities. Men, not women, have been seen as possessing the capacities required of 'individuals', 'workers' and 'citizens.' As a corollary, the meaning of 'dependence' is associated with all that is womanly – and women's citizenship in the welfare state is full of paradoxes and contradictions." (1989, p.185). Hence the protection of women discloses their dependence and their exclusion from citizenship. Historically the exclusion and even prohibition of women in certain employment sectors in the early twentieth century led to a specific model of employment, in which the male

subject was constituted as the worker, as the subject of employment receiving a 'family wage' in the early Capitalized countries. Thus, the concept of woman was constituted as opposed to being 'worker' and 'citizen'.

Wollstonecraft was one of the first names to notice this contradiction and she tried to suggest policies to resolve that. According to her women's unpaid work providing welfare as mothers could be considered "as women's work as citizens, just as their husband's paid work is central to men's citizenship" (Wollstonecraft, cited in Pateman, 1989, p.197). Demanding of the ideal of citizenship to be extended to women would mean to overlook the gendered character of the concept of citizenship and would lead to an abstract understanding of equality, a gender-neutral society. Within the existing scope of the concept, women cannot be citizens like men. However, on the other hand "to demand proper social recognition and support for women's responsibilities is to condemn women to less than citizenship, and continued incorporation into public life as 'women' (Pateman, 1989, p.197).

Taking that dilemma into account, how should we approach the issue of the unpaid labor of women? In the 1970's, feminists started the 'International Wages for Housework Campaign' (Toupin, 2018), demanding that women should be paid for the domestic labor that they complete in the households. The campaign was mostly held in Italy, United Kingdom and United States and focused on demanding wages from federal governments for the domestic labor of women (Small, 2018). It was important to the extent that it reveals the invisible unpaid labor of women demonstrating its connection with capitalism, its integrality for functioning of the capitalist reproduction. However, this campaign could be criticized as well for reproducing women's role of being at home. Not only the capitalists but also the men benefit from women's domestic labor. Emancipating the women from exploitation in

the house we should also question (and make this question public) that why these are women who are assumed to be responsible for this work. Housework should not be considered only women's responsibilities. However, the remuneration of the housework would underline this work as the work of women. And the naturalized domestic role of women serves as a basis for their overrepresentation in occupations on care and reproduction, regarded as 'women's job'. We should also be concerned about not stabilizing women's position through the wage for housework.

Gender quotas and positive discrimination for women could be examples to be examined within the equality and difference dilemma in feminist discussions. Accepting that women are not represented enough in law, government, political parties and social organizations, the gender quota aims at increasing gender-balanced representations and securing women participation in various aspects of social life. However, gender quota is also criticized among many feminists since this way of representation may also serve to maintain women's subordinate position. Moreover, reducing gender equality to numbers is also a problem. Equal representation may not mean equality, since the oppression of women is not merely related to whether a certain quantity of women are in critical positions, but to a more fundamental patriarchal structure of the world that has roots in many aspects of life. The patriarchy in house has no place in the debates on gender quota, since that measure reduces patriarchy to women's representation in public sphere relying again on the gendered distinction of public/private, which feminists aim to problematize.

A contrary example could be given from Turkey: the new Social Security System that changed in 2008, which various consequences on girl's and women's lives (Resmi Gazete, 2006). Before 2008, girls had the right to receive social security benefits of their fathers until they marry or work. When they quit their jobs or

divorce, their right to receive security benefits still holds. However, AKP government amended this law against girls and women under the name of equality for both girls and boys. Within the new law, girls and young women can receive social security until the age of 18, if they are not receiving education. If they continue their education, the age limit is 25, which is the same for boys.

Feminists in Turkey made protests against this law (SFK, 2008) for the reason that girls have fewer opportunities in life than boys, thus they need to be protected. They stated, moreover, considering the barriers in front of women's employment, this law makes young women doomed to marriage in order to have social security via their husband. If we demand for 'equality' in an abstract way without taking account of the outcomes of these political demands, we could face these kinds of problems. Girls and boys should have equal opportunities, but this equality should also include the differences among them, which may come contradictory at first sight. However, to demand for equality, we should take into consideration the existing differences among them (which are socially constructed and have different effects on girls' and boys' lives). Demanding positive discrimination in the name of protection of the girls, on the other hand, also has the risk of underlying the subordinate position of girls over boys. However, what the girls experience for most cases, is either to stay dependent on their families or to marry. Some feminists in Turkey claim that in order for young women not be stuck with these two options, the state should implement some protective policies towards them. Within this specific case it could be claimed that the positioning of the feminists evokes the first-wave feminism, in which the state is assumed to be responsible and thus the social and political demands tend towards the state. (Sosyal Haklar için Kadın Platformu, 2007).

4.2 The problem of recognition and LGBTI+ movement

LGBTI+ people's claim for the recognition and equality is another important debate in LGBTI+ and feminist movements. In many countries including Turkey, LGBTI+ people are not included in the equality article of the constitution⁵ and are not recognized as equal citizens. In Turkey, LGBTI+ activists demand constitutional rights against the discrimination they are exposed by proposing to add the terms of 'sexual orientation' and 'gender identity' into the article on the equal protection of law. LGBTI+ activists also ask for marriage equality to have equal rights with heterosexual couples. That is to be recognized as an identity before the law and demand for marriage equality is part of their struggle. The demand for marriage equality is criticized for adopting heterosexual norms in LGBTI+ politics and reproducing the family institution. However, what LGBTI+ people suffer in their daily lives are various inequalities such as being deprived of accompanying their partners in the hospital, of having right of succession or child adoption. In other words, they cannot benefit from the social and economic rights granted to other citizens. At this point, it would be useful to refer to the discussion between Nancy Fraser and Judith Butler.

In 1997 Nancy Fraser collected her articles including her critiques of feminist theory and politics in USA in a book called *Justice Interrupts: Critical Reflections on the 'Post socialist Conditions'* (1997). Her main point was that politics and activism, as an effect of the hegemony of two decades of neo-liberalism, is concerned too much about a certain type of identity politics, which does not aim at social equality and justice, but rather celebrate the differences. In this period the lack of any

⁵ Article 10, of the Turkish Constitution, everyone is equal before the law regardless of language, race, color, sex, political thought, philosophical belief, religion, sect, or any other reasons. (Ministry of Interior, Republic of Turkey).

emancipatory politics together with the “decoupling of the cultural politics of recognition from the social politics of redistribution” constitutes what she calls the “post-socialist condition” (Fraser, 1997, p.3). She accuses the LGBTI+ and black feminist movements, as from mid-1980s, focusing on “differences among women” and later “multiple intersecting differences” for “failing to connect a cultural politics of identity and difference to a social politics of justice and equality” (1997, p.186), either through “ant essentialism” or “pluralist multiculturalism”.

Butler, in the article “Merely Cultural” (1998), objects above all to the distinction of cultural/economic, and in the example of queer people, to the distinction between cultural recognition and material oppression. She criticizes the consideration of queer struggles as ‘merely cultural’, thus just as an issue of recognition, Butler emphasizes that the social reproduction of people as part of the material life is a constitutive feature of the political economy. Should we understand the situation of trans woman, who does not have any possibility to find a job except as a sex-worker due to her gender identity as merely a matter of recognition? The discrimination against LGBTI+ people, in this sense:

“is not simply a question of certain people suffering a lack of cultural recognition by others but, rather, a specific mode of sexual production and exchange that works to maintain the stability of gender, the heterosexuality of desire, and the naturalization of the family” (Butler, 1998, p.42).

LGBTI+ movement opposes the heterosexist family structure and heterosexist social norms, which mean the traditional and unequal relations between woman and man and correspondingly created norms of “womanhood” and “manhood”. Thus, the family itself as a basic heterosexist institution, where the meanings and duties of being man or being woman are constructed, forms a substantial ground for heterosexism. It is organized in a way, which is much related

with the material world and political economy. Schools, hospitals, marriage contracts have important role in the gendering processes, and they presuppose a normative heterosexual family. It is the place of the reproduction of normative gender subjects and gender roles; and:

“it would be a mistake to understand such productions as ‘merely cultural’ if they are essential to the functioning of the sexual order of political economy, that is, constituting a fundamental threat to its very workability. The economic, tied to the reproductive, is necessarily linked to the reproduction of heterosexuality. It is not that non-heterosexual forms of sexuality are simply left out, but that their suppression is essential to the operation of that prior normativity” (Butler, 1998, p.42).

It is not a matter of misrecognition of LGBTI+ people, namely just a cultural problem; it is their material exclusion, which renders a problem of injustice, thus an issue of political economy.

Aside from the debate on the characteristics of the discrimination against queer people, one of the noteworthy criticisms towards *Gender Trouble*, particularly to the conception of queer, came from within the LGBTI+ community itself, from trans and intersex community. Butler admits these criticisms are important in her interview with the feminist theoretician Sarah Ahmed in 2016. Trans community expressed their need for a clear gender identity, not a fluid one, and genuine recognition based on that identity. In addition to this, many intersex people want to be categorized within a binary system and do not want to be considered as beyond the categories of this system. In Turkey, as well with the rise of queer politics, the emphasis in LGBTI+ movement shifted to a conception of gender as non-binary and fluid from a perspective primarily based on recognition and equal rights for LGBTI+ identities. In the same period trans people formed their own organizations and separated from queer centered LGBTI+ movement. Butler acknowledges this in the mentioned interview stating, “some people very much require a clear name and

gender, and struggle for recognition on the basis of that clear name and gender” (Ahmed, 2016, p. 490). Accepting the need for recognition of trans and intersex people within law, state institutions and their need to live in the particular gender that they want, Butler expresses that it requires “rethinking “the questions of autonomy and embodiment within a social field saturated with power” (Ahmed, 2016, p.491).

At this point, we could ask who these “some people” are that Butler acknowledges have the ‘right’ to demand recognition for clear gender identities. Are these people only trans and intersex individuals in her account? Is this need to be recognized as a clear identity reserved only to them? Then what is the theoretical or political argument for this peculiarity? Why should identity claims (like the ones of trans and intersex movements) not be normative? On the other hand, in *Gender Trouble*, Butler claims that identity definitions are never only descriptive, but always normative and thus exclusionary. In this respect, Butler proposes that the category of women should never be defined, but always left open to some new meaning and significance. We can ask if the definition of the category of women is normative, then does that not hold for the definition of trans women. In fact, the trans normativity that some activists and trans organizations produce is widely discussed within the contemporary trans movement. For instance, some trans women are considered as ‘less’ woman, since they have not completed the whole sex reassignment process, or after completing, because they does not look like a ‘real’ woman, which means they do not fit in the aesthetic norms based on the perception of social femininity. In this sense, a certain kind of transness, a hegemonic one, is produced as well, and the trans movement still does politics, taking these troubles into account.

Normativity, which is one of the main problems for Butler can hold for trans movement as well. What makes the trans movement peculiar then for Butler's acknowledgment on their need for a clear category of women for their experience and existence? We cannot assert an essentialist claim based on that trans movement could not be normative or exclusionary. What could the theoretical explanation for acknowledging 'some' peoples demand for a clear gender identity be but criticizing cis gender women's demands for their names as 'women'? Is there a room in Butler's framework for other women such as black, Kurdish or lesbians' ones? Although Butler does not mention this explicitly, it seems that she acknowledges that feminism grows through political concerns; it is the theory of the movement. Hence here again the political claims are constituted by the very subjects in the movement according to their needs and experiences, and at the same time both considering and questioning the troubles, that these claims would bring.

4.3 Differences among women and intersectionality

In this regard we could address another contemporary theory, intersectionality, which has also arisen from the needs of 'some people', black feminists, as an attempt to constitute themselves as the woman subjects different than the (universal) woman assumed by white feminists. Feminist movement has widely discussed the differences among women. Although women share some similar positions in relation to men, they also differ from each other in many aspects of life. They come from different classes, ethnicities and sexual orientations. The political priorities of women in different positions might differ, since their experiences of being woman differ as well. In this section, I will explain the conception of intersectionality as an analytical tool to apprehend the articulation of multiple differences.

As mentioned in the first chapter, in the 1970's and 1980's, the political experience of black feminism gave way to the concept of intersectionality in the United States, as mentioned in Kimberle Crenshaw's essay, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics* (1989). Several examples of legal cases, based on discrimination faced by black women in employment, were mentioned by Crenshaw's, but the discriminations they faced were not recognized by the courts. In one particularly known case, *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors*, five black women, "alleging that the employer's seniority system perpetuated the effects of past discrimination against Black women" sued General Motors. (Crenshaw, 1989, p.141). Before 1964, which happens to be the year the Civil Rights Act was passed by Congress, General Motors had not hired any black woman before. Subsequently, because of General Motor's seniority system, it was the black women, who were hired after 1970, who lost their jobs during layoffs due to a recession. The women argued that the "last hired-first fired" rule was set up to be discriminatory towards them because they only began getting hired after the Civil Rights Act passed.

Regardless, the court did not allow the black women to file the suit, stating:

"[P]laintiffs have failed' to cite any decisions which have stated that Black women are a special class to be protected from discrimination. The Court's own research has failed to disclose such a decision. The plaintiffs are clearly entitled to a remedy if they have been discriminated against. However, they should not be allowed to combine statutory remedies to create a new 'super-remedy', which would give them relief beyond what the drafters of the relevant statutes intended. Thus, this lawsuit must be examined to see if it states a cause of action for race discrimination, sex discrimination, or alternatively either, but not a combination of both." (DeGraffenreid, 413 F Suprat 143, cited in Crenshaw, 1989, p. 141).

On the grounds of not accepting black women as its own class, while also not taking into consideration the combination of their race and gender as a single claim,

the court dismissed the workers claims of discrimination. Based on this, Crenshaw focused on the absence of black women in general when it comes to anti-racism and feminist theories. To bring to light the absence of representation of black women in the law, the theory of intersectionality was used. It can be said that intersectionality goal was to challenge established frameworks and bring to light the problems black women were facing (where the established frameworks failed to cover these problems). Crenshaw states that the study of the invisibility of discrimination faced by African American women is a paradigmatic case because black women are not considered as one of the categories that is recognized by the law: blacks (represented only by men) and women (represented only by white women), and from this, intersectionality gained its meaning.

To cope with problems of generalization, categorization, inclusion, and representation, intersectionality emerged. However, it does not simply mean the sum of different oppression forms. It should be considered as “a provisional conceptualization, a prism refracted to bring into view dynamics that were constitutive of power but obscured by certain discursive logics at play in that context” (Crenshaw, 2011, p.231). Its provisional and contextual characteristics are significant to show its political claim. Thus, the theory is useful in that it can highlight certain problems which may not be represented by academic frameworks that are already established, hence, it should be utilized as a theoretical and political tool.

Another example of intersectionality could be given within the context of Turkish and Kurdish feminist movements on the debate about birth control in 1990’s. In the beginning of 1990’s the state policy mainly aimed at decreasing the population of Kurds in the Eastern and South Eastern Turkey due to the ongoing war

between the Turkish Army and PKK (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistanê – Kurdish Workers Party). For the state decreasing the population of Kurds in the region would mean less opposition to state policies and also less solidarity among Kurds. However, for many Kurds, including PKK, the oppressive politics of the state should be resisted, and this resistance also includes population growth in comparison to Turks living in the region, who mostly supported Turkish state policies. In 1995, ÇATOM (Çok Amaçlı Toplum Merkezi - Multi-Purpose Community Centers) started to be constituted by the state in order to teach Turkish language courses and birth control methods to the Kurdish women with the aim of assimilation and of reducing the Kurdish population (gapcatom.org). However, that policy did not lead to a significant decrease in the number of babies. In contrast, Kurdish women continued to give birth to many children by claiming that this state policy aims to oppress and colonize them.

On the other hand, Turkish feminists, without asking Kurdish women about whether it is their decision, or they are forced to do this, criticized Kurdish women for not resisting the demand coming from their husbands or families.⁶ According to them, it was not Kurdish women's decision to give birth, but the effect of Kurdish men's pressure on them. Considering the fact that the one who takes care of children is, mainly, women not the men, Turkish feminists, from their own point of view, objected to the continuation of care work that Kurdish women would do. However, they did not realize that attitude towards Kurdish women denoted that they do not acknowledge Kurdish women's agency. Kurdish women, who are oppressed for both being Kurd and woman, have a different relation with family than the Turkish women. Thus, their experience of being woman is different. And the state policy was

⁶ I got the information about these discussions from women who had been in the feminist movement during that period and were present in those meetings.

not the same for Turkish and Kurdish women as well in many contexts like birth control. Thus, their relationship with the state is also different from the Turkish women.

In this chapter I tried to scrutinize some of the political implications of the theoretical problems discussed in the third chapter. The strengths and limitations of the mentioned perspectives (the ones leaning on gender categories and the others refusing any identity) as tools for feminist politics were analyzed within three controversial issues: the ambiguity of protective policies for women, the problem of recognition and LGBTI+ movement, and the differences among women, intersectionality. Examining the different, sometimes contradictory, political priorities, tactics and strategies, I tried to show the dynamism and flexibility of feminist politics. When feminists form their discourses, they are concerned about both not reproducing the hegemonic gendered discourses as well as not ignoring women's material conditions. They care about both ameliorating women's existing conditions and at the same time seeking for ways to demolish the dynamics enabling these same conditions. Hence, political claims are constituted by the subjects in the movement according to their needs and experiences, and at the same time, questioning the troubles that these claims would bring. The seemingly contradictions in that regard are the outcomes of that doubled concern, which also makes feminism both critical and self-critical, thus a productive field both as a theory and politics.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

One of the most significant aspects of feminism as being both a theory and a political movement is its critical, self-reflexive and thus dynamic structure. Throughout my thesis, I have tried to present feminism with its internal tensions and contradictions, where theory and politics influence each other within opposing views and discussions among feminists. The feminist discussions summarized in the second chapter provide a general framework for the history of the feminist movement. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the period referred to as first-wave feminism, was based on the struggles to be recognized as equal with men in the public sphere. The main axis of the struggle was the demands for equal citizenship, such as the right to vote, the right to inheritance and the right to education. The equality within that framework considered as a matter of rights, for which the state was assumed to be responsible, and thus the social and political demands of first-wave feminist movement accordingly tended towards the state.

The second-wave feminism symbolized with the well-known slogan ‘The personal is Political’ demarcated from 1960’s to late 1980’s. Feminists argued more about women’s oppression in the private sphere. They pursue a politics on sexuality, domestic labor, equal pay for equal work, right to abortion; on their difference from men. However, that politics was criticized for ignoring differences among women arising from factors such as race, class, ethnic identity and sexual orientation. Working-class women, black women, lesbians expressed that their specific problems became not visible within that subject category of woman. In the same period, within the criticism of equality feminism, cultural feminists claimed the necessity of a

feminism, which advocates the difference of women. They brought differences of women from men to the fore as their positive properties based on maternity and care work. This approach has been criticized for being essentialist and reproducing the discourse that women belong to the domestic sphere. In order to solve the tension between equality and difference, some feminists suggested the post-structuralist approach. In that context, they argued that post-structuralism as a theoretical thought that aims to deconstruct the binary categories might provide a favorable ground for overcoming the dilemma of equality vs. difference.

The question of the subject in feminism has been discussed by many different theoreticians pondering on its inclusivity. Judith Butler, in her 1990 book *Gender Trouble*, furthered the discussion by problematizing the category itself. Butler argued that sex is a socially constructed category like gender and objected to theories, that assume sex as a natural, “pre-discursive” category. In this regard, she examines the relationship between the politics of representation and the construction of the subject. According to Butler, representation is a normative function of the language that establishes the presumed truths of the category of women, while at the same time providing visibility to women as political subjects. Representation is always a representation of what can be represented. Hence it is exclusionary as it is based on identity categories, which are not only descriptive, but always normative. She questions then the viability of woman as a common, universal identity, as a consistent subject of feminism. In this sense, she objects to a feminism as a form of identity politics and proposes to problematize the category of the subject itself by doing a feminist genealogy of the category of woman. Thus, in her framework gender is performative and that very performativity of the subject makes agency possible. She argues that resistance is only possible at this point due to the fact that

the subject is constantly being reconstructed within the gendered discourse of heteronormativity. That is to say the constructed character of the subject enables the necessary setting for agency.

However, Butler is particularly criticized that there is no room for autonomy and agency within her conception of the subject (Benhabib, 1995; Fraser, 1995). The lack of the normative values in her theory (Nussbaum, 1999) was also questioned. Butler clarifies her position stating that to refuse to assume the notion of subject beforehand or deconstruct it does not necessarily mean to negate it. She also reiterates that agency is only possible when the subject is not taken for granted, but instead when it would be examined as a construction. In this sense, she questions the postulate that any theory of politics needs a subject beforehand, and hence calls for a feminist politics, which would problematize that premise.

In the third chapter of this thesis, I examined the questions on the theoretical and political possibility, necessity, and/or usefulness of the notion of women within/for feminism. Although the above-mentioned feminist scholars agree that the concept of woman could not be formulated in an essentialist, universalistic or ahistorical way, its relevance for the feminist movement was still questioned. In this context, I referred to the conceptualizations of LaRetis and Alcoff on gender and gendered subject (LaRetis, 1987; Alcoff, 1988). Making a distinction between woman, as the theoretical subject, and women, as historical and social beings provides us with the very condition of feminism as both a theory and practice. Thus, the social representation of gender affects its subjective construction and the subjective representation of gender affects its social construction.

Women socially perceived as women, but they also represent themselves as women. Gender in this sense means both the outcome of the representation, and the

very process of the self-representation. Thus, gender is not merely a fiction nor based on an essence; it is “a position from which to act politically” (Alcoff, 1988, p.433). I tried to show its both constructed and active political character, as a historical being endowed with agency seeking to represent her through different positionalities, thus “the doubled vision” (Lauretis, 1987, p.10) of the feminist subject.

Considering feminism as not only a theory but also a political movement aiming at radical social transformation, it is important to ponder on which kind of political questions, tactics and strategies, the theory brings us. Thus, in the fourth chapter, I tried to scrutinize some of the political implications of the theoretical problems related to the category of subject in feminist theory through historical and contemporary examples. The strengths and limitations of the mentioned perspectives as a tool for feminist politics were examined in terms of three controversial issues which correspond to the problems of the difference of women from men, the differences among women, and the necessity and the limits of the politics of recognition in the context of LGBTI+ individuals. Examining the different, sometimes contradictory, political priorities, tactics and strategies, I tried to show the dynamism and flexibility of the feminist politics. As I have argued throughout my thesis, sometimes feminists demanded rights from the state which was sometimes considered contradictory. For instance, they criticize the family as a patriarchal institution, but at the same time defend lesbians right to marry. They demand gender quota and positive discrimination for women, which is underlying of the subordinate position of women as well. This two-fold character is where feminism’ strength comes from. Feminists position themselves in relation to the needs in that specific contexts. Feminists form their discourses by paying attention to the hegemonic gendered discourses while, at the same time, not ignoring women’s material

conditions. Socialist Feminist Collective's campaign in Turkey, Erkeklerden Alacaklıyız (Men Owe Us) could be used as an example that tries to overcome the tension between equality and difference feminisms, and as an example of positionality of gender (Sosyalist Feminist Kolektif, 2010). Although the name of the campaign was "Men owe us", among the demands of the campaign were the right for housewives to retire and protective policies, such as early retirement rights for women who work in both house and workplace. These were demands to the state, but at the same time, it was emphasized that the time spent on housework was time spent for men. In this campaign, feminists care about ameliorating women's existing conditions while also seeking ways to demolish dynamics enabled these conditions.

As I mentioned in the introduction, feminists argued that whether women are being oppressed or exploited should be emphasized in the text. They were aware of the fact that this would not make any change in the material conditions of women at that moment. But they also made this argument because they knew that the discourse, here political rhetoric had a founding power. It poses the possibilities to create a political space as well as to change within it. Thus, the theory and politics affect and reshape each other. To illustrate, within the influence of Butler's critiques of the subject and the politics of representation, feminists started to produce a feminist vocabulary that opens space for identities outside the binary gender system. This could be considered as the contribution of the queer theory to the feminist movement. In particular, the necessity of a feminism that would not exclude transgender people is widely embraced. Notwithstanding however there was the trans and intersex community, who directed criticism at the queer theory expressing their need for a clear gender identity and genuine recognition based on that identity. It is the

very example of the dynamics of the theory and politics on how they affect and reshape each other, even in seemingly contradictory ways.

Throughout my dissertation, I have tried to present the course of feminism along with its internal tensions and contradictions. In this adventure, where theory and politics have affected and changed each other, we have seen that feminists sometimes holding contentious positions enter in various debates concerning the women condition. It is also very much related to the extraordinary place of contemporary feminism within the modernism vs. post-modernism debate. Feminism as a radical movement questions the premises of modernism, the epistemological foundations of Western thought, as post-modernism does. However, feminism is also historically and theoretically a modernist movement including both its early forms based on the idea of liberal humanism and its socialist/Marxist versions. The contradiction between its modernist values and post-modernist argumentations precludes a classification of feminism either being purely modernist or post-modernist. And its subject as well should be thought within this ambiguity (Hekman, 2016, p.12-13). Contemporary feminism claims that this subject is both constructed (from a post-modernist viewpoint) and has an active political agency (from a modernist viewpoint). Thus, gender is both the outcome of the representation, but at the same time the very process of the self-representation (Lauretis, 1987). There is the constructed character of the notion of woman, and at the same time women are historical beings. However, this ambiguity within the gender and woman subject should not be taken as an obstruction; contrary it is the condition of feminism, where its strength comes from, which makes itself a critical, productive, challenging and stimulating pursuit both as theory and practice.

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