



Gender and Nation

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Abstract

This paper presents a comprehensive review of *Gender and Nation*, an invaluable academic contribution authored by the pioneer in the field of social sciences, Nira Yuval-Davis. Conducted through a gender analysis lens, this review thoroughly examines Yuval-Davis's substantial academic legacy. Yuval-Davis's insights emphatically underscore the heightened relevance of such a perspective when dissecting intricate issues related to nation and nationalism. The review initiates by positing a pivotal question and subsequently accentuates the gaps present within the current body of literature that addresses the intersection of nation and gender. Moreover, the review highlights the inherent worth of Yuval-Davis's work by meticulously exploring its implications for themes encompassing women, femininity, men, masculinity, and their intricate connections with the construct of the nation. This exploration distinctly underscores the pivotal role of gender in shaping and influencing these multifaceted aspects. Consequently, the review expounds upon how our identities as gendered individuals often relegate us to a subordinate position, ultimately situating us with paramount significance in the intricate tapestry of the nation.

Keywords: Nation, gender, nationalism, citizenship, biological reproduction.

Cinsiyet ve Millet

Öz

Bu çalışma, sosyal bilimler alanında öncü isimlerden biri olan Nira Yuval-Davis tarafından kaleme alınmış *Cinsiyet ve Millet* isimli değerli akademik katkının kapsamlı bir incelemesini sunmaktadır. Toplumsal cinsiyet analizi perspektifinden gerçekleştirilen bu inceleme, Yuval-Davis'in etkileyici akademik mirasını ayrıntılı bir şekilde ele almaktadır. Yuval-Davis'in görüşleri, ulus ve milliyetçilikle ilgili karmaşık konuları incelerken böyle bir bakış açısının ne kadar önemli olduğunu altını çizmektedir. İnceleme, önemli bir soru ortaya atarak başlamakta ve ardından ulus ve toplumsal cinsiyetin kesişimini ele alan mevcut literatürdeki boşlukları vurgulamaktadır. Ayrıca inceleme, Yuval-Davis'in çalışmasının doğasında bulunan değeri özenle ele alarak, kadınlar, kadınlık, erkekler, erkeklik ve bunların ulusun oluşumuyla karmaşık ilişkilerini kapsayan temalarda nasıl sonuçlar doğurabileceğini ayrıntılı bir şekilde araştırmaktadır. Bu keşif, toplumsal cinsiyetin bu çok yönlü yönleri şekillendirme ve etkilemedeki önemli rolünün altını belirgin bir şekilde çizmektedir. Sonuç olarak inceleme, cinsiyetlendirilmiş bireyler olarak kimliklerimizin bizi nasıl ikincil bir konuma düşürdüğünü ve nihayetinde ulusun karmaşık dokusunda bizi nasıl son derece önemli bir konuma yerleştirdiğini açıklamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ulus, toplumsal cinsiyet, milliyetçilik, yurttaşlık, biyolojik yeniden üretim.

Gender & Nation

Nira Yuval-Davis



Yuval-Davis, N. (1997). *Gender and Nation*. London: Sage Publication. 157 pages, ISBN: 0 8039 8663 7.

Should nation and nationalism be seen as something masculine? Some academic studies (Elias, 2008; Mosse 1996; Nagel 1998) can be used to reveal the role of masculinity in the relationship between nationalism and gender. Gender relations and the necessary attention to women and womanhood seem excluded from the analysis. As Manchanda and de Haan note, it should not be surprising that women are rarely brought up in discussions of nationalism given the widespread belief that “*women are inferior to men*” (2018, p. 91). However, this does not claim that it is a fixed characteristic of nationalism studies. In fact, this conceptualization can be observed in the narratives, discussions, and assumptions of some recent studies, in which the lack of gender lenses becomes visible in the evaluation of nation.

Sociologist Nira Yuval-Davis highlights the importance of paying enough attention to gender analysis in her book, *Gender and Nation*, by claiming that the ignorance of gender relations has

led to women as a category hidden in the theorisations of knowledge reproduction pertaining to nation as well as nationalism. Yuval-Davis then, states that

It is women -and not (just) the bureaucracy and the intelligentsia- who reproduce nations, biologically, culturally and symbolically. Why, then, are women usually hidden in the various theorisation of the nationalist phenomena? (1997, p. 2)

From this standpoint, she encourages the reader to reconsider women’s positions to emphasize the importance of gender analysis, beginning with her own experiences. Moreover, the author provides a critical evaluation of nation as well as belonging to the nation by questioning the positionality of women as a category left invisible historically and politically, which can be traced back to early conceptualisation of the notion(s) of nation. In order to exemplify this point, she analytically reviews and critiques early studies on the social construction of public and private spheres. In other words, these studies acknowledged as classical theories conceptualising men as close to nurture, and women as nature, which can be categorised as naturalising approaches in gender studies literature, are critically evaluated in her analysis. In this analysis, she explores the stereotypical representation of men and women in the Western narratives. Therefore, her critical starting point can be seen as a challenge to the Western knowledge reproduction that conceptualises women as a unique category without providing enough evidence to claim its homogeneity.

This book addresses the relationality between nation and gender by aiming to show how women have been affected by (the process of) national projects and at the same time have had influence on these projects. In order to show this, the book is divided into six chapters. These are namely “*Theorising Gender and Nation*”, “*Women and the Biological Reproduction of the Nation*”, “*Cultural Reproduction and Gender*

Relations", "Citizenship and Difference", "Gendered Militaries, Gendered Wars", and "Women, Ethnicity and Empowerment: Towards Transversal Politics".

In chapter one, Yuval-Davis questions the historical theorization of nation and state to demonstrate that women have always been at the center of the issue, preventing its conceptualization as a new phenomenon. The following chapters provide some case studies that offer the reader a better understanding of the close relationship between gender and nation. Her analysis, as she notes (1997, p. 3), is based on deconstructionism and positions itself apart from postmodernism.

As a contribution to discussions on gender and nation, Yuval-Davis offers fresh insights into the relationship between gender, nation, nationhood, and nationalism. In the analysis, Yuval-Davis includes both women and men in the gendered exemplification of the nation, aiming to reflect the gender relations between them. As she clarifies, the main aim of the book is to promote an analytical evaluation of a

gendered understanding of nations and nationalisms, by examining systematically the crucial contribution of gender relations into several major dimensions of nationalist projects: national reproduction, national culture and national citizenship, as well as national conflicts and wars. (1997, p. 3)

By distancing herself from stereotypical representations, she frames women within a broader context of heterogeneity. She highlights this heterogeneity by considering women's diverse classes, races, ethnicities, and religions. This is evident in her analysis of biological reproduction and its relation to the nation, where she references *Volknation* in the second chapter, and cultural reproduction and the nation in the third chapter, *Kulturnation*. As discussed in the noted chapters, women have been seen as a key element within discussions on reproduction rights. The importance attributed to the role of women as biological reproducers in the nation-state process has been equated with women's freedom (Coşar, 2016, p. 102-103).

Evaluating reproduction in terms of biology and culture, and its representation through women, leads to the homogenization of women as a singular category. Focusing on the centrality of women enabling the continuity of society and dealing critically with some political implementations pertaining to forced sterilisations in evaluation of biological reproduction can be risky. This is due to the fact that it might serve to conceptualisation of women as mothers within a reconstruction reinforcing the heteronormative assumptions. Women are forced to take place in contexts that are contradictory within the framework of their assigned roles and that would hinder the independence of feminism. While women are portrayed as the main actor of nationalist movements with their roles as mothers, warriors, workers and educators, on the other hand, they are made objects that are forced to express themselves within the framework of cultural limitations (Kandiyoti, 2015, p. 169).

However, as Yuval-Davis critically and analytically engaged with the issue of reproduction by demonstrating that gendered assumptions of biological reproduction that naturalise women bodies must be challenged within an awareness that shows how the personal is political or vice versa. It seems more than a necessary because women and their bodies have been used for national projects when it is required. What the author shows us is that key dimensions such as ethnicity, race, religion and sexuality, playing a crucial role in understanding the issue of reproduction, must be counted in order to avoid the authentication and essentialisation of women.

This prompts the reader to question who truly belongs to a nation. What is missing in the discussion on citizenship? The following chapter, Chapter four, appears to address these concerns. It explores the relationship between individual as a citizen and the state. However, her conceptualisation

of citizenship transcends the dichotomy of individuality and collectivity. This is because the construction of citizenship has been analysed within the differentiation in terms of gender, race, ethnicity and class in order to show how one's citizenship can be either privileged or subordinated.

After critically examining citizenship, she extends the discussion to include gendered perspectives on militaries and wars, highlighting their significant relation to the conceptualisations of womanhood and manhood. As a masculinised duty or responsibility of citizenship, military service must be analysed how women as well as children have been categorised as requiring the protection of men. Naturalising and essentialising war as masculine, which, in turn, frames women within the notions pertaining to peace are critically pointed out in the evaluation of masculinised militaries and wars. Furthermore, in the case of women's participation to the masculinised war, it continues to be shaped within gendered role divisions. She notes that

[...] while women are 'allowed' to a lesser or greater extent to fulfil 'men's roles', some sexual division of labour continues to operate even when technological innovations in modern warfare have deemed biologicistic rationalisations of women's exclusion mostly obsolete. (1997, p. 114)

It appears that militarized images of both men and women have been gendered, reinforcing gendered characteristics of the issue. The author's perspective is notably reasonable, challenging the identification of men's and women's roles during militarized war periods. This challenge prompts an exploration of how these roles have been gendered over an extended period.

By addressing these pivotal aspects concerning the relationship between nation and gender, the author presents an opportunity to construct a political feminist unity referred to as "transversal politics" (p. 125). The writer advocates for a discourse of transversalism, contrasting it with identity politics and universalism, both of which perpetuate homogenized assumptions that serve as tools of 'othering.' Transversalism gains significance by rejecting the self-centered process in comprehending objectified bodies and by opposing the homogenization of these bodies. There is ample evidence to assert that the author's aim is to empower a unity that encompasses multiplicity among racialized, gendered, and sexualized bodies. This empowerment seeks to challenge the established power relations within the deconstruction process of these power relations. Nevertheless, the accomplishment of her proposal appears to require time.

Nira Yuval-Davis's seminal work, *Gender and Nation*, constitutes a notable and valuable addition to scholarly investigations of the intricate interrelationship between gender and nationalism. Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations inherent in the study. The perpetuation of heteronormative discourses within the study leads to the marginalization of non-binary gender relations as a peripheral phenomenon. Consequently, the work concentrates on conventional gender dichotomies and heteronormative assumptions. Despite recognizing variations among women arising from factors such as class, race, ethnicity, and religion, the book remains predominantly confined to a binary framework. As a result, it inadequately addresses the intricate intersections that arise at the confluence of gender and nation.

To enhance *Gender and Nation*, it is recommended to broaden the gender perspective to encompass the experiences of non-binary and transgender individuals, to conduct a more comprehensive exploration of women's agency, and provide practical instances of cross-political application. These proposed enhancements will empower the book to offer a more nuanced and potent analysis of the multifaceted interplay between gender and nation within the realm of academic discourse.

Notwithstanding its inherent limitations, this pioneering manuscript stands as a cornerstone in the realm of scholarly literature. It offers an indispensable analytical, evaluative, and theoretical bedrock, catering not only to scholars but also to both undergraduate and postgraduate learners within the disciplines of Sociology, Race and Ethnic Studies, Women's Studies, Gender Studies, and to those with a vested interest in the intricate domains of nationalism, gender, and nationhood.

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