

## **AGAINST IDENTITY CRISIS IN FEMINIST THEORIES: THE EGALITARIAN AND DEMOCRATIC LEGACY OF JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU REVISITED**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In analyzing the feminist scholarship on the Western political thought tradition in general and feminist appropriation of the canons of political philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau in particular, this article aims to highlight and reassess the current identity crisis in feminist theory arising from the everlasting dispute over its subject, namely the category of ‘woman,’ and multiplicity of the subject positions of the ‘woman’. By detecting the problem as a nominalist effect in feminist politics, this article searches a remedy for feminist theoretical fragmentation from within the political thought tradition and revisits the democratic and egalitarian legacy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who is also deemed as the arch-misogynist and yet wrote about gender issues extensively and produced a rich discourse on moral, sexual and political reform by directly addressing women as the primary subject for the establishment of a well-ordered society.

Keywords: Feminism, Woman, Political Thought Tradition, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, General Will, Democracy.

## **FEMİNİST KURAMLARIN KİMLİK KRİZİNE KARŞI JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU’NUN EŞİTLİKÇİ VE DEMOKRATİK MİRASINI YENİDEN DÜŞÜNMEK**

### **ÖZET**

Genelde Batı siyasi düşünceler geleneği ve özelde siyaset filozofu Jean Jacques Rousseau’ya ait literatürün feminist alımlanması üzerine oluşmuş feminist araştırmaları analiz eden bu makalenin amacı, feminist kuramın günümüzde karşılaştığı, kuramın öznesi olan ‘kadın’ kategorisi ve onun özne konumlarının çoğulluğuyla ilgili bitmek bilmeyen uyumsuzluktan kaynaklanan kimlik krizine dikkat çekmeyi ve bu durumu yeniden düşünmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Sorunu feminist siyasete nominalist etki olarak ortaya koyan makale feminizmin kuramsal düzeyde fragmanlaşmasına siyasi düşünceler geleneği içinden bir çare aramakta ve bu itibarla Jean Jacques Rousseau’nun demokratik ve eşitlikçi felsefi mirasını yeniden ele almaktadır.

Rousseau aynı zamanda en belli başlı kadın düşmanı kabul edilir; ne var ki, toplumsal cinsiyet meseleleri hakkında yoğun olarak yazmış, iyi düzenlenmiş bir toplumun kurulmasının temel öznesi olarak kadınlara doğrudan seslenmiş ve kadınlar dolayısıyla bir ahlaki, cinsel ve siyasi dönüşüm üzerine zengin bir söylem üretmiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Feminizm, Kadın, Siyasi Düşünceler Geleneği, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Genel İrade, Demokrasi.

### **Introduction**

In the last decades the dispute over the contested character of the concept of woman has dominated feminist theories (Riley 1988; Butler 1990; Moi 1999; Dietz 2003)<sup>1</sup>. We argue that the framework of the dispute has been drawn by `the nominalist effect` in feminist politics, which aims to eliminate feminist essentialism. Nominalist effect in feminist politics seems to destabilize the unitary political subject of women's liberation and emancipation movements, and questions any collective subjectivity such as `we` qualifying all women or `we` qualifying all feminists in order to deconstruct their abstract and universalist effects. For some feminist scholars, these destabilizations and questions are empowering for feminist politics which has been marginalized by the `totalizing perspectives within both the hegemonic culture of liberalism<sup>2</sup> and within certain version of Marxism<sup>3</sup>`. That is to say, postmodern critique<sup>3</sup> on the universalist and foundationalist claims of both Marxism and liberalism goes hand in hand with feminist claim for the importance of the historically specific, contextual and partial character of judgments, experiences and truth claims (Nicholson, 1992:59).

Others, however, argue that feminist adoption of nominalism `has a deleterious effect of de-gendering` feminist political analysis by asking some significant questions which reflect their suspicion about nominalist assumptions such as: `How can we ground a feminist politics that deconstructs the female subject?` (Alcoff, 1988:419) and `If "woman" is just an empty category, then why am I afraid to walk alone at night?` (Downs, 1993:414)<sup>4</sup>. In a similar vein Toril Moi criticizes certain reluctant feminist theories that avoid to speak for women because of the fear of essentialism about knowing what a woman is. She argues that various forms of contemporary feminisms lead to a kind of inability and powerlessness especially by not understanding women's concerns. In such a context what is urgent for women is `a feminism committed to seeking justice

and equality for women' (Moi, 1999:9). While the dispute among feminists seems to reach an impasse, Linda Alcoff identifies the impasse as a kind of 'identity crisis' of feminist theories.

The identity crisis of feminist theories then can be clarified as follows: for feminist theories— nominalist or not— the most crucial concept is 'woman'<sup>5</sup> and yet formulating a definite or stable explanation of woman is impossible because of the historical transformation and multiplicity of women's experience as well as of everlasting male supremacy dominating social and political life. More significantly the epistemological problem is delimiting feminist theories as well on the ground that theorizing in the name of women and speaking for women requires having genuine knowledge on women. However, the epistemological field has also been dominated by male supremacy. As is expressed by Alcoff,

*Every source of knowledge about women has been contaminated with misogyny and sexism. No matter where we turn-to historical documents, philosophical constructions, social scientific statistics, introspection, or daily practices the mediation of female bodies into constructions of woman is dominated by misogynist discourse. For feminists, who must transcend this discourse, it appears we have nowhere to turn (1988:405-406).*

As a matter of fact, the canons of the Western political thought have been significant source to turn for feminist politics, yet their feminist appropriation has never been an easy task given their predominantly anti-woman character. However, at a time when feminist theories are faced with identity crisis, comprehending the canons with a new perspective and underlining the empowering strands of the Western political thought tradition can be a relief for feminist theories. A recent argument has been developed by Linda Zerilli, who is also well aware of the exclusionary language of the canonical texts. She underlines that without regarding the political and philosophical differences amongst political philosophers, almost all of them consider women as the 'perennial outsider to public life,' as the 'foreigner' and the 'radical social other' against whom political philosophers centralize men as political figures and citizens (Zerilli, 1994:1).

Although women are outsider of the political thought tradition, Linda Zerilli offers four different ways of integrating feminist theory with political thought tradition:

- To expose the absence of women from, or their denigrated status in canonical discussions of politics,
- To integrate women into the very categories of political membership from which they had been originally excluded,

- To show that women cannot be so integrated because their exclusion is constitutive of those very categories,

- To draw the consequences of this impossible inclusion and reconstitute the categories of politics anew (Zerilli, 2006:106-107).

Here rather than embracing one of these assertive projects to integrate women into politics and find a remedy for the extreme fragmentation of feminist theories and politics, we try to reconsider political thought tradition and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's philosophy in terms of all these projects at once as to the absence of women, the possibility of inclusion of women, the constitutive difficulty of integrating women into political philosophical categories as well as thinking feminist politics anew in the lights of political thought tradition. This will be a modest task of finding a way to out from the feminist theoretical impasse and crisis.

### **Women's Exclusion from Politics: Feminist Critique on Political Thought Tradition**

Feminist scholars of political theory have successfully underlined the patriarchal character of the Western political thought tradition. Male supremacy in the tradition has paved the way for the exclusion of women as political members, political actors and political thinkers. When women have a niche to reflect their thoughts and act politically for the betterment of the polities they live in, these reflections and actions remain invisible and unacknowledged thanks to the gender blind character of the tradition. In fact, feminist scholars detect a more severe failure in the tradition, an everlasting misogyny, which not only forbids women to enter into the public political sphere but also stigmatizes feminine political effect as the cause of political disorder (Okin 1979a; Elshtain 1981; Griffiths and Whitford 1988; Pateman 1989; Lloyd 1993; Zerilli 2006).

Among others, Susan Moller Okin in her pioneering book titled *Women in Western Political Thought* investigated the possibility of the political thought tradition to integrate women 'in its subject matter, on the same terms as men' (Okin, 1979a:274). She finds out that except for Plato's *Republic*, the canons discriminate against women by exaggerating women's biological difference (women's nature) which is arguably suitable for the apolitical private realm rather than political public sphere. In *Republic* the 'abolition of the private sphere of life, the control of

reproduction, and the socialization of child-rearing and all domestic function result in the male and female guardians being both similarly educated and similarly employed' (Okin, 1979a:274). Accordingly then Okin is well aware of the fact that in order to achieve a feminist reconstruction of the canons for having an egalitarian gender relations a 'radical restructuring of the family' is inevitable. And it is obvious that without the transformation of the socio-political order in general the restructuring of the family cannot occur. In a nutshell Okin underlines that the Western political thought tradition consists of the reflections of 'men, for men and about men' (Okin, 1979b: 394).

In her famous work titled *The Sexual Contract* Pateman argues that the most prevalent stories explaining modern political life are known as contract theories. Contract theories including Jean-Jacques Rousseau's reveal the establishment of 'a new civil society and a new form of political right; justify the 'binding authority of the state and law'; and more importantly provide a narrative of freedom (Pateman, 1988:1-2). What is more significant however is that something is missing in these freedom narratives for they hide the submission of women. In her argument the social contract provides men with freedom, a freedom including men's domination over women and their right to equal sexual access to women. In other words, social contract theories are essentially sexual contracts establishing modern form of patriarchy that guarantees men's freedom and equality, which is fraternal not universal (Pateman, 1988: 3-4).

Although most political philosophers are remarkable by their differentiating doses of misogyny, Jean-Jacques Rousseau is considered as one of the most expressive one in his anti-woman discourse, the arch-misogynist, particularly when it comes to women's political role in a well-ordered society. Referring to his ideas on politics and the arts, Carole Pateman reveals Rousseau's misogyny by citing his infamous words: 'never has a people perished from an excess of wine; all perish from the disorder of women' (Pateman, 1989:17). According to Pateman Jean-Jacques Rousseau is not the sole political philosopher to deem women 'as a permanently subversive force within the political order'. Rather the so-called disorder of women has ancient, mythological and religious origins. However, she adds, 'it is only in the modern world that 'the disorder of women' constitutes a general social and political problem' (Pateman, 1989:17). Accordingly then it has been one of the main tasks of feminist scholars to unearth and struggle against misogyny, which becomes pervasive in modern politics and political thought tradition.

While unearthing the misogynist discourse in the canons of the Western political thought tradition, feminist scholars do not disregard the value and importance of the canons. They still read the canons in order to articulate the egalitarian canonical vision with the vision of women on gender equality. In this framework, the legacy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau attracts ambiguous feminist reactions on the ground that Rousseau is both considered as a misogynist and democratic egalitarian political philosopher. Jean Bethke Elshtain emphasizes the importance of Rousseau for contemporary political thinking in general and feminist politics in particular by arguing `From Mary Wollstonecraft's rejoinders in 1792 to contemporary attacks on Rousseau as a misogynist, his work has provoked feminist thinkers` (Elshtain, 1992:37). As a rich and different political philosopher, it seems, she claims, to rethink Rousseau's arguments `without fear of repeating oneself` (Elshtain, 1992:37). Accordingly then by revisiting Rousseau through analyzing the contemporary scholarship on his canon dealing with themes of equality, well-ordered society, autonomy, and women and family, this article aims to revitalize both our democratic vision, which turns out to be a cliché for a well-ordered polity in a similar vein to the definition of Adam Przeworski as the `only game in town` as well as the feminist vision, which is overwhelmingly fragmented to the extent that it lost its common subject, the woman.

### **Women's Inclusion into Politics through Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Thought**

One of the most striking characteristics of the Western political thought tradition in terms of its patriarchal constitution is invisibility of women. Most of the canonical political philosophers do not theorize in terms of women's presence and they ignore women's contribution to the idea of a well-ordered polity and a good society. Most of the canonical texts do not hail to women for obviously they are not written for women (Okin, 1979b: 394). Multiple exclusions of women from the Western political thought tradition has led certain feminists to set feminism and Western political thought at odds with each other. It has been considered that if a woman is in the camp of feminism, she should have nothing to do with political thought (Elshtain, 1992). Despite their problematic qualities in terms of women's question, which require serious re-interpretations and revisions, not all canonical texts are exclusionary. In this regard Rousseau's writings constitute a significant exception for speaking directly to women, which became apparent in the popularity of

Rousseau among women's readers of his time. Many feminists share a common understanding about Rousseau by observing that his major works deal with general concerns of gender and sexual politics. Among others Lynda Lange brings a more challenging argument in interpreting Rousseau's work as follows: 'Rousseau addresses almost every social issue that contemporary feminism is concerned with....With regard to sexual equality, it is possible to turn Rousseau on his head, in manner of speaking' (Lange, 2002:24-25).

Some feminists on the other hand find it futile to identify 'pro-woman' connotations in Rousseau. For example, Penny Weis and Anne Harper in their article titled 'Rousseau's Political Defense of the Sex-rolled Family' argue that there are more significant tasks for feminist scholars than 'reconstructing the arguments of someone such as Rousseau—an eighteenth century, white, male, European writing in defense of enforced sexual differentiation' (Lange, 2002:42). And yet, Rousseau's works, especially *Julie* and *Book I of Emile* received passionate response from many eighteenth-century women readers. Underlining women's appeal to Rousseau can be tied to the fact that Rousseau recognizes and respects the value of feminine ideals such as domesticity and sensibility. In addition, at a time when marriages were arranged and adultery was common, many women shared the necessity for moral alteration passionately expressed in Rousseau's works. The feminist contestation over the role of women arises here: to what extent can the moral reform imagined by Rousseau lead to the empowerment of women?

In fact, one of the main reasons Rousseau is seen as the arch misogynist is his overemphasis on sexual differences, which is believed to pay the way for the subordination of women to men, maintenance of patriarchal family and strengthening of paternal supremacy. That is to say, Rousseau seems to present the patriarchal family as natural, inevitable and even desirable on the ground that his political vision for a well-ordered society composed of free and equal people is not extended to women. On the contrary, the political exclusion of women, their confinement into the private sphere and their submission to men are prerequisite for the establishment of what Rousseau envisions as just political community where the primary values of his political philosophy including liberty, virtue, and earthly felicity are animated. Okin further claims that according to the Rousseau vision, women are not powerful in the private sphere because equality is in no sense extended to women without regarding their public or domestic qualities: because of his firm belief in the patriarchal family, Rousseau did not believe that

woman should be any more self-governing in her private life than in the public realm. A wife, he asserts, must “keep her person always under the absolute law of her husband,” and any power that she wields within the family is to be acquired by her manipulation of her husband to do what she wants-by her use, specifically, of her status as “arbiter of (his) pleasures” (Okin 1979b:410).

Women’s so-called public and private powerlessness in Rousseau’s political philosophy can also be tied to his argument on women’s periodical inactivity arising from their reproduction function. Rousseau also believed that husbands are obliged to control the conducts of their wives in order to guarantee their children’s legitimacy. Another significant point which is one of the central themes of Rousseau’s thought is about will. That is to say, Rousseau is considered as one of the main philosophers who opposes to the division of will as it is deployed in his argument on the concept of the general will. Accordingly, as Okin clarifies the reason why women as wives cannot have power in family by arguing “Authority in the family cannot be divided between the mother and the father, Rousseau argues, because in every division of opinion there must be a single will that decides” (Okin, 1979b:411).

A significant Rousseau scholar Judith Shklar shares a similar argument by underlining the importance of paternal supremacy for Rousseau, though she states that Rousseau does not see any inequality in a perfect family. Shklar also argues that inequality arising from husbands’ paternal supremacy is not recognized, because Rousseau does not think that it creates any emotional miseries he detected in other sorts of inequalities. In this sense, only real form of inequality appears in the domestic sphere when servants and workers are hired. Otherwise, Rousseau believes the mother and the father is equal: in fact, the mother is the dominating power in family. To be more precise, Shklar observes that for Rousseau the family is the only social community that “is not subject to the evils of inequality” (1966:43).

For Jean Bethke Elshtain, Rousseau’s political philosophy in no sense makes or pictures women powerless. On the contrary, women and men have power in different forms and scopes. The education of Emile and Sophie as the ideal type of man and woman respectively draws “strong markers of sex differences.” The strong markers of sexual differences however are not meant to keeping women in their traditional place, as certain feminist scholars argue, but rather to maintain an order of sexual interdependence based upon sexual differentiation. Here, Elshtain also acknowledges that only men have an access to the legitimate or formal authority in a public sense. Women’s power and authority on the other hand is informal and cultural (Elshtain, 1992).

As a matter of fact, feminist fear of `Manichean sexual division` of the public and the private spheres of life stemming from ancient understanding of Aristotelian politics seems to be perpetuated by Jean Jacques Rousseau's politics which targets a moral reform for transforming social order and political power. Within the Aristotelian political paradigm arising from the *polis* is based upon certain dichotomies of personalities and moralities sustaining gender relationships. In this regard, public political persons are responsible and rational men enjoying full citizenship of the *polis* life as well as having separate private personalities. Private, in other words, non-political personalities are considered to have lesser rationalities (Elshtain, 1992:456). Furthermore according to Aristotelian understanding, those who do not participate into the life of polis, that is the political life of the polis, are considered as idiot, which is a term Elshtain contends is extended to the women too because in the Aristotelian schema all women are `exclusively private people` (Elshtain, 1992:455).

Feminist scholars emphasize that the Aristotelian typologies on the public and the private in different forms and discourses still affect political theories and practices. Elshtain more precisely underlines the details of the Aristotelian power-politics paradigm as it gains a different modern form, while keeping its connection of politics and morality. She states that the public sphere connotes both to politics and (im)morality or rather a different kind of public morality and public good. That is to say, the standards of the moral conduct are completely different in the public and the private. For this reason, `a bad man can be a good politician` as well as a man can both be a good citizen and a good private person. On the other hand, `a good` woman makes a `bad` citizen.` Women have always been judged in terms of the standards of the private morality. If they are good citizen or good public personalities this means they are not good women in private. The paradox is that if women cannot be good in the private, they have no chance to be good in the public. Accordingly then, the private is moral, non-political sphere and in a sense feminine sphere. The private contains feelings and moral sentiments and is out of the public standard of judgments and rationalities. Women are considered to be `superior` in the private only because they are mired the vices of the public. That is to say, their very inferiority in the public guarantees their private superiority (Elshtain, 1992:460-461).

This line of thinking is directly connected to the citizenship status of women. Given the gender inequality and exclusion of women from the public in most of the canonical texts and political typologies stemming from the canons, feminist scholars show the way the so-called

neutral political category of citizen is nothing but the universalization of the interests of men. Making good judgments, political rights and public responsibilities that construct simultaneously both the citizen and the man overtly discriminate against women. Lori Marso further states that `Even when women are allowed the rights and responsibilities of citizenship formerly reserved for men, underlying sexual politics degrade what has been labeled as the feminine. Reason is upheld as male, objective, and universal; passion is pejoratively described as female, particular, and tending toward perspective` (Marso, 1998:437).

How to construe Rousseau's political moral reform given the predominant picture of the political thought tradition informing gender relations as well as creating bifurcated public and private spheres? It is obvious that Rousseau advocates differentiating sex roles for women and men. According to feminist scholars Weis and Harper, Rousseau's understanding on men and women places at the center of his politics. In Rousseau's political philosophy `the private and public affect each other in numerous and central ways—that women, children, sexuality, families etc. matter to politics as much as do the actions of men in the assembly` (Weis and Harper, 2002:45-46). Apparently there is a methodological affinity in understanding the political power relations and organizations of society. This line of thought is very similar to the arguments of feminists who criticize the separation of the public and the private. When spreading the motto `personal is political` feminists are well aware of the fact that the personal, intimate and thus the private has political connotations and public consequences. Weis and Harper further claim in interpreting Rousseau that given the significance of the private for public, `Rousseau to a great extent construct the private with an eye to its political repercussions. The private becomes the parent and the servant of the public: sex roles serve political ends and teach us lessons that give birth to certain desirable social possibilities` (Weis and Harper, 2002: 45-46). Then what are the political ends and desirable social possibilities in terms of Rousseau's political philosophy?

### **Looking anew, Reconstituting the categories of politics anew**

It is usually argued that Jean Jacques Rousseau as an Enlightenment philosopher had great influence on the French Revolution as well as his arguments had obvious connotations for republican and democratic politics (Miller, 1984:1)<sup>6</sup>. Some scholars however criticize Rousseau for being the advocator of totalitarianism and political tyranny. As is widely known Rousseau presents the story of humanity starting with liberty and equality but ended up by civilized

enslavement and inequality. The works of Rousseau are meant to reconcile the gap between the human soul and the human society by both educating democratic citizens<sup>7</sup> and defining the establishment of a well-ordered society through a social contract. In doing so, Rousseau links particular will of a person to the general will of all so that all members of the society `submit to a law` they have given to themselves (Bloom, 1978). According to Rousseau perfect politics requires a `union of will and understanding` (Riley, 1991:56). The concept of general will is one of the most misunderstood concepts of Rousseau for it is believed it paved the way for the totalitarianism, ironically perhaps deeming Rousseau as `totalitarian democrat`. Kateb argues that the attacks on Rousseau as totalitarian can be tied to the scholar Talmon<sup>8</sup> however, much earlier than him, one of the most significant readings of Rousseau in a critical manner comes from Benjamin Constant defining Rousseau as `the friend of despotism` (Kateb, 1961:519).

Here a close scrutiny of Constant's arguments is crucial in understanding main political philosophy of Rousseau. Constant criticizes Rousseau for being despotic on the ground that Rousseau idealizes what Constant defines as the freedom of Ancients. Rousseau's arguments on a well-ordered society established through social contract would lead to political tyranny if they are appropriated by moderns (Brint, 1985:324). For Constant, appropriating ancient freedoms in the modern times is politically paralyzing because Ancients sacrificed their private interdependence which was a minor sacrifice for gaining more freedoms in terms of public freedoms. On the other hand, if moderns follow Rousseau's arguments this means they would lose their `individual liberties` and as a result they would be suppressed by political tyranny. Given that all forms of political tyrannies are based upon the arbitrary use of political power, and in modern times this arbitrariness is tied to the unlimited power and sovereignty, Rousseau's concept of general will as well as his admiration for the `austere republicans of antiquity` unleashes tyrannical political claims that require sacrificing all fundamental/individual freedoms in modern times (Brint, 1985:327).

Apparently not only Rousseau scholars but the very arguments of Rousseau seem to bring into being contradictory results particularly at a time when modern times witnessing modernity's radical ramifications. We argue that although most of the scholarship on Jean Jacques Rousseau starts from the premise that Rousseau is characterized by his contradictions, it is crucial to underline the rich political discourse he has produced for modern politics. As a matter of fact, Benjamin Barber clarifies differentiating interpretations of Rousseau as follows: His arguments

for democracy have been labeled totalitarian, his love of solitude has been given the name misanthropy, his educational schemes have been branded manipulative and authoritarian, his condemnation of urban society has been construed as the revenge of the social misfit, and his radical individualism has been understood as rationalized paranoia (Barber, 1978:79).

Underlying the contradictions and paradoxes of Rousseau that result in various interpretations is in fact the very human condition in modernity. Then seemingly paradoxical arguments of Rousseau must be contextualized in terms of modern politics and rearticulated in a dialectical way. In this sense, the concept of general will can be interpreted in terms of not losing individual freedoms but receiving common good. As quoted by Kateb, Rousseau states `...individual interest always tends to privilege, while the common interest always tends to equality.` In addition to the claim for equality of all, the general will `wills justice` for all (Kateb, 1961:527). This has nothing to do with losing modern individual freedoms. This can be supported by Rousseau's admiration for public festival as opposed to the theatre, where the former is considered in line with public political participation without losing one's own individuality. Another Rousseau scholar Brint elsewhere argues that Rousseau supports public festivals instead of theatre on the ground that just as in political participation having part in public festivals in Rousseau's account make citizen represent only themselves, fill only their own roles and speak only in their own names. As quoted by Brint in public festivals `everyone lives in the greatest familiarity; everyone is equal and no one forgets himself` By way such participations to public events, which underline the importance of active political participation, citizen bear in mind `their commitments to social harmony` (Brint, 1988:630). For Benjamin Barber as well the concept of the general will may best be comprehended as a `device which, embodying the principle of rational disinterestedness rediscovers...natural powers of compassion.` Accordingly social contract provides conditions under which `self-interested beings can act disinterestedly and thus virtuously in a fashion that curbs their private interests without compromising their natural self-love(amour de soi)` (Barber, 1978:79). Appreciation of virtue as well as his inclinations for human goodness makes Rousseau a distinct political philosopher amongst the Enlightenment figures. This line of argument is supported by William Gairdner as well: Romantic thinking of the type represented by Rousseau produced a tightly linked chain of ideas: from glorification of the child and natural goodness, to glorification of the common people, to glorification of democracy as the collective self-expression of goodness. That is why we may say that modern

democracy and its progressivism rest in important respects on the Romantic spirit, which, in politics at least, has become a modern secular expression of the ancient millenarian impulse to produce the Kingdom of Heaven on earth (Gairdner, 1999:88).

Rousseau's political imagination then combines reason with sentiment, public with private and individual freedom with public justice and equality. Rather than leading to totalitarianism and subjugating political tyrannies and elimination of modern individual freedoms, he opens a way for realization of a unity of equal people without giving up individual difference and autonomy. Rousseau's perspective when comprehended in every respect, does not lead to the abolition and absorbing of the `particular` by the `universal`; his well-ordered society does not imply the suppression of difference in order to actualize a tyrannical form of equality. Scholars who are nurtured by the fear of totalitarianism detect tyrannical and despotic connotations in every form of quest for social unity and universalism. In this sense, Rousseau's ideal of general will, his defense of republican and democratic commonalty, and his demand for social harmony are all considered as the reflection of his claim for unity/identity and as threats to plurality, diversity and tolerance. Kevin Inston in this respect reminds the question posed by Anthony Arblaster who supports Rousseau's understanding of unity expressed in the concept of general will as follows: ...these critics do not always ask themselves whether any society may not need a degree of unity in order to be a society at all, or how much diversity even a liberal society can tolerate without falling apart?` And Inston rightly argues that in a condition of `unbridled plurality, where particular wills pursue their interests without reference to the universal, does not engender diversity and difference but actually jeopardizes them, since in the absence of any collective will, there is nothing to stop one particular group from trying to acquire political dominance at the expense of all others` (Inston, 2009:556).

Accordingly then, Rousseau's critique on the interest-based particular wills can be extended to the divergent and proliferating arguments on the impossibility of defining a common subjectivity for women in feminist politics. Rousseau's general will can be interpreted as a way of producing a collective will in feminist politics for creating a unified political action to eliminate equality and justice problems of women. This does not monopolize each and every woman's unique and authentic self into an imperialistic universalism. This only claims a collective will for all women.

### **Conclusion**

Given this framework that re-evaluated differentiating interpretations of Jean Jacques Rousseau's political philosophy, feminist scholars who detect an identity crisis of feminist politics and feminist theory because of the nominalist effect which challenges the unity and universality of the concept of `woman` as the privileged, foundational and essentialist subject of feminist politics may turn to Jean-Jacques Rousseau as a peculiar political philosopher who deeply felt the contradictory and challenging life, desire and interests of modern people and queried an egalitarian and autonomous way to live in public and private. It is obvious that Rousseau has constructed a moral and political reform by reforming the private sphere that includes the transformation of the gender roles and familial relations as well as the configuration of the home domain. Rousseau's arguments on women are usually articulated on their obvious textual meaning and value. However, they require to be contextualized and be read symptomatically by keeping in mind that he is a philosopher of equality and freedom, aiming obey the rules, which are made by himself. There is a way to enlarge this equality and freedom discourse both men and women.

Although Rousseau advocates a strict sexual division of labor, he is not a biological reductionist in the sense that women are not entitled to inferiority because they are biologically inferior when compared with men. As opposed to certain feminist arguments that connect women's subordination by stating that `biology is destiny`, for Rousseau biological sex is not destiny. The natural differences between men and women are neither inevitable nor immutable in terms of physical strength, mental powers, reproduction capabilities, and interests and dispositions (Weis, 1987:93). That is to say, for Rousseau it is possible to transform human beings and their gendered roles with proper political education in line with the requirement of a good, egalitarian and democratic society. In addition, education should not only target mental capacities and rationalities; rather, as Fermon underlines through proper `education of the senses and of sentiment,` human beings, who would act quite egoistically under the effect of amour propre<sup>9</sup>, are able to `rule themselves in democracy and equality` (Fermon, 1994: 431).

Rousseau's political philosophy centralizes women in order to create a new society and a new soul for human beings who desire to live in a well-ordered society as free and equal fellows. Recognizing the value of women's contribution and power in the establishment of the good society opens a way for us to revisit Rousseau's political philosophy to integrate women into the

ideal of democratic and egalitarian society. We share Lori Marso's argument in interpreting Rousseau's male characters who, are 'taught to embody exaggerated traits of masculinity' such as neutrality, rationality and detachment. Men in this sense appear as to comprehend exclusively the concerns of the general will. On the other hand, female characters are taught to understand 'competing claims on the general good' (Marso, 1998:438). This leads us to a very significant conclusion that in the political philosophy of Jean Jacques Rousseau there is a strand to underline women's ability to create, animate and live into a pluralist society. Finding this strand in revisiting Rousseau is not an easy task. At least it requires three basic contextualizing. First is a historical contextualization, which makes his obvious anti-women discourse understandable in the context of local politics, class and power issues. Second, a philosophical contextualization, which comparatively analysis women's political exclusion within the whole Western political philosophy canons, is required. And finally, a contemporary feminist political contextualization is required in order to find a political path to progress when appears an impasse. As a result, we argue that Rousseau's politics despite all its seemingly misogynist character is worth revisiting for finding a unity of women's politics without giving up singularity of each and every woman.

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END NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Among others Toril Moi, one of the most significant scholars concerning the dispute over the concept of woman, argues in her book *What is a Woman? And Other Essays* that in order to escape the so-called essentialism of the category of woman, "claiming that one only use it 'strategically,' or that one really thinks of it as an 'umbrella term', or that one really ought only to speak of various *kinds* of women, or that one always mentally must add quotation marks to the word in order to place it under deconstructive erasure are misguided because they are unnecessary." (1999: 8). For her opinion, Simone de Beauvoir still makes the most viable statement on being a woman as follows: "Surely woman is, like man, a human being, but such a declaration is abstract. The fact is that every concrete human being is always in a specific situation." (cited by Moi p. 8)

<sup>2</sup> For a strong criticism of liberal democracy from a feminist perspective as well as the merits of it for not giving it up completely please see Anne Phillips (1991) *Engendering Democracy*, "Democracy and Difference: Some Problems for Feminist Theory" and (1992) "Must Feminists Give up on Liberal Democracy?"

<sup>3</sup> For a pioneer and classic essay on feminist critique of Marxism please see Heidi I. Hartmann (1979) "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union", *Capital and Class*, 3(2), pp. 1-33

<sup>4</sup> Iris Marion Young (1997) finds what we call as nominalist effect as paralyzing by stating "Do these arguments imply that it makes no sense and is morally wrong ever to talk about women as a group, or in fact to talk about social groups at all?" p.16 *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy and Policy*, Princeton University Press.

<sup>5</sup> Here it is necessary to cite Sarah Herbold's elucidation as follows: "Whatever they may signify (and this is precisely the question: whether, how and to whom they signify anything), the terms woman and the feminine figure prominently in contemporary Anglo-American and French poststructuralist theories of culture and literature. This concern with woman and the feminine is implicitly linked to ideas of change and liberation: to a desire to be freed from traditional gender roles and representations in the case of feminist thinkers, and from traditional forms of thought, experience, and expression in the case of poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theorists. For better and/or for worse, woman and the feminine are being associated with the current sense of cultural crisis and innovation that has been dubbed postmodernity." (1995: 83)

<sup>6</sup> Joshua Cohen perfectly summarizes Jean-Jacques Rousseau's political thinking on three points: formulating a "well-ordered" society in order to endorse its member's autonomy; emphasizing the central role of institutions in the making (education) of citizens; and implicating egalitarian democracies as the most suitable order for the principle of autonomy and making of good citizens (1986: 275)

<sup>7</sup> Allan Bloom successfully analyzes the making of a democratic man through a cogent reading of *Emile* without regarding gender issue. He agrees with Kant about the merit of *Emile* as a political text which reconciles "nature with history, man's selfish nature with the demands of civil society, hence, inclination with duty." (1978:135)

<sup>88</sup> For a detailed and critical analysis on Talmon's assumptions on Rousseau and totalitarianism, which are informed by Talmon's worldview of his own time, please see Jose Brunner (1991) "From Rousseau to

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Totalitarian Democracy: The French Revolution in J. L. Talmon's Historiography" *History and Memory*, 3(1) pp.60-85. As stated Talmon underlines that he is writing at a time when an `empirical and liberal democracy` is confronted with a `totalitarian Messianic democracy.` (1991: 60)

<sup>9</sup> Rousseau makes a distinction between amour propre which connotes to the self-love arises from external factors depending on the opinion of other human beings, that arises from human sociality and civilization that leads human being to compare themselves with others. A healthy self-love is deemed as amour de soi.

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