

Overthinking? Maybe it is what we need

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It was just another ordinary academic meeting, a two-hour panel, in February 2018 in Ankara. Its title was “Turkey-Germany Relations: Recent Developments” and I was there to hear evaluations of recent important developments. In the background of this panel was the rising tide of deteriorating diplomatic relations between the two countries, and the panel was intended as an academic reappraisal of the past, present and future of these mutual relations. We had three professors - two men and a woman - as panelists, each from political science and international relations departments of three different universities. The audience was composed of academic staff, undergraduate students and graduate students. Since Germany is a core country of the European Union (EU), the focus of attention at some points shifted to Turkey-EU relations, which have also been fluctuating. The first two presentations were by the male professors and both were harsh, unilateral critiques of the EU’s and Germany’s foreign policy choices towards Turkey. The focus of the last professor, on the other hand, was on the concept of complex interdependence and, thus, the potential for normalization.

Among the many academic meetings I have attended, that panel made me feel exceptionally uncomfortable. From the very first moment, and during the whole panel, I felt irritated. I am sure that I was not the only one who felt that way. At least, I know that my colleague who was accompanying me that day left the room at the end of the first presentation, whispering: “I cannot stand this.” Indeed, I wanted to leave the room immediately, but something tied me to my chair there and I stayed until the very end.

I have been thinking about that panel since I left the conference hall. What troubled me so much? As I dug into my emotions and thoughts, I realized that the whole panel had turned into a confrontation with *the* question, which is, for me, the identity question. How do we identify ourselves? How do we identify others? How do we identify the communities - small or larger - around us? How do others define themselves? How do others identify us? Simply: Who/what am I? These are the fundamental questions that humankind has been dealing with for thousands of years, and they seem to be eternal because of their two contrasting traits: On the one hand, “Who/what am I?” is the simplest/easiest question, everybody has an immediate answer to it. On the other hand, it might be the hardest question in life because it depends on how identity is conceptualized. If identity is taken as an absolute framework and as a static trait passed down from ancestors, then the response comes swiftly. However, if identity is dynamic rather than static, as an interaction with life, as being always incomplete, non-fixed, the answer gets more complicated. I can see now that the panel that day triggered a confrontation in me with that question of identity. What is identity? Who/what am I? I, like many others, always have immediate answers to that question: I am an academic, I am a woman, I am a feminist, I am a mother. I usually add that I am anti-nationalist and anti-militarist since, as a feminist, I diagnose that patriarchy’s best friends are

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nationalism and militarism. What happened at the panel was the flashing in my mind of a debate about how I have come to have these identities, how I have learned to define myself, and how I am still continuing to constitute an identity. What does being an academic mean? What does being a woman mean? What does being a feminist, anti-nationalist mean?

“Identity”

Imagine a person who thinks that life is a web of power relations; politics is about power; political analysis is the analysis of unequal power relations characterizing our individual, social and political lives; and, political action is the struggle against discrimination, exclusion, marginalization, silencing and other forms of violence that result from those relations. Imagine she also recognizes that in today’s world it is very difficult to grasp those power relations as they stem from many diverse sources, have many different forms, and subtle manifestations. Imagine at the same time that this person stubbornly believes that it is possible to transform the world. She embraces the slogan: “Another world is needed; together it is possible.” An obsession with power relations combined with a hope in a better future creates a dilemma which is reminiscent of what Gramsci described as the coexistence of “pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will.” I know this quite well indeed, because this is the person that I have been transformed into throughout all the years I spent as a student and as an academic in the discipline of political science.

For me, the only way out of this dilemma could be the idea that the existing configuration of power relations is open to be challenged and shifted, and hence, a belief in the ever-existing possibility of an alternative order. Such an approach to power, however, would require two further theoretical maneuvers: The first is a particular conceptualization of political identities which views them as being contingent; the second is an understanding that the world we live in and our thoughts about it mutually (re)create each other. These three premises are the pillars of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau’s theory of hegemony,¹ which is re-interpretation of the Gramscian notion of hegemony.

This theory is built upon the principle of the incomplete nature of political identities, their openness to different historico-political articulations. It is within and through all kinds of power relations that political identities are constantly formed and reformed, rather than being pre-determined, pre-given, a priori to the political processes. Identity is performative rather than natural. It is never completed, fixed and closed. Since “the open and incomplete character of every social identity permits its articulation to different historico-discursive formations”² “politics does not consist in simply registering already existing interests but plays a crucial role in shaping political subjects.”³ This is how a hegemonic relationship as well as a counter hegemony is established.

The panel that day was an occasion where such theoretical premises were being materialized. I was part of an interactive/performative practice through which I was constituted. My identity as an academic, as a citizen, as a woman was being both challenged and (re)constituted once again. And this was the major reason why I was so thoughtful and uptight.

What happened

From the first moment of the panel session, I found myself in the bizarre situation of listening to two presentations by two professors whose point was to condemn Germany and the European Union as a whole for the deterioration of relations with Turkey. They were accusing Germany and other EU countries with insincerity and hypocrisy because they were

¹ *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, London and New York: Verso, 1989, 2001, 2nd edition.

² *Ibid.*, 100.

³ *Ibid.*, xvii.

absolutely sure that deep inside the Germans and Europeans hated Turks. They were taking this hatred as the *explanans*, and anything else as the *explanandum*. From this perspective, it was because of this hatred, for instance, that Germany and other EU countries have been backing up terrorist organizations such as PKK and FETO rather than supporting Turkey in its fight against these organizations, that they have been jealous of Turkey's high economic growth rates, that they have taken legal steps to recognize the "Armenian Genocide," and that they have insistently applied double standards to Turkey's EU membership. They were absolutely sure that the rationale behind all these strategic moves was to put Turkey in a weak and fragile position. Thus, they were stating that Germany and other EU countries have often behaved inimically although they are supposed to be Turkey's allies by virtue of being members of NATO. But the question was/is still in the air: Why on earth would they do these things? The answer brings us back to the point where we began: "Because they hate us. Because they see us as their competitors in the global race for power after power which is deemed necessary to pursue national interests which, in turn, is necessary to reach national security." The two professors' style was so hard-hitting that their anger was almost touchable. They did not hesitate to express their criticisms in the harshest manner.

In fact, the third professor also made a highly critical analysis of the mutual relations and the foreign policy choices of Turkey and Germany. However, she was quite calm while offering her own analysis of the reasons behind the recent crises in Turkey-Germany relations and highlighting the current state of affairs. She described Turkey-Germany relations with reference to the concept of complex interdependence. The most distinctive part of her analysis was her emphasis on the ever-increasing gap between the norms characterizing policy choices and decision-making processes of each polity. She was considering this discrepancy as the major factor behind the deterioration of the relations. She emphasized that, during the late 1990s and the 2000s, the two countries came closest to each other in terms of sharing the same political values and norms. This corresponds to the period when the membership negotiations between the EU and Turkey were at the center of the political agenda. The 2010s, however, have witnessed a completely counter trend. By bringing to the forefront the highly favorable past of the mutual relations as well as the concept of complex interdependence, the professor was drawing the attention to the importance of upholding the spaces and tools of dialogue, diplomacy and mutual understanding. They were important, she underlined, for the normalization of relations.

Ironically enough, it was the third professor who found herself as the target of a series of accusatory criticisms and biting questions. In fact, almost all questions and comments by the audience were directed to her. She had to hear such sentences as:

- I can never understand how on earth you, as a professor of international relations, can defend Germany? How can you have sympathy for the Germans? I cannot believe what you have been saying.

- They [Europeans] don't like us, they never did; and they will never welcome us. Let's come to terms with this bitter reality.

- They [Europeans] are racists. They hate us. This is no secret.

- We do not share the same values. To be honest, we are worlds apart.

So, what? What was the matter with these presentations and the panel as a whole? In the last analysis, the first two professors had offered their own perspectives and the audience had listened with the greatest attention. Why did I feel so uncomfortable listening to them? And the third professor, in her turn, presented her own analysis and dealt with all biting questions and comments very well; she was calm, coherent and rational. Why was I so on edge? As I have already mentioned, I recognized immediately that the reason for my consternation was that all presentations had triggered debates in my mind regarding the identity question. The first two presentations lit the fire of two debates: One was regarding nationalism and hence

the constitution of my antinationalist identity. The other was a methodological and epistemological debate regarding the place of emotions in political science and hence on the constitution of my academic identity. And the question and answer session, following the third presentation in turn, triggered a debate about my identity as a woman.

Being Nationalist/Anti-nationalist

In the background of the first two presentations were the premises of nationalism. Although the core concepts and the units of analysis of nationalism - nation and nation-state - are pretty new phenomena, considering the very long history of humanity, they have acquired an unquestioned authority in the theory and practice of global politics. Despite the fact that it has been only a century that the world ceased to be a world of multi-ethnic, multi-religious empires and turned into a world of nation-states, these concepts are the main pillars of today's realpolitik national-interest being its sole working principle. Today, nationalism is in a position to crosscut even rival political standpoints such as liberalism, conservatism and even socialism. This has been the case although the debates about the end of the nation-state and its replacement by international and/or transnational institutions gained prominence during the 1990s. 9/11/2001 is usually taken as a turning point where such debates were put on the shelf together. After that, high hopes for a consensus on universal ethical values that could lead to the formulation of an International Law in the Kantian sense were replaced by an understanding of global politics as a zero-sum power game between uncompromising national interests and codification of every single problem as a threat to nation security.

So, when I look through the lenses of this hegemonic discourse I can see and understand that these premises were the pillars of the first two presentations. I can see at the same time that they were adhering to a static and absolute framework in conceptualizing identity. The existing world is composed of nation states and everyone is born into a nation. We have an identity - national identity - since the very first moment of our existence. This a priori status of national identity is assumed to give it priority and superiority. I personally have great difficulty in adhering to this framework endorsed by those professors. I am not sure if that is the case in other parts of the world too, but in Turkey, being anti-nationalist is considered as a kind of "shame" by a considerable majority. The notions of nation, national unity, national interest, and national security seem to have exceptional significance in Turkish politics. This situation is related with the fact that the Republic of Turkey was established following a long and tough War of Independence (1919-1923). After its defeat in World War I, parts of the Ottoman Empire were partitioned and occupied by the Allies. Many analyses of Turkish political history agree on the traumatic effect of this War of Independence which manifests itself as a constant fear of extinction. It is usually considered the main reason behind the securitization of every single issue as a matter of life or death in Turkey. I can say, for my generation at least, that every child in Turkey goes through an education characterized by an overemphasis on such concepts as national identity which is often formulated as "the indivisible unity of the nation and the state and highest interests of our nation versus the internal and external enemies of our nation." It is quite symbolic that in the late 1980s, middle school and high school curriculums included such social sciences courses as "*National Geography*", "*National History*". That we had "National Security" courses taught by military officers, and that the ministry of education in Turkey is still named Ministry of National Education says a lot.

My first questions about nations and nationalisms appeared in parallel to my curiosity about the history of my family. I learned very early in my childhood that my great grandparents were immigrants to Anatolia from today's Bulgaria which was a part of the Ottoman Empire until 1876 when it gained its independence as a nation-state. Since my early childhood, I have always loved encouraging my grandparents and other elder relatives to talk

about this adventure by asking questions, hoping to help them recall the details. I know from these conversations that when my great grandparents migrated in the early 1930s, they did not know where they would settle down. Hence, they changed their location three times until they decided their final destination. I could also figure out during these conversations that since they started anew each time they changed their location, in the process they lost their ties with their closest relatives, their sense of belonging, and their sense of community as well as a considerable portion of their material belongings. Their complete reluctance to “savings” has always seemed highly meaningful to me: They never tried to increase their wealth, owned almost nothing, made no “investments” and, in their neighbors’ words, “they earned one day and spent the other day; what they liked most was to spend their money on food, and to have many guests at their dining table any time during the day.” Despite all criticisms and blaming that my family has had to face for years, and although it was the main issue that my own parents used to fight over, I have always found their reluctance to private property quite understandable because I perceived it as an indication of the transformation of their self-perception in time: Before they migrated, they had been long established *villagers/farmers*, the *subjects of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious empire*; then they became *migrants* living almost a nomadic life for years; then they became *citizens of a nation state*, the newly established Republic of Turkey. Obviously, their self-perception, self-definition, the identity that they associate themselves, shifted more than once. My father, the eldest child of his family, in his turn, left home as a teen for boarding school and happened to be an army officer. So, we also migrated from one city to another during my childhood, again, owning nothing but some furniture. I finished my primary education in three different schools. I do not have any memories with my primary school teacher because I had several of them. Once my nuclear family finally settled down after my father retired, it was now my turn to hit the road for my university education. After graduation, I moved to another city to live in a hotel for months, but then moved back and settled in the city where I had studied. Upon this familial/personal background, I believe, it is not surprising that I have always had hard times in answering one of the most popular questions people ask in Turkey when they try to know each other: Where are you from? I have never had a sense of belonging to a land, a city, a group of people, a neighborhood, an identity or material stuff. Moreover, since my early childhood, I enjoy dealing with that simple but crucial question: What if...? I enjoy imagining “alternative universes.” I believe that the question of “What if...” has been the major factor behind my later drift as a political science student towards the idea of the contingency of political identities. This theory of identity has enabled me to put into words what exactly makes me feel uncomfortable with the whole idea of nationalism and national identity. For me, my familial background presented an excellent example of how identities are constituted and re-constituted within a dynamic interaction with life rather than appearing as a static trait.

These theoretical elaborations comprised the answers to the questions in my mind related with the construction of (political) identities. They have given me a legitimate ground to reject essentialist conceptualizations of identity; to argue that -even in the cases where we are born with a given identity- it is not possible to take them for granted. From the perspective of this theory, all identities, including national identity; all encounters between these identities, including articulations and disarticulations are open to be found, created, recreated, expanded, changed, shifted, challenged and deconstructed. So, all of these rest at the background of my distance toward nationalism, national identity and the unquestioned authority of other related concepts such as national interest and national security. These together, in turn, were completely at odds with the atmosphere at the panel session where the discussion was built mainly upon these concepts and an approach that takes identities as fixed.

Being an academic, being critical

The second reason why I felt uncomfortable in listening to the first two presentations was related with my interest in autoethnography. For about two years, I have been reading about the place of autoethnography in political science and international relations. I have also been reading highly inspiring autoethnographic texts. These readings are part of my struggle to overcome the alienation that I have been experiencing from my profession and the state of paralysis making me unable to read and write.

Upon this background of my engagement with autoethnography, at some point, my whole experience at the panel became very confusing for me. I was perplexed because I started to question whether the first two panelists were doing what autoethnography invites us to do: They were talking about their emotions aroused by some (inter)national political developments. And, while doing that, they were not trying to hide their personal assessments of what had been disturbing them; rather, they were putting them at the very center of their analysis. However, all these were coming to me as extremely disturbing. Why was this so? Did I have the right to find them disturbing while at the same time being convinced by autoethnography's dismissal of the "silent authorship"? It was not the anger in the air that made me feel so tight, though that may also well be considered as inappropriate behavior for university professors at a scientific meeting. Rather, it was because of their carelessness in building their presentations completely upon nationalist biases which was evident in the excessive use of 'the racist Europe' argument. "The racist Europe," however, due to being overused without ever defined clearly in Turkish politics, has become a slippery concept, reflecting nothing more than deep-seated prejudices, and hence devoid of any analytical potential. The male professors were talking about the Europeans' hatred against the Turks as "the objective reality." Their discourse was not open to revision and critique – quite the opposite. It was definitive and self-regarding, rather than open and sensitive to different positions and subjectivities.

So, I started to ask: Is it not the case that the constitution of our identities as academics should include self-critique rather than deploying excessive self-confidence? Is it not a process which includes asking uncomfortable questions of ourselves? Should it not include a serious challenge to the position of moral or epistemological authority and pride from where we are trained to think and speak as "academics"? Were the two male professors not displaying a violent closure in these respects? Were they not representing a definitive discourse regarding their identities as academics?

On my own part, distress caused by the self-regarding and closed accounts of these diplomatic relations was combined with a deep-rooted questioning of nationalism and its role in curbing the potential of developing a more thorough understanding. A conceptualization of 'national identity' as being pre-given, completed and fixed could only lead to the repetition of memorized prejudices; not to analyses with coherent and lucid bases. Such an understanding of identity makes it a distant impossibility to think and rethink; to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct identity. This, however, is a main obstacle on the way to imagining a better world and struggling for it. The realist paradigm preaches us to take the world as it is rather than trying to change it; to be a strong player that is impossible to defeat rather than to re-design the game. It perceives the world as being given to us, without any viable alternative and thus irreplaceable. Moreover, this realism is labeled as rationalism; and on the basis of the conventional/hegemonic/patriarchal binary oppositions of reason/passion, rationality/emotion, man/woman, it is identified with manhood. Any other approach is labeled as emotional, romantic and, consequently, as feminine and thus as unreasonable. This, in turn was the origin of the third debate which that panel triggered in my mind when the floor was the third professor's, the debate on patriarchy.

Being a woman, being feminist

Why did the third professor have to hear such harsh criticisms and questions almost to the degree of intimidation? As a matter of fact, it was she who had made the most solid and dense analysis of the reasons why the mutual relations of Turkey and Germany had deteriorated. She had listed in a very concrete manner the factors and developments that had led to this deterioration: She identified the Gezi Park Protests of May 2013 and the coup attempt of 15 July 2016 as two major turning points where the approaches of the two countries completely fell apart. Likewise, she emphasized that their foreign policy choices and tools on several crucial matters such as the Syrian crisis, the Russia-Ukraine crisis, the Arab Uprisings, and the issues related to the Balkan countries had been radically different from each other. She underlined that both countries had held very tough election processes and that the electoral campaigns increased the tension so much so that the Turkish government and the mainstream media went as far as accusing the German politicians of Nazism!

The reason why I am relaying this here is because I want to show what I, as an individual audience of the panel, can still remember from each presentation. I can recall, almost point by point, the third professor's concrete analysis. The only explanation I remember from the other two presentations is that the Germans for some reason hate the Turks and they would do what they could do to make them weaker by deterring the socio-economic development and democratization process in the country. When I try to recall their prospects for the future, on the other hand, I remember the third professor's call for normalization with a stress on dialogue, collaboration and cooperation. But I am not able to detect such prospects in other presentations, because if they (the Germans) hate us (the Turks) for some unexplained and/yet presumed reason - as this is their starting point, their *explanans* - that would mean that they would continue to hate. So, there is nothing that we can do to change this situation. It was exactly this vicious circle that the third professor was pointing to while she was responding to an audience question: "Sir, please tell me," she said, "are you telling me that they hate us, then we will hate them too?" She looked drained and a bit angry now. She continued: "Are you saying that we are supposed to take the world as it is, rather than trying to change it in a better direction? If this is the case, I would like to remind you that if the founders of the Turkish Republic had had the same way of thinking, I, as a woman in this country, would have never been able even to imagine becoming a professor and giving conferences on global politics. Thank God they had not."

Hell, yeah! That was what my inner voice said. I hardly stopped myself from shouting out. She was bitterly right and correct! Yes, some women and men, at some point in time, decided to do something, took actions and changed the world for all women. A highly organized feminist movement had already emerged in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, in the Ottoman period and with the establishment of the Republic in 1923 legal reforms recognizing equal rights of women were put into effect in Turkey.

I was born into a secular family, daughter to parents who internalized the model of "ideal (modern) family" that had been at the center of Kemalism, the founding official ideology of the Turkish republic. Anyone who is familiar with Turkish political history would easily know how much this one-sentence biographical account means. Since there is already a very rich literature on Turkish modernization/Westernization process, here I will suffice to reiterate three of its most distinguishing characteristics: One is the significance of visible changes in life styles. At both individual and social levels, they have always been thought as symbols of Turkey's complete break with its Ottoman past. Another one is the centrality of secularism in the theory and practice of Turkish modernization resulting from the conviction that the dominant role of religion in socio-political life of the Ottoman Empire

was the main obstacle on the road to modernization. The third one is the perception of women as the bearers of this modernization project. Well-educated women's increasing public activity has been considered as representations of its success. This project has succeeded in reaching out to a significant portion of population. It was in this context that my parents did their best to make it possible for their daughters, my sister and me, to stand on their own feet, to pursue a successful career, to have economic independence, in short, to become "modern individuals." Both of us had a good education, which was, like for many other middle-class families, the most important thing in life for my parents since it was the only way for upward social mobility. All of this was accompanied by an open display of a deep trust they had in us. Consequently, I have become a university professor, my sister a dentist, as graduates of the highest-ranked universities in Turkey. It was on this familial background that I developed a feminist consciousness.

As an academic in political science I have studied and lectured with a purpose of posing a challenge to the hegemony of patriarchy. Now I have two daughters. I want them to have a good education, to become independent individuals, to have a life of their own, I want them to believe in themselves; I am dreaming of a decent life for them, just and equal, I hope to see them as happy as they are now as my children. Unfortunately, it is not easy to hold on to hopes and dreams as they are immediately replaced by worries and fears. Most of the time, as a woman/a feminist academic/the mother of two girls, I usually find myself feeling upset, frustrated, scared, annoyed, marginalized, silenced, repressed, hopeless, excluded, and ignored. To say the least, in terms of objective criteria, Turkey has quite a bad record on gender equality. According to the 2015 Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum, Turkey is the 130th country out of 145 countries; only 15% of the MPs are women; the labor force participation rate of women is 30%; every 4 women out of 10 are exposed to physical and sexual violence at least once in their lifetime.

Statistical data is important, but not enough to grasp the whole picture. To understand the emotional state I just described, one needs to combine these data with the symptoms of the religio-conservative gender climate.⁴ Since the early 2000s, Turkey has been going through "sociopolitical conservatization through Islamization" where "the mainstream political discourse and the social policies are dominated by and legitimized through the privileging of Turkish-Muslim identity."⁵ In time, the official discourse has become laden with affirmation of traditional gender roles and "any challenge to such roles or to the structure of heterosexual traditional family such as single parenthood, gay rights, abortion or demands for public care services are seen as threats to the moral structure of society."⁶ Moreover, "women's economic dependency on men, their unequal position in society, forms of patriarchal oppression ranging from sexual harassment to control of the body and their conduct have not been part of legal and political discourse."⁷ This situation is what the concept of gender climate implies: "discourses and practices on gender relations that are accepted, prevalent and/or dominant in private and public life and that determine the modes of thinking, acting and morality regarding gender relations."⁸ What is even worse, this deterioration in the status of women was indeed preceded by great accomplishments of the

⁴ Ayşe Güneş-Ayata and Gökten Doğangün, "Gender Politics of the AKP: Restoration of a Religio-conservative Gender Climate," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 19:6, 2017, 610-627.

⁵ Simten Coşar and İnci Özkan-Kerestecioğlu, "Feminist Politics in Contemporary Turkey: Neoliberal Attacks, Feminist Claims to the Public," *Journal of Women Politics & Policy* 38:2, 2016, 1-24

⁶ Gülbanu Altunok, "Neo-conservatism, Sovereign Power and Bio-power: Female Subjectivity in Contemporary Turkey," *Research and Policy on Turkey* 1:2, 2016, 139.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Güneş-Ayata and Doğangün, "Gender Politics of the AKP," 611.

Turkish women's movement, observable in the passing of progressive legal changes and reforms on gender equality.

On the basis of this historical and contextual background it was more than distressing to witness that the third professor, although hers was the only presentation that met the highest academic standards, had to face - implicitly or explicitly - comments and criticisms that she was being too "idealist" or "romantic" and hence was unable to see "the reality", which was the fact that "they hate us, and they will always hate us, and that is it." This was the response she got from the audience as a full professor of international relations, who received her doctorate from a German university, who had lived there long enough to be fluent in German, who has an admirable academic reputation, who had just made a comprehensive analysis, used solid data and examples, suggested an alternative way of thinking and acting, called for initiative, and reminded us of the hope of a better future. Not a single question or comment was posed to other two professors; mainly because what they were saying was quite simple, simple in every sense of the word. Easy to say, easy to repeat. No explanation was offered, no remedy was offered, no prospects were offered; because it was "the reality"; it was all clear. "They do not like us, they hate us."

Conclusion

I have written this narrative to try and show how my selfhood - my citizen self, my feminist self, my academic self - is in an endless process of being constituted and re-constituted. I have tried to illustrate the questions that may associate the constitution of identity with a political subject. Another question, however, has been haunting me since the very moment I started writing this essay: Why would anybody else be interested in this? The answer, I believe, is hidden in the strength of the term *lived experiences of individuals*. It is only through our very ordinary, everyday, average experiences that we try to/come to understand the world around us. It is through our lived experiences that we start to ask questions about it, criticize it, and challenge it. And we also dream about changing it, before we try to change it. This path designates, at the same time, how the individual, the social and the political are inseparably connected to each other. Attending a panel is part of the professional routine of an academic, so it has no value in itself. This is true unless/until that academic starts to dive into her thoughts and feelings about that panel. It is at that moment that an individual experience starts to reveal so much about the socio-political life.

Theorizing identity as being always in the process of making is intertwined with an understanding of the world which is also in the process of making and thus changeable. In that respect, democratic struggle becomes a collaborative effort to understand and change the world. This article, then, hopes to be a part of that collaborative effort which is a task that has to start with speaking and listening to each other, by starting a dialogue.⁹ I try to imagine what the undergraduate and graduate students among the audience were thinking. For me, what they/we were witnessing was a challenging of the hegemonic definitions of nationalism, realism, rationalism, and womanhood/manhood. The whole panel and especially the debate during the question and answer session was a challenge, for instance, to the essentialist conception of identities of "woman" and "man" in a way that identifies the former with emotions and the latter with reason and rationality. It was the third professor, a woman, who was calm, rational and coherent. It was the two male professors who were too emotional to the extent that they lost the balance between intimacy and distance.¹⁰ The third professor was also using the same analytical tools of the nation state, national interest and national identity

⁹ Paulo Ravecca and Elizabeth Dauphinee, "Narrative and the Possibilities for Scholarship," *International Political Sociology* 12:2, 2018, 125-138, 132.

¹⁰ Naeem Inayatullah, "Distance and Intimacy: Forms of Writing and Worlding," in A. Tickner and D. Blaney (ed.) *Claiming the International*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2013, 194-213.

but she was doing it in such a way that she was able to show how the identity of political subjects is open to new political articulations. I wish I could have made all those young people recognize these challenges.

An obsession with the ever-existence of power relations and a parallel belief in the possibility of change does not have to be an oxymoron if we can “demonstrate our complicity in structures of oppression as well as our contribution to structures of liberation.”¹¹ As I said before, comprehending the connection between the individual, the social and the political gives us a hope that the social and the political can be changed through the individual. In that way, we can see “how structures sustain themselves and change through human action.”¹² As I write this essay, I hope to have shown this tension in myself with the hope of starting a dialogue.

¹¹ Ibid. 212.

¹² Ibid. 211.