

*Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article***Mainstream Feminism's Silence on Collective Punishment Practices in the Gaza Genocide**

Gazze Soykırımındaki Kolektif Cezalandırıcı Uygulamalara Yönelik Ana Akım Feminizmin Suskunluğu

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Öz

Bu araştırma, Ekim 2023'te başlayan ve 2026 yılı itibarıyla devam eden İsrail'in Gazze'ye yönelik askeri harekati sürecinde, Batı merkezli ana akım feminist örgütlerin, neoliberal feminist figürlerin ve feminist dış politika iddiasındaki devletlerin tutumlarını derinlemesine analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Akademik alan yazına ek olarak, birincil deneyime sahip kadınların anlatıları, sivil toplum kuruluşları raporları ve saha verilerine de odaklanan bu araştırma feminist teorinin ve pratiğin, Gazze'deki soykırım karşısında tarihsel bir kırılma yaşadığını ortaya koymaktadır. Odaklanılan içerikler; (a) ana akım feminizmin, Gazze'deki sistematik üreme soykırımı ve kadın kırımına karşı sergilediği sessizliğin, pasif bir ihmalden ziyade; neoliberalizm, sömürgecilik ve emperyal devlet çıkarlarıyla kurulan yapısal suç ortaklığının bir sonucu olabileceğini, (b) bu kurumların İsraili kadınlara yönelik şiddeti haklı olarak kınarken, Gazze'de on binlerce kadının öldürülmesini savunma hakkı retorisiyle meşrulaştırmışlarının bir görmezden gelme pratiği olabileceğini, ve (c) Almanya başta olmak üzere, dış politikasını feminist olarak tanımlayan devletlerin İsrail'e askeri desteğe devam etmeleri nedeniyle aslında bu politikaların emperyal bir araç olarak kavramsallaştırılabileceğini işaret etmektedir. Sonuç olarak yaşanan bu tarihsel kırılmanın küresel kız kardeşlik mitini geri dönülemez bir şekilde parçaladığı tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Gazze soykırımı, ana akım feminizm, üreme soykırımı, feminist dış politika, neoliberal suç ortaklığı.*

Abstract

This study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the positions adopted by Western mainstream feminist organizations, neoliberal feminist figures, and states that claim to pursue a feminist foreign policy during Israel's military operation against Gaza, which began in October 2023 and has continued into 2025. In addition to academic literature, the study focuses on the testimonies of women with first-hand experience, reports by civil society organizations, and field data, and demonstrates that feminist theory and practice have undergone a historical rupture in the face of the genocide in Gaza. The issues examined suggest that (a) the silence of mainstream feminism regarding the systematic reproductive genocide and femicide in Gaza may be less a matter of passive omission than the outcome of a structural complicity forged through neoliberalism, colonialism, and imperial state interests, (b) the way these actors have, while rightly condemning violence against Israeli women, legitimized the killing of tens of thousands of women in Gaza through the rhetoric of the right to self-defence can be understood as a practice of erasure, and (c) due to the continued military support provided to Israel by states that describe their foreign policy as feminist, particularly Germany, such policies can in fact be

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conceptualized as imperial instruments. Finally, it is argued that this historical rupture has irreversibly shattered the myth of global sisterhood.

Keywords: *Gaza genocide, mainstream feminism, femicide, feminist foreign policy, neoliberal complicity.*

INTRODUCTION

October 7, 2023, did not only mark a new rupture in the political geography of the Middle East, but also opened a deep and lasting fault line in the cognitive map that has structured the mental and emotional coordinates of the global feminist movement. Israel's military attacks on the Gaza Strip, which have been described by international law experts and United Nations special rapporteurs as carrying a risk of genocide or as constituting genocide, have subjected the long-repeated claim of the universality of feminism to a concrete and merciless test. For decades, liberal feminist discourse, which has occupied a hegemonic position in Western centered academia and civil society, has presented women's rights as an inseparable component of human rights and as a set of norms that are valid across all geographies and above cultural difference; however, the war waged in Gaza has made visible the extent to which this normative framework is in fact strongly articulated to *specific geographies, social hierarchies, and geopolitical alliances* (Marquardt, 2024). In other words, mainstream feminism, which defines itself through the principles of universal justice, equality, and opposition to violence, has, through its selective silence and conditional sensitivity in the face of the siege of Gaza, the mass bombardment, starvation, and systematic killing of civilians, exposed a striking hierarchy regarding *whose life is deemed worthy of mourning and whose suffering is considered politically expendable*, thereby inscribing into history the geographical and social blind spots on its own cognitive map (Kynsilehto, 2025).

The claim that Gaza constitutes a historical rupture for mainstream feminism becomes clearer when situated within a comparative context. In cases such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, mainstream feminist organizations and state actors articulated swift, unambiguous condemnations of state violence, explicitly naming the aggressor and mobilizing gender-based humanitarian and political frameworks. Similarly, during the Mahsa Amini protests in Iran, Western feminist institutions framed gendered state violence as a global feminist concern, emphasizing solidarity and resistance. Even in the case of the Rohingya crisis, feminist and human rights discourses largely acknowledged asymmetrical power relations and mass victimization. By contrast, the response to Gaza has been characterized by prolonged silence, delayed humanitarian framing, and discursive symmetry that obscures colonial domination and collective punishment, defined as the punishment by any means of members of a group or the group as a whole for alleged offenses by some of its members (Çoksan et al., 2025). This contrast suggests that the rupture does not lie in the scale of violence alone, but in the conditional application of feminist moral and political concern. Gaza thus marks a moment in which the limits of mainstream feminism's universalist claims become structurally visible.

Dimensions of the Crisis and Conceptual Framework

Following Israel's systematic attacks, the growing body of scholarship has begun to frame the crisis not merely as an issue of *silence*, but as a problem of active *epistemic violence* and *colonial feminism*. Epistemic violence refers to the systematic destruction of the capacity of a particular group, in the context of this study Palestinian women, to produce knowledge, to narrate their own stories, and to make their suffering heard. Western media and mainstream feminist institutions have either objectified *Palestinian women as human shields for Hamas* or rendered them entirely invisible (Aldossari, 2023; Nassar, 2025).

Engaging with this critique in a systematic manner, the present study focuses, within three main conceptual frameworks, on academic literature as well as on the publicly accessible testimonies of women with firsthand experience, reports produced by civil society organizations, and field-based data. These three conceptual frameworks can be described as follows: (a) imperial feminism, which denotes an approach that frequently understands women in the Global South as subjects who must be *rescued* from their own cultures or from their own men and which has historically served to legitimize military interventions (Pratt et al., 2025; Viimes, 2025); (b) neoliberal feminism, which sidelines structural inequalities such as colonialism and instead concentrates on women's individual success in the market and vertical mobility within institutions (Pervez, 2025; Sigle et al., 2025); and (c) reproductive

destruction, which designates a deliberate strategy of targeting reproductive health, pregnant women, and infants in order to prevent the biological continuity of a community (Draper et al., 2024; Pratt et al., 2025). In this context, the study does not only aim to provide a descriptive account of the current situation but seeks to document a moment that may constitute a critical crossroads for the future of feminist theory. As noted above, the research materials include academic articles published between 2023 and 2025, United Nations reports, press releases issued by feminist organizations, and activist manifestos.

Although the manuscript draws on several debates, it is theoretically anchored in epistemic violence, understood here as the patterned, institutionally mediated production of silence, misrecognition, and asymmetrical grievability. In this framework, epistemic violence does not merely denote the absence of speech or delayed condemnation; rather, it refers to a set of discursive and organizational practices through which some subjects are rendered less credible as knowers, less visible as victims, and less legible as political agents. In the context of Gaza, the relevant question is not only whether mainstream feminist institutions speak, but how their speech and non-speech distribute recognition: who is named as a legitimate victim, whose suffering is framed as politically intelligible, and whose accounts are displaced into humanitarian abstraction or strategic ambiguity. The manuscript therefore treats “silence” as an active and structured outcome, produced through institutional routines, geopolitical alignments, and established repertoires of feminist legitimacy.

Operationally, epistemic violence is examined through recurring discursive moves across institutional statements, reports, and policy-facing narratives. These include (a) perpetrator erasure through the avoidance of naming state agency, (b) symmetrisation via *both sides* framings that neutralize power differentials and blur relations of occupation and collective punishment, (c) depoliticisation through the reduction of systematic violence to an undifferentiated *humanitarian crisis*, (d) conditional empathy that extends moral visibility selectively and ties solidarity to geopolitical acceptability, and (e) objectification and ventriloquism, whereby Palestinian women appear primarily as passive figures (victims, shields, or cultural Others) rather than as narrating subjects and political agents. Read together, these patterns constitute an epistemic regime that regulates feminist attention and mourning, producing a hierarchy of recognisability that is central to the manuscript’s core claim.

Within this architecture, imperial feminism, which refers to the co-optation of women’s rights rhetoric by Western powers to justify military intervention, occupation, and geopolitical dominance under the guise of *saving* women in the Global South (Amos & Parmar, 1984) and neoliberal feminism, which is a form of feminism that prioritizes individual empowerment, entrepreneurialism, and personal responsibility over collective social justice, thereby converting structural inequality into individual problems to be solved through market-based solutions (Rottenberg, 2018), are treated as two complementary logics through which epistemic violence becomes institutionalized in mainstream feminist discourse. Imperial feminism is conceptualized as a civilizational and security-inflected grammar that aligns women’s rights with militarized governance, counterterrorism rationalities, and the geopolitical commitments of Western states. In this logic, violence perpetrated by allied states can be narrated as regrettable but legitimate, while the women subjected to that violence become collateral to an overarching moral project. Neoliberal feminism, by contrast, is approached as an organizational and political rationality that privileges representation, institutional access, donor compatibility, and market-oriented empowerment over structural critique. In this logic, feminist legitimacy is secured through policy proximity and reputational risk management, which can incentivize ambiguity, humanitarian framing, and the avoidance of conflictual naming. Together, these logics help explain why mainstream feminist institutions can condemn gender-based violence in some contexts with clarity and speed, yet respond to Gaza through delay, equivocation, or strategic silence: the epistemic boundary of feminist universality is maintained by recalibrating whose suffering becomes speakable within dominant institutional constraints.

Concepts such as reproductive destruction (or reprocide), sophicide/scholasticide, feminist militarism, and feminist foreign policy are therefore not mobilized as parallel theoretical anchors, but as empirical sites where epistemic violence becomes especially legible. Reproductive destruction highlights how the governance of life, reproduction, and bodily continuity becomes a terrain where violence is simultaneously material and narratively sanitized. Sophicide and scholasticide illuminate how the

destruction of knowledge infrastructures intersects with the suppression of Palestinian narration and with constraints on critical speech in Western academia. Feminist militarism foregrounds the inversion of feminist anti-violence commitments through celebratory representations of women's participation in armed institutions, an inversion that can normalize lethal force while retaining the symbolic capital of "gender equality." Finally, feminist foreign policy is analysed as a state-facing institutional domain in which feminist language is incorporated into geopolitical practice, revealing the conditions under which feminism functions less as a universal ethic than as a legitimating repertoire of state power. Across these domains, the manuscript's analytic aim remains constant: to trace how epistemic violence is produced, stabilized, and contested within mainstream feminist discourses in the context of Gaza, and to show how this production marks a broader rupture in the claims of feminist universality.

This manuscript uses the term *genocide* with attention to its established meaning in international criminal law. Under the Genocide Convention and the Rome Statute, genocide refers to a set of prohibited acts committed with the *specific intent* to destroy, in whole or in part, a protected group as such, including acts such as killing members of the group, causing serious bodily or mental harm, deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the group's physical destruction, and imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group.

At the same time, this study does *not* claim to render a legal determination, allocate criminal responsibility, or establish the evidentiary threshold required for adjudication. The analytic objective is different: it is to examine how mainstream feminist institutions and feminist foreign policy actors (a) recognize or disregard allegations and risk assessments framed in legal and human rights vocabularies, and (b) reproduce hierarchies of grievability, credibility, and political visibility through discursive practices of naming, silence, delay, and *both-sides* framing.

The terms *reproicide* and *reproductive destruction* are used in this manuscript as analytical concepts rather than as fixed categories of international law. Specifically, *reproductive destruction* is employed as an umbrella term for patterns of violence and deprivation that materially undermine a population's reproductive continuity and the conditions of social reproduction (for example, the degradation of obstetric care, pregnancy-related health outcomes, and reproductive infrastructures). Where relevant, the manuscript also clarifies how such patterns can be discussed in relation to legally recognized pathways, particularly the prohibition of measures intended to prevent births within the group and other acts that international law treats as salient to genocidal processes. Accordingly, claims in the manuscript should be read as interpretive and critical discourse-analytic findings about institutional complicity, epistemic violence, and selective moral recognition, rather than as judicial conclusions.

METHOD

This study is designed within a post-positivist paradigm, using Critical Discourse Analysis, one of the research designs that focuses on qualitative data. Critical discourse analysis has been adopted as the main methodological approach of this research because it allows texts to be examined not only in terms of their linguistic structures, but also with regard to the historical context in which they are produced, relations of power, ideological choices, and elements that are rendered silent (Fairclough, 2010). Positioned at the intersection of feminist theory (Mohanty, 2003), postcolonial theory (Spivak, 1988), and genocide studies, this theoretical document analysis aims to examine contemporary debates that take shape around the concepts of epistemic violence, collective punishment, and reproductive destruction.

To clarify the legal and analytical horizon of the manuscript, this study engages selectively with Article II of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide as an interpretive framework rather than a juridical claim. In particular, Article II (a), concerning the killing of members of a group, and Article II (d), concerning the imposition of measures intended to prevent births within the group, are analytically relevant to the patterns documented in Gaza.

The study does not seek to establish legal intent or criminal responsibility. Instead, it examines how mainstream feminist organizations and feminist foreign policy actors respond discursively to practices that correspond to these categories, as documented in United Nations reports, reproductive health assessments, and field-based civil society data. Large-scale civilian deaths, the disproportionate killing of women and children, the collapse of reproductive healthcare, increased miscarriage rates, and the

destruction of obstetric and fertility infrastructure are treated as empirical sites through which feminist silence, depoliticization, or selective recognition become analytically visible. Engaging Article II in this manner strengthens the methodological rigor of the analysis by situating feminist discourse in relation to internationally recognized categories of extreme violence, without advancing a legal determination.

Data Sources and Procedure

In determining the data sources of the research, a purposive sampling technique was employed. Within this framework, institutions located within the neoliberal mainstream feminist movement were selected according to specific criteria. The main criteria in the sampling process were that these institutions (a) possess a long-established institutional history in the Western world, (b) manage large-scale funding structures, and (c) have a decisive influence on global policymaking processes. In line with these criteria, the discourses of organizations such as the National Organization for Women (NOW), Planned Parenthood, Emily's List, and UN Women, as well as state actors that implement Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP), were included in the analysis.

In the data collection process, the aim was to identify established institutional policies and official positions rather than momentary institutional reactions. Therefore, the data sources were composed of public statements published on the official websites of the institutions, annual activity reports, and official press releases. Grounded in the formality and durability of institutional discourse, this study excluded short-term and informal posts shared on the institutions' social media accounts (e.g., X and Instagram) from the data corpus. In addition, academic articles published between October 2023 and November 2025, reports prepared by the United Nations and relevant special rapporteurs, field-based reports by civil society organizations, press releases issued by feminist organizations, open letters written by employees, and activist manifestos were also incorporated into the document pool of the study. The texts included in the analyses were selected on the grounds that they directly or indirectly address the position of feminist discourse, forms of silence, and practices of selective sensitivity in the context of the attacks on Gaza.

The study does not subject the examined texts to a quantitative coding process and does not make any claim to statistical generalization. Its aim is to make visible the ontological crisis of mainstream feminism and the concrete forms of epistemic violence through the patterns that the selected documents present at the levels of content and discourse, and to open up for discussion the theoretical rupture points that emerge in this process. Therefore, the findings should be understood not as claims to representativeness, but as interpretive results that discuss the limits and blind spots of feminist discourse within a specific historical context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During the analysis process, these texts were read and examined in line with the conceptual framework presented above.

The selection of institutions in this study follows a purposive and theoretically driven sampling strategy rather than an attempt at global representativeness. Organizations such as NOW, Planned Parenthood, Emily's List, UN Women, and state actors implementing Feminist Foreign Policy were included because they occupy a hegemonic position within Western-centered mainstream feminism, manage substantial financial and symbolic resources, and exert direct influence on global policy discourses.

The analytical focus on Western institutions is deliberate. The study examines not feminism as a global plurality of movements, but the specific discursive power of liberal and neoliberal feminist actors whose claims to universality are most pronounced. Feminist movements from Latin America, South Africa, and South Asia, including influential actors such as Ni Una Menos, are not included primarily because they either issued explicit statements condemning the violence in Gaza or did not produce institutional materials that reflect the patterns of silence under investigation. As such, their exclusion does not signal analytical oversight but reflects the study's focus on hegemonic silence rather than resistance. Nonetheless, the analysis acknowledges its geographical limitation and does not claim to represent feminism globally. Rather, it interrogates the crisis of universality within Western mainstream feminist discourse.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Institutional Architecture of Silence: Mainstream Feminist Organizations and Selective Mourning

The stance adopted by long established, legitimized, and resource rich mainstream feminist organizations in the Western world regarding Gaza functions as a kind of laboratory that necessitates a historical and structural analysis, rather than merely reflecting an isolated political choice. During the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Enloe and Conway, 2025) or during the Mahsa Amini protests in Iran (Bajoghli, 2023), most of these organizations intervened almost simultaneously with clear, unequivocal, and principled statements, issuing declarations that strongly condemned state and police violence against women and called for solidarity. In contrast, when Gaza has been at stake, a significant number of the same institutions have either retreated into deep silence or, after months of delay, have chosen to publish ambiguous statements that do not name the perpetrator, that render power relations invisible, and that present the parties as if they were symmetrical. This picture reveals the institutional and ideological architecture through which Western centered mainstream feminist organizations decide which lives are considered worthy of mourning, which women are deemed deserving of solidarity, and which forms of suffering are regarded as politically expendable.

One of the largest and historically most influential women's organizations in the United States, the National Organization for Women (NOW), shared a message of solidarity with Israeli women immediately after the attacks of 7 October, without any delay, strongly condemned Hamas, and framed these attacks as a serious human rights violation targeting women (NOW, 2023). Although the effort to make violence against women visible appears consistent and appropriate in this context, the same organization did not adopt a similarly swift and explicit position in response to the killing, injury, and displacement of thousands of Palestinian women as a result of Israel's air strikes and ground operations in Gaza, and it refrained from issuing a strong statement that would *condemn the genocide* or at least *call for an immediate ceasefire*. This asymmetry reveals the organization's racial, national, and geopolitical priorities, that is, it shows which women's suffering triggers an institutional response and which is passed over in silence. The discourse that is mobilized in the context of Gaza in the form of *both sides suffer, both sides use violence* produces a framework that equates an occupying state with a population living under occupation, that blurs power relations, and that renders Israel's military superiority invisible. This type of *both sides'* language appears, either explicitly or implicitly, in the statements of organizations such as NOW, and in doing so it dissolves the structural violence, the disproportionate use of force, and the practices of collective punishment to which Palestinian women are subjected into the abstract category of *the inevitable costs of a conflict environment*. This language also places both democratic governance and the social sciences under serious threat (Jost, 2024).

A similar pattern manifests itself in the case of the Feminist Majority Foundation (FMF). The organization, particularly in the 2000s, actively supported the United States invasion of Afghanistan with the rhetoric of *rescuing Afghan women from Taliban oppression* and *bringing women's rights to Afghanistan*, thereby providing a concrete example of what has been described as *imperial feminism* (Osman, 2025). For such organizations, the violence of a state that is a military and strategic ally of the West, namely Israel, is regarded as legitimate within the framework of the *fight against terrorism*, while Palestinian women are coded as the inevitable and unfortunate by products of this *legitimate violence*. Within such a framework, Palestinian women are recognized neither as full victims nor as political subjects; rather, they become the silent extras of the costs that are deemed necessary for Western security (Pratt et al., 2025).

On the other hand, Planned Parenthood, which is one of the world's leading organizations in the field of reproductive rights and bodily autonomy, maintained institutional silence for a long period in the face of the reproductive health catastrophe in Gaza. This silence caused great outrage among the organization's base and its employees. Throughout December 2023 and 2024, employees of the organization published open letters accusing the leadership of remaining silent in the face of genocide (see Froio, 2024, 2025). The employees argued that the principle of reproductive justice for all did not extend to Palestinian women and that the organization was experiencing a moral collapse in order not to alarm its donors and political allies. Only months later did the organization issue statements that

remained limited to an emphasis on a humanitarian crisis and that avoided naming the political perpetrator and the nature of the acts (Planned Parenthood, 2023).

A similar process has been repeated in political circles that claim to conduct their political lives within the framework of liberal feminism. For instance, Emily's List, which supports Democratic Party women candidates in the United States, has followed a policy of complete silence regarding Gaza. Many of the candidates supported by the organization cast votes in the United States Congress in favor of approving military aid to Israel. The mission of Emily's List, which is to *bring women into positions of power*, appears to have fallen into a deep contradiction when these women, once in power, support policies that result in the deaths of other women. This situation may indicate that liberal feminism focuses on the politics of representation while ignoring the content and consequences of policy (Davis, 2024; Rosenfeld and Schlozman, 2022).

Over time, these criticisms have also targeted international institutions. One of the most heavily criticized institutions among international mechanisms has been UN Women. For the fifty-five days following 7 October, the institution delayed issuing a strong condemnation or a comprehensive report on Israel's attacks on Gaza. Institutional statements became stronger only after intense pressure from civil society and growing unease within the organization (Hibbert, 2023). Public opinion has expressed that UN Women has been operating under the pressure of Israeli lobbying groups and Western donor states. Reports published in 2024 and 2025 (UN, 2025; UN Woman, 2025) indicate that the institution has begun to document the horror on the ground; however, this does not appear to have dispelled the criticisms associated with *delayed justice*.

State Feminism and the Paradox of Feminist Foreign Policy

In the early twenty first century, countries such as Sweden, Canada, and Germany adopted the doctrine of *Feminist Foreign Policy* (FFP). This doctrine asserts that foreign policy will be grounded in human rights, gender equality, and peacebuilding (Aggestam et al., 2019; Zhukova, 2025). However, the crisis in Gaza appears to have constituted the most significant test of this claim.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock is known as one of the most ardent advocates of FFP. Yet when war began in Gaza, the German government, in line with the principle that *the security of Israel is part of Germany's reason of state*, provided unconditional military and political support to Israel. While this support was being extended, the thousands of women and children killed in Gaza seemed to fall outside the feminist radar of German foreign policy. The German government attempted to silence feminists, artists, and academics who criticized Israel's actions by accusing them of antisemitism (Aran and Brummer, 2024; Marquardt, 2024; Noce, 2024). Considered in this context, field-based evidence may indicate that Germany's FFP in practice functions as *an imperial instrument* and that feminism may be mobilized in order to soften and legitimize the hard power of the state. The banning of demonstrations organized by Palestinian and Jewish women peace activists in Germany suggests that state feminism has assumed an authoritarian form that silences even women within its own borders (Salem, 2024; Shoman et al., 2025).

This situation does not appear to be limited to Germany. Ursula von der Leyen, the highest-ranking female representative of the European Union, travelled to Israel in the first days of the war and delivered the message that "we stand with you." This message has been interpreted as casting a shadow over the European Union's proclaimed commitment to international humanitarian law (Gümüő and Bardakçı, 2025). Umbrella organizations such as the European Women's Lobby (EWL) remained silent for a long time or issued statements that aligned with the official policy of the European Union and refrained from directly naming Israel. Some civil society organizations interpret the lack of a similar mobilization for women in Gaza to that which was displayed for Ukrainian women as a reflection of the exclusionary structure of European identity (Amnesty International, 2024; Muhanna-Matar, 2025). In this context, Palestinian women may be represented in the political and cultural imagination as an *other* situated outside the boundaries of the European subject and not regarded as *worthy of protection*.

Reproicide and Biopolitics

What has been unfolding in Gaza appears to constitute a form of systematic and gendered violence that cannot be explained by reference to the concept of collateral damage in the military literature (Bowden,

2023). In particular, when Israel's attacks are considered in terms of their biological effects on the Palestinian population, one can speak of what may be termed reproicide, which refers to the systematic targeting of reproductive capacities, including pregnant women, infants, fertility infrastructure, and reproductive healthcare, in ways that aim to disrupt the biological continuity of a group (Ross & Solinger, 2017). The literature also contains indications that support this assessment.

According to data from UN Women and the Gaza Ministry of Health as of mid 2025, seventy per cent of those killed are women and children. It is estimated that more than twenty-eight thousand women and girls have been killed directly in bombardments. However, these figures do not include indirect deaths resulting from hunger, disease, and a lack of medical care. Each day, an average of sixty-three women are killed, thirty-seven of whom are mothers. This situation converges with a domicile that makes it impossible to care for surviving children and that causes the collapse of the social fabric (Altay et al., 2024; Salem, 2024; UN, 2025; UN Women, 2025).

In a similar vein, data from the Palestinian Family Planning and Protection Association (PFPPA) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) describe the situation of pregnant women in Gaza as *apocalyptic*. In the months following October 2023, there was a three hundred per cent increase in the rate of miscarriages due to stress, fear, malnutrition, and physical trauma (Froio, 2025; IPPF, 2024). Because of the collapse of the health system and the embargo on medical supplies, thousands of women have been forced to undergo caesarean sections without anaesthesia, pain relief, or sterilization. Physicians have reported performing these operations by the light of mobile phones. According to UNFPA data, there were seventeen thousand births in the first half of 2025, whereas the corresponding figure for the same period in 2022 was twenty-nine thousand. This forty-one per cent decrease in birth rates suggests that the strategy aimed at the destruction of the population has been "successful" in its own terms (UNFPA, 2025). It has been reported that the Israeli army struck the largest in vitro fertilization center in Gaza, destroying thousands of frozen embryos (Salem et al., 2024). This act can be seen as a symbolic and concrete genocidal act that targets even children who might have been born in the future (PFC, 2025; Pratt et al., 2025). Legal scholars and feminist academics argue that this picture constitutes *the crime of imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group*, as defined in Article 2(d) of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (ISHR, 2025; Salem, 2024). In a situation in which this form of reproductive destruction is so manifest, the silence of liberal reproductive rights advocates can be regarded as both a legal and a moral violation.

The End of the Global Sisterhood Narrative?

The responses of neoliberal mainstream feminism to what has been unfolding in Gaza appear not merely as an institutional reflex, but as an ideological choice. While neoliberal feminism tends to confine women's rights to integration into the capitalist market economy and to individual empowerment, imperial feminism may regard the military power of the West as a guarantor of women's rights. This dynamic may lead to a questioning of these institutions' claims to global sisterhood.

For instance, leading figures of neoliberal feminism have launched a global campaign through various documentaries and have opposed the use of *rape as a weapon* of war by focusing on documenting the sexual violence perpetrated by Hamas (Parker, 2024). However, the same activism has chosen to remain silent regarding the actions of Israeli soldiers in Gaza that have been documented, including sexual harassment, humiliation, and the forcible exposure of Palestinian women's underwear. This selective mourning may convey the message that the rape or assault of a Palestinian woman does not carry the same scandalous weight as that of an Israeli woman (Aldossari, 2024; Almog and Amir, 2025; Mookerje, 2024).

Feminist Militarism as an Oxymoron

Neoliberal feminism conceptualizes women's service in the armed forces, their employment as combat pilots, or their holding executive positions in arms companies as indicators of *equality*. In this context, images of Israeli women pilots or tank operators who drop bombs on Gaza are presented in Western media as representations of *strong women* (see Ramon, 2024). This approach appears to invert the anti-violence stance and the ethic of the protection of life that lie at the core of feminism. Researchers who employ feminist theory from a critical perspective adopt the view that *if a woman is bombing another*

woman's home, this cannot be called feminism, and they therefore oppose militarized feminism (Bhatti, 2024; Pratt et al., 2025).

A similar militarist perspective also appears to manifest itself in views directed at Muslim women in Gaza. For example, Muslim women are continually coded as objects in need of rescue. As another example, one may point to the debate on banning the burqa that was promoted during the genocide in Gaza. The very fact that this debate was opened can be interpreted as indicating that the priority is not women's lives, but rather conformity with Western secular aesthetics. From this point of view, women in Gaza under Hamas rule are already assumed to be oppressed, and Israel's bombardment can be paradoxically rationalized as an act that liberates them from this oppression, or at least as an action that destroys their allegedly oppressive culture (Bhatti, 2024; Rashid, 2024). This can be conceptualized as an orientalist blindness and appears to deny that Palestinian women are active, resisting, and political subjects.

Academic Feminist Sophicide as an Oxymoron

Another practice that casts a shadow over the claim to global sisterhood is the process of *sophicide*, which denotes the deliberate destruction of intellectual life through the killing of scholars, artists, and knowledge producers, as well as the erasure of epistemic infrastructures (Vulliamy, 2009), and *scholasticide*, which refers more specifically to the targeting of educational institutions, universities, libraries, and academic communities as part of a broader strategy of cultural and temporal erasure (Desai et al., 2025), carried out in Gaza. The Israeli army has bombed all universities in Gaza, burned libraries, and deliberately targeted and killed leading academics and artists. The United Nations has described this as an attempt to erase the past and the future of a people. This situation is also characterized as *the destruction of intellectual resources* (Mookerje, 2024; PFC, 2025). It can be argued that defending academic freedom in the face of such practices is a specifically feminist responsibility.

In addition, it may be claimed that the other dimension of *sophicide* has unfolded in Western universities. For instance, student encampments in support of Palestine have been dismantled by university administrations through the use of police violence, and students and academics have been subjected to disciplinary and legal sanctions. Departments of feminist and gender studies have also been affected by this repression. One of the most prominent living theorists of feminism, Judith Butler, has had conferences cancelled and has been publicly targeted because of her criticism of Israel (Noce, 2024). In Germany, for example, the University of Cologne withdrew its invitation to Nancy Fraser on the grounds that she had signed a statement calling for the boycott of Israel (Connolly, 2024). In addition, the academic Jodi Dean was suspended from her position because of her article "Palestine Speaks for Everyone" (Essa, 2024). These events may indicate that the Western academy's professed commitments to *freedom of expression* and *critical thought* cease to hold when criticism of Israel's policies of collective punishment is at issue.

CONCLUSION

This article has aimed to critically analyse mainstream feminist discourses regarding Israel's policies of collective punishment during the genocide in Gaza. As indicated above, this process appears to constitute a turning point in the history of feminism. In particular, mainstream liberal feminism may no longer function as a universal point of reference. Its silence on Gaza may indicate that it is not a universal, but rather an imperial instrument. In other words, from this perspective, the discourse of women's rights appears to remain valid only insofar as it serves the geopolitical interests of the societies in question, and to be set aside when it comes into conflict with those interests. In addition, policies of collective punishment have turned women's bodies in Gaza into a biological battlefield. From the standpoint of feminist theory, opposing this development appears to be a biopolitical imperative. In conclusion, those who ignore the violence directed at women in Gaza may in fact be denying feminism itself, whereas those who criticise and resist such violence appear to be returning feminism to its radical roots, namely to its mission of standing with the oppressed.

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Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

Mainstream Feminism's Silence on Collective Punishment Practices in the Gaza Genocide

Gazze Soykırımındaki Kolektif Cezalandırıcı Uygulamalara Yönelik Ana Akım Feminizmin Suskunluğu

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Giriş

İsrail'in Gazze'ye yönelik ve uluslararası hukuk uzmanları ile Birleşmiş Milletler raportörleri tarafından soykırım riski taşıdığı ya da doğrudan soykırım olarak nitelendirilen saldırılarının, feminizmin uzun süredir tekrarlanan evrensellik iddiasını teste tabi tuttuğu savunulmaktadır. On yıllardır Batı merkezli akademide ve sivil toplumda hegemonik olan liberal feminizm, kadın haklarını insan haklarının ayrılmaz bir parçası ve coğrafyadan bağımsız evrensel bir normlar bütünü olarak sunarken, Gazze'deki kuşatma, bombardıman, aç bırakma ve sistematik sivil ölümler karşısındaki seçici sessizlik, hangi hayatların yas tutulmaya değer görüldüğü ve hangi acıların siyaseten harcanabilir sayıldığına dair derin bir hiyerarşiyi açığa çıkarmıştır. Bu, feminizmin bilişsel haritasındaki coğrafi ve toplumsal kör noktaları görünür kılan ontolojik bir kırılma olarak yorumlanmaktadır. Bu araştırma bu krizi yalnızca sessizlik sorunu değil, aktif epistemik şiddet olarak kavramsallaştırmaktadır. Epistemik şiddet, bu çalışma özelinde Filistinli kadınların kendi deneyimlerini anlatma, bilgi üretme ve acılarını duyurma kapasitesinin sistematik biçimde yok edilmesi anlamına gelmektedir. Batı medyası ve ana akım feminist kurumların Filistinli kadınları ya Hamas'ın canlı kalkanı olarak nesneleştirilmesi ya da tamamen görünmez kılması bu çerçevede okunmaktadır.

Yöntem

Bu çalışma, nitel veriye odaklanan post-pozitivist bir paradigma çerçevesinde, Eleştirel Söylem Analizi yöntemi kullanılarak tasarlanmıştır. Araştırmanın veri kaynakları, amaçlı örnekleme tekniği ile belirlenmiştir. Bu kapsamda; Batı dünyasında köklü bir kurumsal geçmişe, büyük ölçekli fon yapılarına ve küresel politika yapım süreçlerinde belirleyici bir etkiye sahip olma kriterlerini karşılayan neoliberal ana akım feminist kurumlar ve Feminist Dış Politika uygulayıcısı devlet aktörleri analize dahil edilmiştir. Veri toplama sürecinde, kurumların anlık sosyal medya reaksiyonları yerine, resmi web sitelerinde yayımlanan açıklamalar, yıllık raporlar ve basın bültenleri gibi yerleşik ve kalıcı kurumsal politikaları yansıtan belgeler esas alınmış; sosyal medya paylaşımları kapsam dışı bırakılmıştır. Ayrıca Ekim 2023 ile Kasım 2025 tarihleri arasında yayımlanan akademik makaleler, BM raporları, sivil toplum raporları ve aktivist manifestoları da doküman havuzuna eklenmiştir.

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Bulgular ve Tartışma

Sessizliğin Kurumsal Mimarisi

Ukrayna işgali ya da İran'daki Mahsa Amini protestoları sırasında Batı'daki büyük kadın örgütleri çok hızlı, açık ve ilkeli açıklamalarla devlet şiddetini kınarken, Gazze söz konusu olduğunda ya derin bir sessizliğe gömülmüş ya da failin adını anmayan, güç ilişkilerini görünmez kılan muğlak metinler üretmiştir. National Organization for Women, 7 Ekim saldırılarının hemen ardından İsraili kadınlarla dayanışma mesajı yayımlamış, İsrail'in hava ve kara saldırıları sonucu binlerce Filistinli kadının öldürülmesine ve yerinden edilmesine dair benzer güçte bir açıklama yapmamıştır. Feminist Majority Foundation örneği, geçmişte Afganistan işgalini *kadınları kurtarma* söylemiyle desteklemesi nedeniyle emperyal feminizmin kurumsal tezahürü olarak tartışılmaktadır. Planned Parenthood, üreme sağlığı alanındaki küresel öncülüğüne karşın Gazze'deki üreme sağlığı felaketi karşısında uzun süre sessiz kalmış, çalışanların açık mektuplarına ve içeriden gelen eleştirilere rağmen ancak aylar sonra, siyasi faili ve eylemin niteliğini anmayan sınırlı açıklamalar yapmıştır. Emily's List gibi liberal feminist yapılarda ise kadın adayları iktidara taşıırken bu adayların İsrail'e askeri yardımı onaylayan politikalara destek vermesi nedeniyle temsil siyaseti ile bu siyasetin ölümcül sonuçları arasındaki çelişki öne çıkarılmaktadır.

Devlet Feminizmi ve Feminist Dış Politika Paradoksu

Çeşitli ülkelerin Feminist Dış Politika söylemini benimsemeleri, ilk bakışta insan hakları, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği ve barış inşasına dayalı bir vizyon sunarken, Gazze krizi bu iddianın sınırdığı bir bağlam olarak sunulmaktadır. Almanya'nın *İsrail'in güvenliği Alman devlet aklındır* ilkesi doğrultusunda koşulsuz askeri ve siyasi destek vermesi, bu sırada Gazze'de öldürülen on binlerce kadın ve çocuğun feminist dış politika radarından adeta silinmesi, FFP'nin pratikte emperyal bir araç olarak işlediği iddiasını desteklemektedir. İsrail'i eleştiren feministler, sanatçılar ve akademisyenlerin antisemitizm suçlamaları ile susturulmaya çalışılması; Filistinli ve Yahudi kadın barış aktivistlerinin gösterilerinin yasaklanması, devlet feminizminin kendi sınırları içindeki kadınları dahi bastıran otoriter bir yapıya dönüşebildiğini göstermektedir. Avrupa Birliği düzeyinde Ursula von der Leyen'in savaşın ilk günlerinde İsrail'e giderek *yanımızdayız* mesajı vermesi, Avrupa kimliğinin dışlayıcı sınırlarını ve Filistinli kadınların bu sınırların dışında, korunmaya değer görülmeven *öteki* olarak konumlandırılmasını görünür kılmaktadır.

Biyopolitika

Gazze'de yaşananlar askeri literatür ile açıklanamayacak kadar sistematik ve cinsiyetlendirilmiştir. UN Women verileri, öldürülenlerin yaklaşık yüzde yetmişinin kadınlar ve çocuklar olduğunu, doğrudan bombardımanlarda on binlerce kadın ve kız çocuğunun hayatını kaybettiğini göstermektedir. Her gün onlarca annenin öldürülmesi, geride kalan çocukların bakımını imkansızlaştırarak toplumsal dokuyu çökertecek bir *hane kırımı* ile birleşmektedir. UNFPA verileri, hamile kadınların durumunu *kıyamet benzeri* olarak tanımlar; düşük oranlarında çarpıcı artış, anestezisiz sezaryenler, çöküş halindeki sağlık sistemi ve ciddi doğum oranı düşüşü, nüfusun biyolojik olarak hedef alındığı bir stratejiye işaret etmektedir. En büyük tüp bebek merkezinin bombalanarak binlerce embriyonun yok edilmesi, gelecekte doğabilecek çocukları dahi hedef alan sembolik ve somut bir soykırım eylemi olarak okunmaktadır. Hukukçular ve feminist akademisyenler, bu tabloyu Soykırım Sözleşmesi'nin grup içinde doğumları engellemeye yönelik tedbirler suçuyla ilişkilendirmektedir.

Küresel Kız Kardeşlik Anlatısının Sonu Mu?

Küresel kız kardeşlik anlatısının çöküşü, neoliberal ve militarist feminizm eleştirisi üzerinden derinleştirilebilir. Neoliberal feminizmin kadınların orduda görev almasını, savaş pilotu ya da silah şirketi yöneticisi olmasını eşitlik göstergesi olarak yüceltmesi; İsraili kadın pilot ve tankçıların *güçlü kadın* imgeleri olarak pazarlanması, feminizmin özündeki şiddet karşıtlığını tersyüz eden bir yaklaşım olarak okunabilir. Eleştirel feministler, bir kadının başka bir kadının evini bombaladığı bir durumda bunun feminizm olarak adlandırılmayacağını savunur. Aynı militarist bakış, müslüman kadınlara yönelik oryantalist söylemlerde de görülmektedir. Burka yasağı tartışmaları gibi örnekler, önceliğin kadınların yaşamı değil, Batılı seküler estetikle uyum olduğunu gösteren sembolik göstergeler olarak ele alınabilir. Bu söylem, Filistinli kadınları baskı altında, kurtarılması gereken pasif nesnelere olarak

kodlayarak onların direnen ve politik özne konumlarını reddetmektedir. Son olarak, Gazze'deki tüm üniversitelerin bombalanması, kütüphanelerin yakılması ve akademisyenlerin hedef alınarak öldürülmesi, bir halkın geçmişini ve geleceğini silmeye dönük bir entelektüel kaynak imhası olarak tartışılabilir. Buna paralel olarak Batı üniversitelerinde Filistin yanlısı kampüs eylemlerinin polis şiddetiyle bastırılması, feminist çalışmalar alanındaki akademisyenlerin cezalandırılması, Batı akademisinin ifade özgürlüğü ve eleştirel düşünce iddialarının, İsrail'in kolektif cezalandırma politikaları söz konusu olduğunda askıya alındığını göstermektedir.

Sonuç

Gazze soykırımı bağlamında ana akım feminist söylemlerin eleştirisinin feminizm tarihindeki bir kırılma anına işaret ediyor olabilir. Liberal feminizmin evrensel referans noktası olma iddiasının çözüldüğü, kadın hakları söyleminin jeopolitik çıkarlarla uyumlu olduğu sürece geçerli, bu çıkarlarla çatıştığında ise askıya alınan bir araç haline geldiği öne sürülmektedir. Kolektif cezalandırma politikalarının Gazze'de kadın bedenini biyolojik bir savaş alanına dönüştürdüğü, buna karşı çıkmanın feminist teori açısından biyopolitik bir zorunluluk olduğu savunulabilir. Gazze'deki kadınlara yönelik şiddeti görmezden gelenlerin feminizmin kendisini inkar eder hale geldiği, buna karşı çıkan ve direnen feministlerin ise feminizmi ezilenlerin yanında konumlanan radikal köklerine geri çağırdığı ileri sürülmektedir.