



A Review on The History of Western Feminism

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ABSTRACT

The present paper elaborated on the multiple waves of Western Feminism. Each wave carries different periods of time. Simultaneously, each wave has a specific aim, feature, and even event is worth mentioning that every particular period is influenced by a specific event that covers the wave. Furthermore, the history of Western Feminism is often limited to the so-called first and second waves. The period between the two waves, which lasted from 1920 to 1965, is almost not discussed. On the other hand, if the period is reviewed it is not counted as an important period for feminism but rather as a 'pause of time between the movements. Nevertheless, this does not mean that no one has looked at Western Feminism and its waves which have brought many changes. The first wave achieved legal rights for women. The second wave has brought a number of sociological, ideological, and political changes. The third wave is often related to critics as it has brought reproductive rights for females. The fourth and fifth wave has led to empowerment and inter-sectionalism of women.

1. Introduction

Whether socially, economically, or politically speaking, throughout the history of mankind women have had a long and intense struggle when it comes to gender equality. This paper review shares a range of relevant discussions about the history



of feminism since the main focus of the mentioned Ph.D. research is generally related to the struggle for women's rights. Therefore, this theoretical paper tries to explore an understandable image of the history of feminism i.e. Western societies. The main objective of this paper is to share a range of accurate knowledge on the history of Western Feminism over a particular period of time for those who are interested i.e. Western Feminism. More to the point, the paper seeks to highlight the different waves of feminism from a sociological point of view. Current and previous sociological studies have constantly tried to display the struggle for women's rights throughout the feminist movements via different sociological perceptions.

Methodologically, the study lies at the intersection of sociology and, political science. It should be emphasized that this paper has been done according to a historical and explanatory approach method, which is applied in both fields of political theory and political sociology. The explanatory approach is a method to make us understand something by describing and illustrating. Therefore, this paper uses literature research and text analysis as a tool for it.

In short, this review paper shows an overview on early works regarding this topic. First, a short introduction about the start of feminism throughout history is given. Then, the paper elaborates on the concept of feminism and the development of Western Feminism in connection with its pioneers. Afterward, the first, second, third, fourth, and fifth waves of Western Feminism together with their aims, characteristics and achievements are explained. Last but not least, the conclusion part of this literature review consists of restated ideas that remind the reader of the main points of this paperwork.

2. The Literature Review

Before expressing a clear explanation of the history of feminism, it should be highlighted that before the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth century, females were counted as the pioneers of so-called proto-feminism (LeGates, 2001, p.18). The latter predicts modern feminism as a concept that remained unrevealed. Going back in time, the period of the year 1550 to 1700 was seen as an extremely inspiring time in terms of the history of women and literature in England (Plain and Sellers, 2007, p. 41). Female authors started to publish their work through



manuscripts and printed books, in a broad variety of classifications such as poems, advice books, letters and translations, memoirs, and works of philosophy and fiction. The same women were female rulers that were living in a social and political era (Plain and Sellers, 2007).

2.1 The Pioneers of Feminism through History

Historically speaking, and according to Plain and Sellers (2007) feminism originated in the age of the Enlightenment and the French revolution of 1789. This phase was known as a period of philosophical movements that dominated the world of ideas in Europe in the 18th century (Outram, 2019). The progressive Enlightenment supported democracy, freedom of expression, and the destruction of religious authority. In this period, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) who was a British feminist and writer eagerly stood for educational and social equality for women. She pleads for the improvement of women's status through political change by reforming the national education systems (Plain and Sellers, 2007, p. 48). Moreover, in 1792, she published a book entitled *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, and due to the success of the book she became known as the 'primordial mother of feminism' (Plain and Sellers, 2007, p. 56). Another well-known female that struggled for the rights of women in the patriarchal society of that time was Virginia Woolf (1882-1941). She was a British writer and feminist that has been pointing out that women's experiences, especially in social movements, are fundamental principles for transformative social change (Plain and Sellers, 2007).

Although, some other scholars of gender note that Enlightenment ideals were not initially proposed as a global sense of the word. Even though, they inspired the struggles for women's rights (Outram, 2019, p. 5). It should be mentioned that the majority of Enlightenment thinkers did not support equality for everyone, regardless of race and gender; rather, they believed that rights and freedoms were an inborn matter (Outram, 2019). Therefore, it is worth noting that the first feminists were mainly liberals who struggled for the freedom of individuals.

2.1.1 The Emergence of the Concept of Feminism



Walters (2005) and Witt (2004) argue that feminism has emerged in Anglo-Saxon and North-western European countries. According to them, the beginning of feminism occurred in the 19th century. A particular movement was created under the name: Women's Movement Declaration of Sentiments that was used to protest against the second-class citizenship of women. The history of feminism includes stories of the movements and beliefs. The social, political, and ideological movement called feminism has always been a core of concentration among scholars. It is worth highlighting that there is a range of different definitions and explanations for the stated phenomenon. The French feminist and campaigner Hubertine Auclert (1848-1914) was the very first individual who used the term feminism around the year 1800. The concept of the mentioned term refers to a synonym for the women's movement. Auclert argues that the word feminism originates from the Latin term *Femina* which means woman (Gelfand, 1988, pp. 621-622). On the other hand, in her book *The Second Sex* (1949), the French existentialist and feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986) investigates popular definitions of femininity. She concludes that those definitions have been used to suppress women, through the ages. For de Beauvoir the views of individuals are socially and culturally produced. Femininity is not fundamental; it is a construct that has been learned through socialization (Dini, 2017). While the historian feminist and author LeGates (2001) defines feminism as the pursuit of political, economic, and legal equality.

According to Kowaleski-Wallace (2009), many feminists do not agree with each other on a specific definition of feminism. They differ in their perception of the concept of feminism and criticize it. Yet, they do share interests in combing several different categories. Another explanation of feminism by Baber and Allen (1992) reveals that the concept demonstrates a framework that deconstructs the ideologies and practices that support the gender inequalities between females and males while challenging the “essentialist feminist theories that ignore differences among women related to factors such as age, race, class, and sexual orientation” (Baber and Allen, 1992, p. 2).

2.2 The First Wave of Feminism



Throughout history and as one of the oldest movements feminisms carries not only a single wave; rather, it contains a range of different ones. LeGates (2001, p. 197) addresses that prior to the 1850s and the 1860s feminist networks were often loosely organized or short-lived, whereas after the mentioned period reformers in Europe and North America started to form more permanent movements. These developments are what the majority of historians have called first-wave feminism. It is essential to mention that since the late 1960s, the history of feminism has been divided into different waves.

The American Sociologists George Ritzer and J. Michael Ryan explain that feminism is understood as a social movement with two periods of high mobilization while the first wave is 'Between 1792-1920', and its second wave in the '1960s to 2008'. However, between both waves, there is a period of quiet "*hiatus*" (2010, p. 273). Ritzer however, (2005, p. 306) claims that the first wave of feminism emerged as a result of suffrage among women and the demands of middle-class white women's political, educational, and employment equivalence to men. The wave also focused on overturning legal inequality in the sense of having the right to a paid job. In addition, in the Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory, Friedan shares in her book entitled *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) that one of the goals of first-wave feminism appears to be a way for women to discover themselves, experience satisfaction in their careers, families, and relationships (Kowaleski-Wallace, 2009; O'Brien, 2009; Witt, 2004). According to Ritzer the first wave of feminism ended during the economic crisis of the 1930s which is also known as the Great Depression (2005, p. 77).

2.3 The Second Wave of Feminism

As for the second-wave, Aleman and Renn (2002), Baber and Allen (1992), O'Brien (2009), and Holmes (2007), mentioned that the all the waves started from the 1960s until the early 1980s in which its main focus was linked to issues that were concerned with equality between sexes and discrimination of women. It is worth noting that the second wave of feminism is more difficult to be described if compared to the first wave, because different thoughts and movements arose during the wave. As a result, feminism received a large amount of criticism from various scholars specialized in



different fields of study. In addition, Plain and Sellers argue that the history of feminist criticism emerged during the second wave of feminism (2007, p.20).

Nevertheless, in their book Ritzer and Rayan address that Nancy Chodorow, who is an American sociologist and professor that is also described as a psychoanalytic feminist, is regarded as one of the founding scholars of second-wave feminism because of her book entitled *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) which shares a range of challenged subjective perceptions about gender in the sense of “how individuals come to see themselves as masculine or feminine” (2010, p. 92). Ritzer (2005, p. 77), describes in his book that the second wave of feminism aimed to continue the struggle for the rights of female citizens in terms of controlling their own lives to the same extent as men. Furthermore, another goal of the second wave to understand the nature of gender inequality between males and females as it illustrates the gender roles, experiences, and interests (Plain and Sellers, 2007; Witt, 2004; Walters, 2005; LeGates, 2001).

Globally seen, feminists have always differed in causes, aims, and intentions, depending on time, classes, culture, and country. Many Western feminists advocate that all movements that work to attain the rights of women should be considered feminist movements, even if they do not apply the concept of feminism to themselves (Witt, 2004).

2.3.1 Simone de Beauvoir as a Key Figure in Second Wave of Feminism

One of the key figures that played a vital role during the second-wave of feminism is the French feminist Simone de Beauvoir. She was born in 1908 in Paris. Simone de Beauvoir was the oldest daughter of a middle-class family. She studied literature, mathematics, and philosophy at Sorbonne, which is also known as the University of Paris. After her graduation, she followed a teacher training course at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, where she met Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) who was a French philosopher, novel writer, and the founder of French existentialism. Both were lovers, friends, and lifelong partners until the death of Jean-Paul Sartre in 1980 (Dini, 2017, p. 10). Their relationship has been criticized and ridiculed as their lifestyle was not in-line with the conservative France of that time. Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre’s relationship was based on an agreement that consisted of keeping own



independence and sexual intercourse with others should stay possible. They were both against marriage as they considered marriage as bourgeois (Dini, 2017).

Simone de Beauvoir has published many novels books and philosophical essays. Her essay which was later published as a book, in 1949, entitled *The Second Sex*, became one of the best-known works of feminism and is considered as the main work of feminism in France. This book discusses the social status of women from the beginning of civilization to the modern day. Her main argument is that “Women have always been forced to take a secondary role to men since the earliest times, and that the whole human condition is viewed in male terms and is described in language that excludes women” (Dini, 2017, p. 12). Other subjects that were tackled in her book were females’ role in the home environment, their function in marriage, the debate of partialism (a male-centered attitude that continues until this day). Furthermore, Simone de Beauvoir explains the idea of femininity while different scholars agree that her work seems to date the future generation, as this book supported changes in the life of women nowadays (LeGates, 2001).

As for the implementation of certain changes based on different types of rights, females have achieved a range of distinct feminine rights during the second wave of feminism. According to Chafetz (2006, p. 154), the second-wave movement in Western countries has worked on female issues related to reproductive rights, sexuality, economic exploitation, and domestic violence against women. Then, he also describes that scholars date the feminist comeback to the founding of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966 (Chafetz, 2006, p. 161). During the comeback period, feminism has established itself by forming organizations and ideologies while moving into the public consciousness (Chafetz, 2006; Witt, 2004). Furthermore, in the 1970s major sub-divisions of feminism have emerged such as liberal, radical, social, and lesbian feminism.

2.3.2 Women’s Equality Achieved by the Second Wave of Feminism

Regarding a massive change that has been achieved by the second-wave of feminism concerning female equality, is literary works on women and motherhood (O'Brien, 2009; Baber and Allen, 1992). Many scholars have concentrated on working, single, and lesbian mothers, teenage girls, breastfeeding in the workplace, pregnancy, and



childbirth. Interestingly, scholars that are new in the area, concentrate more thoroughly on subjects that were in the past less investigated such as, female disabilities, mothers of disabled children, and maternal sexuality. Expectedly, the field of feminism will continue as it expands in new directions (O'Brien, 2009, p. 618).

Furthermore, it can be said that the second wave of feminism affected Western society in many different ways (Aleman and Renn, 2002; Copenhaver, 2002; Chafetz, 2006). Major changes have been made in all the branches as a radical transformation in research, medical fields, the fashion world, services, sports, literature, education, law, culture, social work, global thinking, family life, and even in different religions. Concerning the latter, for instance, in some conservative Western countries, gay liberation movements made same-sex marriage possible (O'Brien, 2009, p. 622). Another topic that received attention is the issue of rape. The latter was the reason for the creation of women's shelters which brought even in several Western countries changes in custody and divorce laws (Chapman et al., 2005, p. 142).

In his book, O'Brien (2009, p. 134) indicates that feminists of the second wave were divided in terms of sex and sexuality. For instance, some were against lesbians, and others believed that pornography, prostitution, and any sex with men will maintain the sexual subordination of females. The opposite is also true, namely, some feminists which are called sex-positive feminists, supported women's choice in sexual partners as they were of the opinion that females deserve free access to sexual satisfaction with whom and whenever they desire. In addition to that, sex-positive feminists were sharing the same opinion adults that should have the freedom of exchanging sex for money. Yet, there were advocating decriminalization of prostitution and the policing of the sex trade (O'Brien, 2009; LeGates, 2001). Many scholars would agree that the period of the second wave of feminism, in America, ends at the beginning of the 1980s due to feminist sex wars over problems related to sexuality and pornography. This so-called sex war was the primary purpose of third-wave feminism in the beginning of the 1990s (O'Brien, 2009).

Feminists of the second wave have been striving for equal rights within the disciplines of the academic arena. The 1980s consisted of a period where feminists started to achieve major progress in the sense of social research from the perspective of women. As it is highlighted by Chapman et al. (2005, p. 16), feminist scholars have



revealed how all academic fields have been controlled through the perception of males. In the world of social sciences, this phenomenon carries the meaning that females were constantly been ignored while males have been considered the norm. That is why feminists started to do attempt to replace the balance in researching women's lives by using Western society as a clear example. It is worth pointing out that the goal of feminism, at that time, was to introduce female emancipation to devise more open and equal techniques in terms of the methodology that had to be suitable in examining women in general and their cases and their perception according to the world (ibid., p. 16). Nowadays, both research and feminist theories considered as the core of the majority of classical academic disciplines and interdisciplinary settings such as women and gender studies. A feminist methodology is an approach that is designed by second-wave feminist scholars to gather data to analyze information to conduct research that examines patriarchal understandings of how knowledge is created and accepted as legitimate by academics, feminist activists, policymakers, and ordinary people (O'Brien, 2009, p. 322). The above happenings have steered feminists of the second and third wave towards a deep focus on topics related to women in the arena of higher education. Subjects such as the experiences of women in higher education, and, gender experiences in the academic workplace were becoming so attractive for scholars to study the above questions (Ritzer, 2005).

2.4 The Third-Third Wave of Feminism

The third-third wave of Feminism contained significant characteristics that are worth to be mentioned. Initially, the stated wave started during the beginning of the 1990s while it stretched out towards the period before 2012. A prominent key figure of third-wave feminism is Rebecca Walker who is an American writer, feminist, and activist that has published a well-known book named *Becoming the Third-wave* in 1992 (Copenhaver, 2002). According to Walker (2001), one of the characteristics of third-wave feminism is the strong statement that feminism essentially continues with the ideological challenge produced by women of color to examine and perform in ways that mirror the intersectionality of gender-related sexual, racial, and ethnic suppression. Another feature of the third-third feminism is that the aspects of activism and ideology have experienced a clear change, in that, young women started



to concentrate less on victimization while and on empowerment. Therefore, the attention was more on individuals rather than on organizations. This shift upgraded the world of modern technology in the sense of the appearance of feminist websites that were offering advice, reading lists, and calls for action (ibid., 2009). The third characteristic of the wave in issue refers to reclamation of femininity and the production of a sex-positive culture where women can play with the occurrence and create a political message via their bodies about possibilities and challenges of gender and sexual categorization in the culture. However, a few of the mentioned features may sound new, the matters of both waves, namely, the second and the third wave is not different. Subjects such as, reproductive rights, the function of sexuality in self-esteem, body image, and the right to live without violence are all topics that shift from one generation to the other (O'Brien, 2009, p. 914).

According to Ritzer (2005, p. 305), the third wave of feminism is the last wave of feminism in the twentieth century. It symbolizes diversity based on every single level such as women, classes, culture, and so forth. White feminists and feminists of color have orchestrated diversity during the third wave. The latter process has developed more multicultural and global feminism in the twentieth century. Despite the consideration of the different waves of feminism, the latter regularly distinguishes itself as a multi-faceted set of ideas and actions. Notably, feminism included different fields, such as liberal, radical, cultural and postmodernist variation, and it shares multiple thoughts and strategies for attaining social change and cultural transformation. Even though the history of feminism consists of various ideas in a wild conflict, it can be demonstrated that each wave of feminism is a standing stone with a unique unified agenda (ibid., 2005). Therefore, as Walker (2001) describes, feminism is unique of its kind, and at the same time, it consists fully of splinter movements.

2.5 The Fourth Wave of Feminism

The third wave was not a wave that ended the process of feminism, instead, it continued as it expanded towards a fourth and a fifth wave in the Western world. The fourth wave of feminism started around 2012. Its main features are can concentrate the empowerment of women, using internet tools, and the subject of intersectionality



(Abrahams, 2017). The main goal of the fourth wave gains greater gender equality by paying attention to gendered norms and female neglect in societies (Grady, 2018). The fourth wave of feminism differs from the previous one in terms of the disorganization of actions, the involvement of men, and the use of social media. The latter, ensures an action goes viral without an established organization behind it (Abrahams, 2017). Although, some scholars argue that the fourth-wave did not start in European countries or America, rather, it all started in the protests, in India, in the year 2012, when a female student was brutally raped and murdered by a group of men. Another event that took place in Turkey became another cause for the start of the fourth-wave. The judge, in Turkey, found the female victim, who was raped and murdered, guilty since she was wearing a mini-skirt (Cornelissen, 2019).

2.6 The Fifth Wave of Feminism

Regarding the fifth-wave of feminism which consists of only a few Western countries, some figures argue that the wave includes a completely different aim than the first four ones, but unfortunately not much is written yet in the academic arena concerning the fifth wave. Nonetheless, a young American writer named Mary Retta who is an education columnist specializing in black feminism, the youth movement, and internet culture, wrote an essay in 2020 to show that the first four waves of feminism, in the Western world, attempted to work with the current system to bring political and social changes. While the goal of the fifth wave of feminism is to destroy the present system in order to build a new society that prioritizes the need of every stigmatized individual to be recognized by politicians, regardless of their gender (Retta, 2020).

3. Conclusion:

To sum up one can conclude that the history of Western Feminism is clearly categorized into multiple waves in which every single one of which contains specific events, aims, and characteristics that are obviously based on the situations and periods that have been covering the waves. For instance, the first wave was a wave that strove for the suffrage of women. While the second-wave gave access to equal opportunities in the work environment as it ended sex discrimination as well. Now,



the third-wave lacked a cohesive aim which came to be that the wave was seen as an extension of the second-wave. The empowerment of women became the central focus during the wave that followed, namely, the fourth-wave. The fifth-wave which is considered by some scholars as the last wave struggles to achieve a new global system that prioritizes the needs of marginalized people despite their gender. Yet, it should be expressed that regardless of strong continuity between the waves of feminism, it is still lacking cohesion. In other words, the generations of the waves have always been striving for the rights of women; however, the circumstances within the stages have determined what the aims of feminism should be currently and what they have to look like in the future, without any cooperation among them.

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بیداچونه وهیه ک له سهر میژووی فیمینیزی پۆژئاوا

پوخته:

ئهم توێژینه وهیه بریتییە له پێشکەشکردنی تیروانینیکی کۆمه‌لناسییانه له باره‌ی میژووی فیمینیزی پۆژئاوا. ئهم توێژینه وهیه تیشک ده‌خاته سهر چه‌ند ژماره‌یه‌ک له شه‌پۆله‌کانی فیمینیزی پۆژئاوا. ههر شه‌پۆلیک ماوه‌ی کاتی جیاوازی هه‌لگرتوو و له هه‌مان کاتدا ههر شه‌پۆلیک ئامانج، تایبه‌تمه‌ندی، و پووداوێکی دیاریکراوی هه‌یه. شایه‌نی باسه‌ که ههر سه‌رده‌میکی دیاریکراو کاربگه‌ری له‌سه‌ر پووداوێکی دیاریکراوی هه‌بووه، که به‌م شێوه‌یه شه‌پۆله‌کانیان داپۆشیوه. له پال ئهمه‌شدا میژووی فیمینیزی پۆژئاوا س‌نووردارکراوه به‌ ته‌نها هه‌بوونی شه‌پۆلی یه‌که‌م و دووهم، که ماوه‌ی

ئەو دوو شەپۆلانیە لە نیوان سالی (١٩٢٠) تا سالی (١٩٦٥) بوو، که زۆر که میس باسی لەسەر کراوه. لە لایە کیتروە ئەگەر پیداجوونەووەیەک بۆ ئەو ماوێه بکریت ئەوا وەک ماوێهەکی گرنگ داناندری بەلکوو وەک وەستانیەک لە نیوان بزووتنەووەکاندا هەژمار دەکریت. هەرچەندە ئەو واتیە ناگەیه نیت، که هیچ کەسێک چاوی بە فیمینیزی رۆژئاوایی بە شەپۆلەکانیەووە نەهیناوه، که لە بنەرەدا گۆرانکارییەکی زۆری بە دواي خۆیدا هیناوه. شەپۆلی یەکەم مافی یاسایی بۆ ژنانی بە دەست هیناوه، شەپۆلی دووهم کۆمەلێک گۆرانکاری کۆمەلایەتی، ئایدۆلۆژی، و سیاسی هیناوهتە ئاراوه، و شەپۆلی سێیەم زۆر جار پەییوەندی بەو رەخنەگرانەووە هەیه و مافی مێینەي دووبارە بەرەهەم هیناوهتەووە. لە کۆتایییدا شەپۆلی چوارەم و پینجەم بوونە هۆی بەهیزبوون و یەکتربکردنی ئاڤرەتان.

مراجعة لتاريخ النسوية الغربية

المخلص:

في هذه الدراسة حاولت فيها وقدمت مراجعة موجزة لتاريخ الحركة النسوية في الغرب من منظور سوسولوجي. تناولت الورقة الحالية بالتفصيل الموجات المتعددة للنسوية الغربية. حيث تحمل كل موجة فترة زمنية مختلفة. في الوقت نفسه، لكل موجة هدف وميزة محددة، وظهرت من الدراسة بأن لكل فترة معينة تأثيراتها الخاصة بحدث معين يغطي الموجة ويتسم به. علاوة على ذلك، تقتصر وتتسم تاريخ النسوية الغربية على ما يسمى بالموجتين الأولى والثانية، لقد استمرت تلك الفترة الممتدة بين الموجتين من عشرينيات القرن الماضي الى أواسط ستينياته. يبدو من الدراسة بأن هذه الفترة لم تتم مناقشتها تقريباً، هذا من جانب، ومن جانب آخر إذا ما تمت مراجعة الفترة هذه، فإنها لا تُحسب على أنها فترة مهمة للنسوية بل يمكن اعتبارها "وقفاً أو فجوة زمنية بين الحركات". ومع ذلك، فهذا لا يعني أنه لم ينظر أحد إلى النسوية الغربية وموجاتها التي أحدثت العديد من التغييرات. توصلت الدراسة الى أن الموجة الأولى قد أثبتت الحقوق القانونية للمرأة في حين جلبت الموجة الثانية عدداً من التغييرات الاجتماعية والأيدولوجية والسياسية. تبين بأنه غالباً ما ترتبط الموجة الثالثة بالنقد والمناقدين للموجة، لأنها جلبت حقوق الإنجاب للإناث. تبين من الدراسة بأن الموجتان الأخيرتان الرابعة والخامسة قد أدت إلى تمكين المرأة ومواجهتها للنقاطات التي تقف بوجهها.