

## WOMEN OF THIRD WORLD AND GENDER EQUALITY

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**Abstract:** *Many questions appear in minds are connected to the woman's role and position in political ball, whether she is an affective player in decision-making, or she is just a doll who satisfies man's needs. Thereon, this article examines female struggles in decision-making. Also, it studies basic notions that are related to women of third world and gender equality. Without any doubt, woman is the mother, the sister, the daughter and the wife, she is the person who brings to the world a new life, and she is considered as the core of the family. Therefore, the purpose from this work is to draw attention to this unfair bias against equality of the genders; which has gradually broken down when the time has come for women to demand for their rights as citizens, and also challenging men in their political, social and economic world. Moreover, the growing global interest in the issue of women's development enables them to achieve their roles successfully by holding a series of seminars and conferences that emphasize the need to support the role of women from the importance of their position in society. The result from this research ends with the fact that women were able to show the world in general and men in particular, that they are accomplished to succeed the responsibilities that are related to both relatives and regime. Besides, they confirm that politics is not only man's game.*

**Keywords:** gender-equality, politics, power, society, third-world, woman.

### 1. Introduction

Much of Western feminist states theory in the 1900s has largely ignored the experience of the Third World women under the post-colonial situations, because most Third World states can be categorized as 'weak' states. Moreover, women in these circumstances were not aware about their rights. Thus, this chapter illustrates how women from underdeveloped countries could challenge the difficulties that made by males in order to control females and asking for their privileges and rights.

### 2. Woman and Third World Society

The third world which is known as 'backward', 'underdeveloped', 'undeveloped' or 'developing' is considered as less developed to the first, or second world which consists of the African, a quantity of Asian, and a number of Latin American countries. All are witnessing an explosion in demographic and urban growth, with repetition economic sectors (industry sector modern and traditional), and its dependence on the export of raw materials plus semi-finished materials and failure to achieve self-sufficiency in food. In addition to the increasing foreign debts, and economic dependence of the former colonial countries, these facts did not stop the western feminism spring of twentieth century which went beyond the European continents to get in touch with the third world women who strongly were influenced by the courage of the first world women.

Nevertheless, before the mid of the twentieth century the Indian writer Chandra Mohanty (1991) stated that, "For too long, women in the third world have been considered not agents of their own destiny, but victims". (Ray, Kortewge, 1999: 47). For the reason that, most of the third world women were suffering from racism, discrimination, widow burning (in India), female infanticide (i.e., the practice of killing an unwanted newborn), and female genital cutting (FGC) which is also known as "infibulations". According to the definition of the World Health Organization (FGC) refers to the partial or total removal of the external female genital, or injury the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. Moreover, the table below

shows the countries that use the female genital cutting (FGC) to their girls. This tradition still applies until the present day.

**Table 1: Popularity of FGM percent in the Third world**

Country	Prevalence of FGC	Country	Prevalence of FGC
Somalia	98%	Ivory Coast	36%
Djibouti	96%	Nigeria	27%
Guinea	93%	Kenya	27%
Egypt	91%	Senegal	26%
Eritrea	89%	Cent. African Rep.	24%
Mali	98%	Yemen	23%
Sierra Leone	88%	Tanzania	15%
Sudan	88%	Benin	13%
Burkina Faso	76%	Iraq	8%
The Gambia	76%	Ghana	4%
Ethiopia	74%	Togo	4%
Mauritania	69%	Niger	2%
Liberia	66%	Uganda	1%
Guinea-Bissau	50%	Cameroon	1%
Chad	44%		

Source: <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/feb/06/what-is-female-genital-mutilation-where-happen>

Accordingly, the table above illustrates that most of African and even Muslim counties as Egypt, Mali and Sudan using the custom of the **Female Genital Cutting** without any specific reasons, forgetting human rights and the pain of their daughters and wives. Unfortunately this act is still until today in some African tribes.

### 3. Women's Wakefulness

Third World feminist in the twentieth represented a challenge to the dominance applied by Western feminism in the context of the development of feminist thought, which always tends to ignore the specific capabilities of the ethnic groups that are outside the Western cultural perceptions. Hence, during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, most Western female were describing the Third World women as sisterhood but when those females were granted their rights in the 1900's some of them started treating the women of developing countries in their literary works "as passive victims of barbaric and primitive treatments".(Haleh Afshar, 1996: 10)

In other words, the Western feminists closed the eyes to the role and experience of the Third World women during the post-colonial era. So as retribution to what was written against the Third world women many feminists' writers from the backward appeared and astonishing the Western with their writings such as, the Indian novelist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak with her famous novel *Can the Subaltern Speak?* In (1988), Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Sheila Sandoval who criticized the stereotype image of the Middle East and North African women (MENA) which were given by Western feminists who are not relating to the third world women's culture and did not have any idea about how those women were living. Relating to this, Chandra Talpade Mahonty in her book "Under Western Eyes " (1991) criticized first world feminists for their view on the third world's females as well as she drew a method reductive portraying by ordinary women in the Third World in feminist discourse. In fact the Western women were portrayed as; knowledgeable, modern, and in control of their bodies who have the right to share their ideas in a public and political sphere, with enjoy the freedom to take decisions. Whereas women that belong to the Third world were portrayed as; living a bitty life, because they are ignorance due to the lack of education, uncivilized and living in poverty as well as they obey the traditional culture which ruled by men. In this point,

Chuchryk a Chilean woman writer (1989) illustrated that, most of women in developing countries stayed with their husbands for the sake of their children when she said:

“I married when I was 14 years old.... I have been living with my husband for thirty years.... When the girls were born, I slept with them, after working like a dog all day long. He never helped me, slept in the other room. Then, when the girls were still, he would come and get me. He would fulfill himself and that was it. Me, never.... But because of my daughters I put up with everything. I live for them.” (Haleh Afshar, 1996: 69)

This events and the thought of Western women on (MENA) made women of the Third World recognizing that feminist movement does not mean only the demand for equal right but in fact it goes beyond this, it is about creating spaces with the purposes and objectives of engaging into cultural boundaries, and this idea was identified by Talpade Chandra Mohanty as ‘imagined community’. As well as, they were looking for tools in order to improve that they were capable to obtain their right as the western females did in the 1900’s.

#### **4. Women’s Struggles in the Third World Nations**

The Third World witnessed a variety of women’s liberations that were searching for freedom from enslavement and racism. However, when Western women were struggled to expand their political privileges in the nineteenth and twentieth century, women in the Third World were experienced the authoritarian and military regimes of the colonialism at that time especially in Africa. The movements in the Third World emerged as a nationalist movements seeking for the independence from colonialism. Before addressing in this issue, the one should know that the National liberation movements from the eighteenth until the mid of the twentieth century have a fundamental influence in highlighting the position of Women who played an essential role in the war against the colonialism.

##### **4.1. Women’s Suffrage in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

Women’s struggle in the Third World was invisible under the control of males in decision making. Thus these women were often used terms as motherhood and ‘complementarily’ instead of equality with the aim of achieving some possessions as comfort life and safety for their children. Furthermore, the women in both Asia, Africa and Latin America were struggled for their own benefits differing with the Western female who were fighting not only for their personal sakes but also to climb the highest position in the state.

Therefore, Azerbaijan was the first Muslim nation that enfranchises women in (1918) after the collapse of Russian empire in the country. In addition to The Brazilian women who could win the suffrage right on a national level in (1933), and in (1988) they became completely equal to men in all the legal aspects, where the nation observed a huge participation in social and economic employments in (1970) and (1980) furthermore many female ministers entered the the Brazilian cabinet in the government of João Baptista do Oliveira Figueiredo (1979-1985).

Also, females in Indonesia were granted the suffrage right in November (1941), and Roden Ajeng Kartini was one of the famous women who sopped the women’s movement in Indonesia as well as she was best known by her speech, “*Habis Gelap, Terbitlil Terang*” i.e.,(After Dark, comes the Light). Additionally, Japan gave women the suffrage right in (1945), also women in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh were gaining the right to vote in (1947) and Women in Argentine gained their suffrage rights in (1947) but many struggles happen after that during the government of the dictator Gorgy Rafael Videla in (1976) who was kidnapped about 500 children from their families in order to train them as soldiers. Thanks to the Argentinean women’s revolution and the strong demand for their captured children who never comeback could end the rule of Gorgy Rafael Videla in (1981).

Concerning the women in Arab countries, most of them granted the right to vote after the independence such as Turkey in (1930), Algeria in (1962), Iran in (1963) with the exception of Kuwait who first granted women in (1985) but later it was removed than granted

women I Kuwait for the second time in (2006) while women in Saudi Arabia did not have the right to vote. Thereon, by the end of the nineteenth century almost all the women were giving the right to participate in elections thanks to the women’s struggles and help of many feminist conferences that hold for the aim of assisting the Third world women.

**5. Famous Conferences Supporting Women’s Rights**

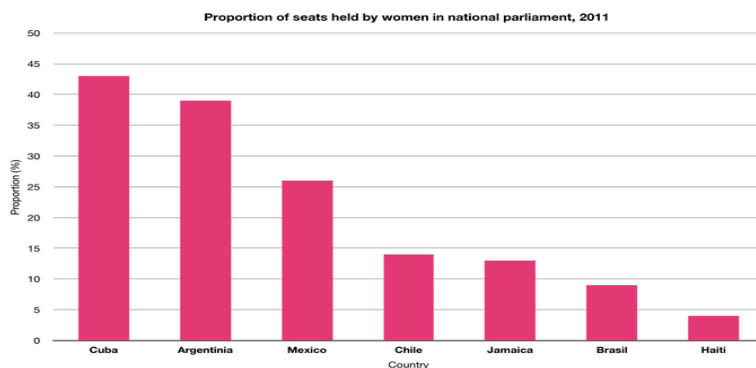
There were four famous world conferences which took place between (1975) and (1995) with the intention of raising the idea of freedom for women that was used first by Western feminism. Furthermore, the first conference on women was in Mexico City in 1975, than in Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985, and Beijing in 1995.the aim and the focus of these conferences was to give women liberty as any other citizen. In addition to the Conference on Environment, and Development (1992, Rio de Janeiro), the World Conference on Human Rights (1993, Vienna), the International Conference on Population and Development (1994, Cairo), and the World Summit on Social Development (1995, Copenhagen). Hence, the purpose from these last conferences was to seek the problem of violence against women in the world.

Women’s groups in both Western and Third world actively participated in these conferences and had a positive effect on the processes, results and decisions exploring how the key issues and perspectives dealt with each conference that can carry with it a precious chance for evaluating the tasks of the modern international women’s movement. The theme of all four UN conferences on women, were “Equality, Development, and Peace”. This notions looks at two key issues: first the politics of development and second building solidarity across differences. According to these conferences on women’s issues, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that:

“The authority of government is grounded in the will of the people. Half, even more than half, of ‘the people’ are women. Yet for far too long, women’s will, women’s voices, women’s interests, priorities, and needs have not been heard, have not determined who governs, have not guided how they govern, and to what ends. Since women are amongst the least powerful of citizens, with the fewest social and economic resources on which to build political power, special efforts are often needed to elicit and amplify their voice.” ( Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. 2008/09: 30)

Gratitude to these conferences which were done in order to create a kind of equality between men and women in political participation women - although they still marginalized in decision-making particularly in the Third world - they could put their hands on some seats in national parliament during the 21<sup>st</sup> century as it is shown in the subsequent diagram.

**Figure 3: Third world women in national parliament seats in 2011.**



Source: www.Womenindecisionmaking.com (images)

This diagram shows that women in both Cuba and Argentina are members in parliament with more than 35% (Cuba +40%, Argentina 40%) also women MPs in Latin America increase to 25%, Chile and Jamaica with 15%, whereas, women as MPs in Brazil and Haiti enhance less than 10% of seats in national parliament.

## 6. Arab Women and Political Participation

Arab Women usually suffer from inequality and discrimination between them and men in many social and political spheres, and this goes back to the leftovers of the colonialism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in the Arab countries and the Third world generally where corruption and hypocrisy are threaten those societies. Actually it is prohibited for an Arab Muslim nation to accept a woman as a president.

Even so, Islam gives women their rights as equal as man without any vague and the best proof of this is the number of fences that mentioned in the Qur'an which Enhance the status of women in the life. On one hand, some believers support the notion of Political Rights of Women in Islam. On the other hand, there are no legitimate limitations or officially authorized on the participation of Arabian women in political parties, parliament, government and decision-making, nevertheless, the only problem here is the lack of female participation in controlling political power to the community as a governor.

## 7. Conclusion

Although women are still marginalized in some Third world and Arab societies, but they bravely could challenge men in decision-making. The realization of the principle of equality and to guarantee the participation of women in the administration of the state and politics is very important in order to build strong nations that stands on freedom, equality and democracy, and this is not because the woman is a major contributor to the production of material goods and spiritual only, but also, she considered as an essential product for life also. Woman from the backward was able to build her own strong personality and to be among the characters in both the cultural and the political sphere such as the Brazilian President [Dilma Rousseff](#) in (2011); [Sonia Gandhi](#), President of the Indian National Congress Party in (1998-2004); [Cristina Fernandez](#), President of Argentina from (2003 to 2007). In addition to [Yingluck Shinawatra](#), Prime Minister of Thailand in (2011), and [Laura Chinchilla](#), President of Costa Rica in (2010). All these women confirmed that women are capable government leaders equal to men.

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