

Epistemological Insights on Feminism Movement for Women Rights

رؤى معرفية حول الحركة النسوية لحقوق المرأة



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المخلص

تهدف هذه الورقة الرؤى المعرفية حول مذهب النسوية والتي تمت رؤيتها من زوايا مختلفة في مجال البحث. لذلك، عندما يتعلق الأمر بالتنظير لمصطلح النسوية، فإن المنظرين ينظرون إلى الحركات النسوية عبر عصور مختلفة ومتطورة من زمن لآخر في تصورات حديثة، بطرق أكثر علمية وتقليدية للأكاديميين. تتناول الورقة أيضاً توسع الحركة النسوية، عبر موجات مختلفة، طوال القرنين الثامن والتاسع عشر، والتي كانت مرتبطة بالليبرالية التي شجعت الحرية لجميع الأفراد. المذهب النسوي تم اعتباره شكل من أشكال الحق في الحصول على فرصة التحرر من التدخل الذي أوجدته المجتمعات قدر الإمكان، لتحقيق نجاحهن ومساوهم وثروتهم الخاصة، وهذه إحدى النتائج الرئيسية التي توصل إليها البحث.

Abstract:

This paper targets epistemological visions about feminism which was viewed by different angles up to the discipline and area of research. However, when it comes to theorizing the concept, theorists rather view the movements through different eras in a newer perception, in more scientific and conventional ways for academicians. The paper also covers the expansion of feminism, through different waves, all along the eightieth and nineteenth centuries, which was related to liberalism that encouraged freedom, for all the individuals. It is included as a form of right to have the opportunity to be free from the interference created by the government, as

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much as possible, to achieve their own success and their own path and wealth, and this is one of the main findings that the research reaches

Keywords: Feminism, gender discrimination, women work, economy, equality.

Introduction

The start of feminism as we understand it, occurred in the late eightieth century, in lots of ways in conjunction with the French Revolution and it was at a time when there are new constitutions being written, when declarations of the rights of man are being promulgated and expanded. Series of questions so heated but debatable were tackled right throughout the nineteenth century and it creates issues newly set in an intricate way linking the nineteenth with the twentieth century, like:

- What would be the type of women whose rights are being vindicated urgently in any specific area throughout the world?
- Who is the woman, the portrait, whose rights Wollstonecraft is calling painstakingly for?
- And who is the woman, the area under discussion, of all the nineteenth century campaigns for women's rights?

Accordingly, nineteenth century feminism immediately questions and covers the woman's demand for including her in politics by her insertion in the state, rights of man and citizenship. Though the defense was set for some women, but by no means, all of them were meant to include in the case. Feminist activity and thought were the pillars of first wave Feminism. Thus, the women's movements and the feminist movements began in the middle of the nineteenth century in the United States and the United Kingdom, asking for a number of a parcel of rights so long neglected from the public demand, especially when devoted to women: rights to education, guardianship rights, and rights to work, but most predominantly citizenship and legal and political rights. The nineteenth century women's movements, particularly in the mid nineteenth century, held attractive perspectives for the status and the future of women. These women were combined strongly with abolitionist movements, like with movements for the abolition of slavery and the liberation of slaves. With time, 1st wave feminism movement turn from individual calls scattered sometimes, denied another so often, to an intellectual commitment and political movements touching hot topics like slaves emancipation, slavery, race, ethnicity, to farther end with sex difference in all domains.

From philosophical viewpoint, the movement was not limited to a political revolt or rebellion, 1st wave feminism was linked to a set of theories and ideologies usually meant to interpret philosophical topics from a feminist opinion, which was acclaimed by the 1960s and reached by the second Wave Feminism. While in the first wave feminism different domains in law, politics, sociology and literature contribute to the launching of the movements to empower it and great participation was from the suffrage leaders who marked history by their efficient involvement.

The Suffrage Leaders' Contribution

Many suffragists' women contribute from different domains in the success of rights emancipation and vindication and indeed their writings and claims were echoed to the authorities proclaiming many legal demands often thrown aside when the subject of woman is tackled

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Indeed, the American suffrage leader Elizabeth Cady Stanton, starts her career as an activist and as campaigner for the abolitionist cause. Right after she moves to focus on women's rights when she was at a meeting in Britain and was deprived to hold a public from the stage as a woman. She proceeds later on, when she went to the United States, to fix the first women's rights convention. John Stuart Mill plainly explains it in his book entitled *The Subjection of Women* when he said: "Meanwhile the wife is the actual bond servant of her husband: no less so, as far as legal obligation goes, than slaves commonly so called. She vows a livelong obedience to him at the altar, and is held to it all through her life by law...She can do no act whatever but by his permission, at least tacit." (Mill, 1896, p.55). The strong common sense of parallel between the position of women especially married women, and of slaves, and the point that Mill spots, is unquestionably linked to marriage as a law; an institution that deprives the woman from her identity and be passed as an ownership legally to her husband subduing to him her name, her life, her soul and body. Accordingly, the right of divorce and the right of vote where the two pillars on which Elizabeth Cady Stanton proclaims violently in her claims. She adopts the role of women rights and being herself married and mother of three sons could only motivate her to move forward. She nicely put it in her own writing *Eighty Years and More*. She also witnessed women oppression as a personal experience that she decides to protest by publically spreading freely her opinion to the world to save the dignity of the ones exposed to traumatic nature of slavery as she puts "It seemed as if all the elements had conspired to impel me to some onward step. I could not see what to do or where to begin—my only thought was a public meeting for protest and discussion" (Stanton, 1993, p 148). So, a nineteenth century married woman in Britain, the United States, Australia, most other countries, was deprived from many legal rights like money, inheritance, earnings, work, and the worse is of being the ownership of her husband, plus her children who are under the pledge of her husband especially in case she thinks to abandon him. The most horrible and cruel matter is that he can imprison her to guarantee her complete submission and yielding to fulfill any wanted domestic and sexual services. With great care to preserve notions of femininity, involved the women in the suffrage campaign insist to look very respectful, kind and reasonable. Their target was to convince and try to influence male legislatures, or members of their own relatives. This is why there was a policy of beauty applied among women who wrestle for their rights; in the suffrage movement, the front stage was left specially for pretty women while very severe looking women were given the back to occupy. Their aim was not at all bodily but a way to

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attract male attention to her views openly said publically for the first time. It was the only vital way to claim their demand and be heard by men.

Suffragists: Millicent Fawcett and the [National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies](#) (NUWSS)



The women who advocated for women's suffrage were suffragists, highly regarded women, well thought and constantly correctly clothed.

Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst

Whenever the developmental position of the new woman in English literature is evoked in the 1890's, where it becomes apparent to the public that drastic change is prepared, there is a revolution against Victorian sexual demeanor and Victorian sexual modes. However, the real change begins in the early twentieth century with the introduction of the women's social and political union (WSPU), the militant campaign that is associated with Emmeline and her daughter Christabel Pankhurst and their followers. Christabel Pankhurst began this campaign in 1905. The British suffragette interrupted

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a political campaign and she claimed this in her book: *Unshackled: The Story of How We Won the Vote* in which she wrote: "Women, we must do the work ourselves. We must have an independent women's movement. Come to my house tomorrow and we will arrange it!" (Christabel, 1959, p45). The suffragettes accept as true that you have to essentially take the struggle to political parties, and make political parties approve women's suffrage. In light of the early twentieth century, the UK witnessed an initiation led by the Pankhursts, who denounced the most compelling arguments while seeking the full equality with men in voting rights. Notwithstanding the organized protest that advocates female rights and mainly female suffrage, Pankhurst recommended publicly the Union's slogan "Deeds not Words"¹ In this vein, she interrupted the Liberal party meeting in 1905 with Annie Kenney, and made an epic moment while raising a banner demanding "Votes for Women" and therefore there was a certain strictness, or even cruelty at times, in the impulse of her heroic action. There was, of course, an abrupt insurgency that resulted her imprisoning for her defiance of the authority. However, she reached a different conclusion and took the suffrage campaign to another uplift which required hunger strikes and a rigid assembly of energies for the counterattack. Notably, actual figures like Pankhurst and her followers were gifted to procreate well considered ideas by drawing attention to the shrine of truth. Significantly, they punctured big demonstrations which raised thorny aphorisms to back up their case. Suffragettes also confronted the forces of law and order. Moreover, they bore every seizure by legal authority including jail and arrest. Pankhurst proclaims her experience in Manchester's workhouse where she was witness on the suffering of little girls at a very early age, as she said: "The first time I went into the place I was horrified to see little girls seven and eight years old on their knees scrubbing the cold stones of the long corridors ... bronchitis was epidemic among them most of the time." (Pankhurst, 1914, p 25-28) of course, the segregation of the female gender does not know any limitation; for such suffering does not offer any exceptions. Pankhurst was left in owes when she "found that there were pregnant women in that workhouse, scrubbing floors, doing the hardest kind of work, almost until their babies came into the world ... Of course the babies are very badly protected ... These poor, unprotected mothers and their babies I am sure were potent factors in my education as a militant." (Pankhurst, 1914, p 25-28)

The term suffragette is coined at this time by the "Daily Mail"² first recorded in 1900-1905 and it is intended initially, it differentiates the suffragettes from the suffragists (suffrage+ette). It is coined at the beginning as a way of kind of demeaning that is to say making diminutive. They are degraded and become a much bigger nuisance. Coupled with the suffragette's demands, they took the lion's share of all events of the twentieth century when it comes to women rights and especially to advocate the female suffrage.

The WSPU (Women's Social and Political Union)

² (www.oxfordreference.com)

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In a country that rejected any female involvement in voting at that time, all women had occasionally had to wrestle against the governing authorities. Thus, another key point to highlight is the WSPU (Women's Social and Political Union) amongst the suffragettes, was created in Manchester under the leadership of Emmeline Pankhurst after the women suffrage was brutally revoked in 1832.³ Hostility increased in intensity and in some degree, it was attracted to be involved with these political campaign speeches, but in the period from 1906 to 1913 the suffragettes moved on with this into property damage. Their pacific disposition resulted nothing but more injustice, their voice was mute and their demands had been laughed on. All sort of devastation seemed to be the most approachable solution in order to echo their words. The movement captivated a lot of attraction especially when they sought violence and disobedience as refuge. It was an unfamiliar strategy done by respectable ladies, yet rebellious and vigorous at the same time. They burnt letter boxes, destroyed shop windows, and even and set on fire buildings in towns. In fact, the conflict was carried by force when they did not find any ears to listen and minds to reflect their demands. It was always property that was damaged, they were careful not to cause any harm to people. The movement's main aim was to attract more attention. The reason why it was done quite publicly because they were determined to hold the result of their revolt. In fact, suffragettes sought to be arrested, go to prison, speak from the dock and then have the whole big celebration coming out of prison. According to their beliefs, this seemed to be the most persuasive act to earn the public opinion.



Pankhurst released from Holloway prison, 1908

For women who were arrested and imprisoned did not surrender even when their freedom was enchained. All things considered, it seemed reasonable to demand a special treatment as political

³ (www.britannica.com).

prisoners and not viewed as common criminals. In sum, the struggle became more serious and in 1908, the suffragettes in prison went on hunger strikes. For the government, that was an unexpected move and not in the favour of their interests. As long as public opinion was not really stirred, parliament was not interested in the suffragettes in any franchise. Rather they wanted to get rid of every tinge of the movement while trying to deactivate its effectiveness. Hence, they decided to introduce forced feeding as a way to deal with this problem. In other words, hunger strike was a common type of protest against improper treatment and basically imprisonment and women opt for this option to put pressure on the government and to perpetuate the submission of the parliament through continuous acts likewise.

The Second Wave Feminism

The second wave started first in the United States then arose in Australia and spread in much of the most other developed western countries by 1960s with the goal of gaining more equalities and more rights for all women beyond the movement of the suffrage political franchise which was just about having the right to vote, But they did not call it feminism; but Women's Liberation movement (WLM) as Stephen Trombley and Bullock have claimed in their book entitled: *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* where they said: "The WLM branch of [Radical feminism](#), based in [contemporary philosophy](#), comprised women of racially- and culturally-diverse backgrounds who proposed that economic, psychological, and social freedom were necessary for women to progress from being second-class citizens in their societies." (Bullock; Trombley 1999, p314). In 1950s, the idea of the housewife keeper was spread in all the society and it was expected and supposed that only function of woman at that time was to uphold her home and take care of her husband and her children and maintain everything that has a relation with her marital situation. Therefore, America in 1960s began to change when all women across the nation and the globe started their demands of change and rebel against this idea; they call for new rights and try to express their opinions on their own society that had a big and a strict contrast with what they were supposed to be in the past. This moment in history is known as the second wave of feminism. Betty Friedan in her famous book *The Feminine Mystique* claimed that: "A woman is handicapped by her sex, and handicaps society, either by slavishly copying the pattern of man's advance in the professions, or by refusing to compete with man at all." (Friedan, 1963, p361)

The second wave of feminism defined the transformation and the renewal of women's rights with the help of the new concepts and thoughts expressed in the publication of feminist books like Betty Friedan *The Feminine Mystique* and by famous feminists emerging at that time. Thus, women began to have stronger demands and wishes to change the ordinary beginning in the early 1960s and persist and carry on into the 70s and the 80s until the present time. Women across the nation saw this as a call for more rights for women and more notable government action followed. Around the time of the 1960s, all people in the society had accepted that the principal and the most important duty of women was to take the responsibility of their families and to tend to all the demands of their husbands

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or children at home. At this time, women spent an average of about 55 hours a week primarily on tending to household tasks around the home, for this reason they were not able to hold a job and a place in the workforce because they had not enough time to be responsible of other tasks. The 1960s follows World War two that took place from 1939 to 1945, when many job opportunities opened because men were shipped off to war and demands for supplies boosted. This was an occasion that provided a lot of women more than ever before with new opportunities and chances to go to work and have a job. Following the World War two, during this time, women who worked were those who gained special jobs and occupied works such as: nursing care, teaching or working as secretaries. Working women had repeatedly less payment than that of men, as it was expected that they would bear children while holding the job and to tend to the duties at home, earning fifty eight cents compared to the men's dollar in the 1963 as demonstrates the following diagram. And also, it shows the gender wage gap narrowed by 20% in the four decades following the 1970s with woman earning 79 cents to the man's dollar as of 2012.

77 Cents for Every Dollar

Median earnings of full-time, year-round workers, age 15 and older

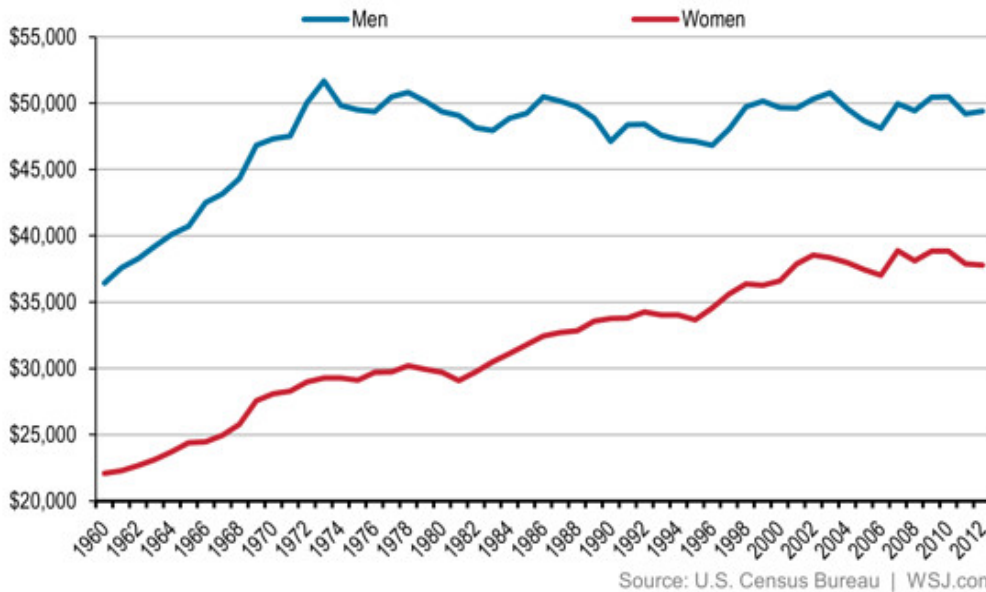
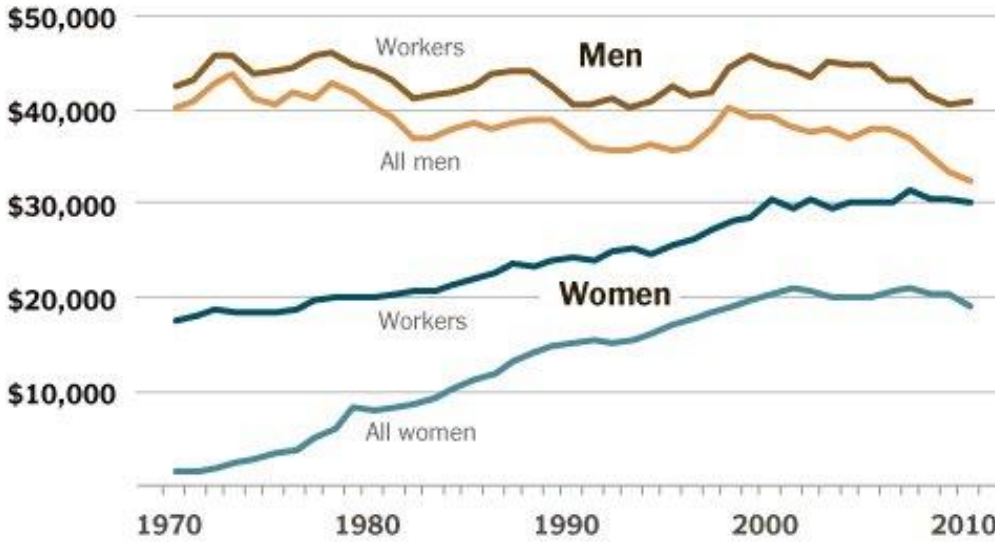


Figure 1.1: earnings among women and men from 1960 to 2012

(U.S. Census Bureau/ WSJ.com)

Women were totally discriminated comparing with men, even when they had their job interviews they were told that if they were a man they could have the job but they do not want to risk that type of position on a woman.

EARNINGS of people ages 25-64



NOTE: Adjusted for inflation, in 2010 dollars.

Source: U.S. Census via The Hamilton Project, The Brookings Institution THE NEW YORK TIMES

Figure 1-2: Earnings among men and women from 1970 to 2010

(U.S. Census via The Hamilton Project, www.hamiltonproject.org)

This diagram shows the earnings of all people who are between 25 and 64 years old, according to the gender wage gap, women be them workers or not have always a less salary than men. While much progress has been made over the years as clearly showed in Figure 1-1 and figure 1-2, the problem of gender equality is still very prominent, discrimination of women can still be seen in and out of the workplace, today the wage gap although improved is still present and employers are often biased towards men in higher job positions with women still in middle skilled jobs. However, with every single passing day women and men are working towards true and total equality.

Women's Liberation Movement

In 1963, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, this book stemmed from her past experiences from attending college finding work as a reporter in New York but then losing her job when she was pregnant with her second child. In the *Feminine Mystique*, New York academic Betty Friedan wrote a devastating critique of the modern woman's situation and she said: "Women as well as men can only find their identity in work that uses their full capacities. A woman cannot find her identity in the dull routine of housework" (Friedan, 1963, p324). This brought attention to the real unhappiness of women at that time. This book questioned the woman's role and the distinct separation

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of spheres between women and men, she started her writings about the sufferings of women as housewives and demonstrates their situation by calling it: “the problem that has no name” and this was explained in the beginning of her book, *The Feminine Mystique*, when she wrote: The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning [that is, a longing] that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States.” As a matter of fact, Friedan directly commented on the position of women at that time as she continues: “Each suburban [house] wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries ... she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question — “Is this all?” (Friedan, 1963, p15). The ideas expressed Friedan’s book caught like wildfire. In fact, there was no manner to identify the distinct reason of the second wave of feminism, but it was believed that Friedan’s book was a great contributor that helped to the emergence of the opening of this movement.

The women of the 1960s followed a strict set of beauty standards, they were expected to wear skirts and dresses, keep their hair in fashion and have makeup that would look elegant. However, the younger people at that time began a counterculture to these standards, mud girls and hippies began to arise and new style, new norms and beliefs have emerged in the society.

Many second wave feminists tossed aside the idea of having select leaders of the movement, while the various forms of media at the time picked and chose the one they thought to be suitable as a leader. Gloria Steinem was a feminist in the 1970s that had a significant presence in the media of the time. Steinem is a journalist and she created miss magazine; a solely feminist magazine that empowers women and still stands tall in the newsstands to achieve equal rights for women and make them visible and powerful.

In 1961 the president John F Kennedy attempted to address the inequality problems regarding women of the time by creating the Presidential Commission on the Sasse of women, and put former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt as the first head of the operation. The commission addressed the discrimination of the nation’s woman in certain fields of the culture at the time. These monumental strides and legislation marked many wins for women but there was still many problems of discrimination and inequality. Women have been marching and agitating for liberation, for everyone; for people in the third world, for workers in factories and for students. The first women’s liberation meetings were held in Australia in 1969 and by 1970, most of the big cities had at least one group where women began to examine their own oppression. They knew that it was legal to pay them 25cents, 25% less than men and that there were many occupations and jobs that simply were not available to them and they were excluded from all sorts of jobs and all the domains just because they were women. Femininity was a straitjacket, imposing and forcing behavior that rendered women seen as lowered and in an inferior position in order to be conventional to the existing standards.

Thanks to legislation passed during the second wave feminism, women are able to enjoy many rights that they could have never dreamed of a hundred years ago to shift to another new wave of feminism.

The Third Wave Feminism

The third wave feminism started in the mid of 1990s and it is a continuation and a follow-up that pursues the second wave movement. The emergence of this movement tends to be much more multiplied about sexuality and personal announcements plus model preferred choices and much less doctrinaire. The third wave feminism appears as an inclination to be more watchful mostly on the alert than some second wave feminists were as challenging to class and race concerns. This is why feminists of this era look definitely more self confident to involve in spheres formerly forbidden engaged to dare use power in politics, media and the electoral process. The term is firstly coined by Rebecca Walker in her famous article "Becoming the Third Wave" (1992) claiming her position as not a postfeminism feminist but as the third wave: "The movement in flux is often referred to as the Third Wave of the U.S. women's movement, interchangeably called "Third Wave Feminism." There appears no consensus regarding the coining of the term "Third Wave." Some accounts, like Lorber, point to Rebecca Walker, daughter of legendary feminist writer and activist Alice Walker, who boldly asserted in a 1992 Ms. Magazine: "I am not a postfeminism feminist. I am the Third Wave." (Evans, 2007, p.208)." Radical democracy, women's autonomy and full independence were the main calls by the third wave of feminism were other contributors from women supported Rebecca Walker like Garrison (2000), in her writing: *U.S. Feminism-grrrl Style! Youth (sub)Cultures and the Technologicis of the Third Wave.* and Lynn Chancer (1998), *Reconcilable Differences: Confronting Beauty, Pornography and the Future of Feminism.*

Around the same time, Chela Sandoval and Barbara Smith argued in an unpublished book that "Third Wave" was supported by women of color who exposed the Second Wave's lack of racial-ethnic diversity and interesectional analyses that see race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppression as thinks Patricia Hill Collins (2000) in her book *Black Feminist Thought.* The third wave feminism sums up a newer feminist expression basically targeted at realizing a radical democracy which witnessed drastic change attitudes and conceptualization of the concept to focus rather some biased and marginalized groups. Rather third wave feminists meet with more advanced technology like the Internet. In this context, [Diane Elam](#) wrote in her essay entitled "*Generations, Academic Feminists in dialogue*":

This problem manifests itself when senior feminists insist that junior feminists be good daughters, defending the same kind of feminism their mothers advocated. Questions and criticisms are allowed, but only if they proceed from the approved brand of feminism. Daughters are not allowed to invent new ways of thinking and doing feminism for themselves; feminists' politics should take the same shape that it has always assumed. (Baumgardner and [Richards](#), 2000, p77)

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Feminists in the third wave have come to categorize themselves within a chronological context in history that traces its legacy from the second wave of the feminist movement; on the other hand, while they pay scarce reverence to their foremothers, they claim convincingly that the feminist experience is different this time (Baumgardner and Richards 2000; Dicker and Piepmeier 2003; Henry 2004).

Accordingly, Benita Roth (1999) the different between the waves and emerged from different feminisms descendant of dissimilar racial and cultural groups and shaped different feminist movements:

The reemergence of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s needs to be understood as the reemergence of 'feminisms,' plural form of the noun, because feminisms from different racial and ethnic groups formed organizationally distinct feminist movements in the second wave. At the same time, these movements were linked in a crowded, competitive social movement sector, and there were mutual and complicated relationships between feminist activists from different racial/ethnic communities. (1990, p.70)

Thus, the third wave feminism emerged in multiple levels representing women all over the world carrying their histories, concerns and words. New clothing to the concept starts to be coined opposing former labels about the term and oppose many granted interpretations. Unfortunately some traditional recalls impede justice as Vivien Labaton and Dawn Lundy Martin continue to argue: "This concentration on 'traditional' women's rights often obscures the importance of the complex network of gendered injustices that we bring to the foreground in *The Fire This Time*. In other words, we see a new movement evolving from one in which there is a dialogue about feminism and race to a feminist movement whose conversation is race, gender, and globalization." (Sheryl, 2004, pxxix). The dilemma sets in arguing freedom but be confined to feminism, this could appear odd to any sexist and anti-racist movements that were the main demands of feminism and the expression of "I am a feminist" as simply put and definitely argues starts to change to "I am not a feminist but..." Thus, third wave feminists tend to be more visible and real as sustained by the media which help to cope third wave feminism with post modernism: "while expressing some truth, the notion that the 1980s can be dismissed as a postfeminist decade is, in great part, a fiction that has helped to propagate conservatives' view of feminism and that now serves to grant a new generation of feminists a way by which to distinguish themselves from their immediate predecessors...and maintenance of this chronology of feminism's history." (Henry, 2004, p21)

Some scholars go to even confirm the Death of Feminism, which no longer helps to achieve better career for women like Jennifer Pozner (2003) who thinks that syndrome of feminism death was mythological and a creation of the lobby from media:

In an on-line debate about their 'Is Feminism Dead' attack, feminist author Phyllis Chesler asked Time's Ginia Bellafante why she 'didn't...take on the media' instead of

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blaming the women's movement for its own misrepresentation in popculture, Bellafante's curt answer spoke volumes: 'My next job won't be at Time Warner, and then I'll rip the media to shreds' (Pozner, 2003,49)

Thus, third wave feminists go to look upon theorizing the third wave literature though meeting many challenges in doing so. They assist their arguments by defending this hybridized wave is a legitimate, indisputable, justifiable, and right as any other adaptation of veracity, truthfulness and reality. Indeed theorists in the third wave advocated an improvement account about feminist history, as should be discussed in the following section.

Conclusion

This research overlooks the evolution of feminism throughout time, from epistemological viewpoints. It sums up feminism as a concept through its three waves, Accordingly, feminism has become recently a philosophy but it still dictates the same ethics of the movement since its launching. Womanist scholars advocate the defense of women over the world and demeanor pour scorn on any offence towards culture because of being different or not suitable to any racist convictions. Resultantly, feminism concept has taken wider dimension to represent other diasporic minorities for which the concept of Afropolitanism has recently been given.

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