

MOVING BEYOND WESTERN FEMINISM AND MULTICULTURALISM DILEMMA:

ACTOR ORIENTED FEMINISM APPROACH

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Abstract

In the Post-development era, a common critique of feminist theory is that its basic ideas and conclusions are irrelevant outside of the modern, industrialized Western world. The paper draws on this key statement to analyze the current dialogues between Western and Non-Western feminism, or between the United States and the Third World. Feminist theorization of women's participation in the development process and the strengthening women's status is a focus of this article, which examines the dominant perspectives in the field. The predominant feminist paradigms to development are more like multifaceted road maps than unified and mutually exclusive discourses. As useful as they are, these frameworks were primarily established under the patronage of succeeding iterations of Western feminist ideology, exporting to the wider world a set of ideals and methods which were rather exclusive for Western feminist movements. This study examines the primary constraints that Third-world feminist researchers have found in Western feminism as well as multiculturalist feminism approach when attempting to explain and evaluate the progress of women's status in the developing nations in the age of globalization. The study draws on analysis from structural/historical framework and actor-oriented perspectives to highlight the potential of these contributions for enhancing women's location in societies across the world.



STRATEGIC HIGHLIGHTS

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List of Abbreviations

WID	Women in Development
GAD	Gender and Development
WAD	Women and Development
HDHL	Household Division of Labor

Introduction

A political, cultural, or economic movement that seeks to guarantee women's rights and safety under the law is often referred to as "Feminism". Feminism is a political and social movement that promotes gender equality and advocates for women's interests and rights as well as a set of ideas and philosophies that focus on problems of gender difference. Although the words "feminism" and "feminist" were not used ubiquitously until the 1970s, they were already in use in the general lexicon far earlier, for instance, Katherine Hepburn, in the "Woman of the Year" movie, referred to the "feminist movement" in 1942.

From popular culture to the law, feminism has shifted Western society's mainstream perspectives. Feminist organizations and ideologies were historically mostly led by middle-class white women from Western Europe and North America ("History And Theory Of Feminism" 2022). Alternative feminisms have been advocated by women of color at least as far back as Sojourner Truth's address to American feminists in 1851. This shift expedited in the 1960s, when in the United States the Civil Rights Movement ensued and European colonialism had collapsed in the African, Latin American, Southeast Asian and the Caribbean regions. Thereafter, women in the Global South and the former European colonies developed "Third World" and "Post-Colonial" feminisms. Western feminism has been called "ethnocentric" by Postcolonial feminists like Chandra Talpade Mohanty and black feminists including Alice Walker and Angela Davis have this stance.

Intersectional feminism, a term established by American academic Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, emphasizes women's manifold identities and the need to take them into account while combating gender disparity. All women experience discrimination from their male counterparts, but women of certain social identities, like women of color, endure considerably greater disadvantages athwart both white male and female. Women of color, LGBTQIA+, and other marginalized groups are more likely to be victims of sexual assault than white women because they have less safeguard mechanisms against abusers.

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However, it is often white women who speak out about issues such as salary disparity, sexual assault, and abuse of power. Consider the #MeToo movement as an example. Though actress Alyssa Milano helped popularize the word with her usage of it as a hashtag, it was really coined more than a decade ago by a black woman, Tarana Burke (“Feminism Is Not One-Size-Fits-All | The Concordian” 2018). There is also a multiplier effect for violence against women of different identities. Hence white and privileged female society and scholars are unable to grasp the danger and violence that indigenous women, black women and trans women suffer on a daily basis.



Graphic by Zeze Le Lin (“Feminism Is Not One-Size-Fits-All | The Concordian” 2018)

In light of the fact that feminism is not an “one-size-fits-all” ideology or movement, this article questions the concept of universalizing either the heterogeneous approach of feminism or the homogenous approach of feminism. This study aims to promote and ensure women’s essential rights and needs in all communities via the use of an actor-oriented feminist approach. As such, it will provide an overview of certain key areas, as follows : 1) the distinction between western and non-Western feminism, with a focus on Latin American, South Asian, and Black feminisms; 2) the potential adverse effects of multiculturalism on feminism, with a focus on the work of Susan Moller Okin; and 3) finally, Norman Long’s actor-oriented approach to feminism as a means of resolving the tension between the heterogeneous and homogeneous forms of feminism in order to take into account the diverse location of women in societies across the globe.

Literature review

In “Third-Wave Feminism: A Transnational Perspective”, Su-Lin Yu analyzes ideas and practices of third wave feminist writing. He investigates western and Asian women’s third-wave feminism linkages and network interactions. First, he investigated the link between western feminists and third world women by reviewing literature on difference and identity in the previous two decades of feminist engagement with postcolonial and multicultural discourses (Yu 2009). Next, he analyzed the narratives and discourses of Asian-based young feminists. After analyzing the difficulties and aspirations of today’s Asian women, Yu addressed a worldwide third-wave feminist activity and its repercussions on local communities. This initiative aimed to build deeper transnational relationships between western and non-western, or to be specific, Asian feminist academics.

Multiculturalism, which implies ethnocentrism and group rights, has become a shibboleth for political correctness. Stanford scholar Susan Okin examines in “Is Multiculturalism bad for Women”(1999) what sanctioned cultural norms (such as polygamy, child marriage, female genital mutilation and forced illiteracy) entail for women. She contends that women are treated derogatorily in all societies, majority and minority, despite mainstream liberal ideas presuming sex

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equality that is sometimes lacking in minority cultures. Okin argues that advocates of cultural integrity (even in religious norms) neglect this truth to the disadvantage of women. Okin believes that women shouldn't be disadvantaged by their sex, hence we should not embrace group rights that tolerate oppressive behaviors against women because their perpetuation is vital to the sustenance of minority cultures which would otherwise be jeopardized.

Azizah al Hibri critiques Susan Okin's multiculturalism versus feminist attitude by asking, "Why is a head scarf repressive but a miniskirt liberating?" (Al-Hibri 1999). The former academic offers three substantial objections to Okin's perspectives. Azizah contends that Okin's vision originates from a Western worldview burdened by immigrant difficulties and human rights concerns. Okin contends that certain cultures may be deserving of extinction. Second, Okin conflates different belief systems. She uses numerous instances from the field of religion to argue against the claim that members of cultural minorities should be afforded particular protections. Here, Okin treats culture and religion as interchangeable. This leads to Okin's third fatal error: It contradicts American constitutional ideals like church-state separation and religious freedom.

When it comes to protecting the rights of marginalized groups, especially women, is it conceivable for the state to do both at the same time? According to Ayelet Shachar's book "Multicultural Jurisdictions: Cultural Differences and Women's Rights" (2001), this is not only possible from an institutional standpoint, but also conceptually necessary. Multicultural Jurisdictions challenge the status quo by proposing alternative moral and legal responses to the issue of sanctioned intra-group rights infringement. At the same time, it offers practical legal and institutional answers to this "paradox of multicultural vulnerability". This progressive method of "joint governance" is driven by a notion that works to lessen inequity between marginalized communities and the rest of society while simultaneously strengthening the foundations of justice within such communities.

"Development Sociology: Actors Perspectives" (2001) by Norman Long lays forth the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of an actor-oriented strategy for development. He employs a social constructionist approach and describes in great depth the method wherein social actors



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(both internal and external to specific venues) interact in order to shape and construct new social forms via struggles for access to and control over resources, meanings, and authority inside institutions. He asserts traditional development theories only consider social conditions, contexts, and external forces. They are unable to assess the many kinds of social change and to characterize social practices, ideologies and insights of the various players participating in development processes. They deliberately avoid considering topics that are crucial for development sites and that provide light on the challenges of social connections, such as the interactions, dialogues, and social conflicts that occur between the many players. Therefore it is crucial to analyse how local and extended structures and processes affect specific interventions.

Research Methodology

This study used a qualitative methodology to examine the interplay between state, community, religious and political institutions, and non-state actors in determining where women stand in communities throughout the globe. The paper relies mostly on secondary sources such as books, journals, and news stories. The paper extracts information from secondary sources published by significant authors such as Susan Moller Okin's "Feminism and Multiculturalism: Some tensions"(1998) and "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women"(1999), Kriemild Saunder's "Feminist Post-Development Thought : Rethinking Modernity, Post-Colonialism And Representation"(2002), Sen and Grown's "Development, Crises And Alternative Visions : Third World Women's Perspectives"(1987) etc and Norman Long's "Development Sociology : Actor Perspectives"(2001) to analyze if it is possible to generate a comprehensive feminist approach applicable to all the communities to ensure both the equality of cultures and equality of women's rights.

Is Western Feminism an one-size-fits-all approach?

A common critique of feminist theory in the United States is that its fundamental assumptions and conclusions only apply to women in industrialized, developed nations. Examples of such feminist methods include Women in Development (WID), Gender and Development (GAD), Women and Development (WAD). Although these frameworks may be useful, they were mostly inspired by later

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iterations of Western feminist ideology, which then exported to the wider world a vision and set of techniques that were unique to Western women's movements. Using this seminal declaration as an integral point, this section seeks to contribute to the ongoing dialogues between the First World and Third World feminist thought, or, more generally, between Western feminism and Non-Western feminism (Bruno 2006).

There was a flurry of theoretical development among feminist academics in response to the burgeoning feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s. These researchers had a similar feminist foundation but offered vastly divergent theoretical viewpoints. However, it's possible that Western liberal feminists were more intellectually positioned to connect development's promises with advancements in women's situations. Lewis, one of the prominent economists, claims that modernization would bring about social transformation by using the instruments of economic efficiency, welfare, suitable policies, and planning, advancing women's liberation and offering "even larger advantages to women than males" (Bruno 2006). The Women in Development (WID) approach, which subscribes to the fundamental principles of modernization theory, blamed traditional civilizations' authoritarianism and male-dominance for women's terrible status. This method argues for the inclusion of women into economic development, with a focus on their productive characteristics, as economic growth and technological incorporation were seen as primary pathways for modernization. The disputes among WID academics often centered on the worth of women's labor and the need of modifying traditional theories of development in light of feminist frameworks.

The discourse of Western feminist organizations as voiced at international conferences held in the 1980s and 1990s emphasized the following: a) sex inequality is the primary issue facing women in the Third World; b) patriarchal power takes precedence in the analysis of women's status (relative to other marginalizing factors); c) other analytical categories such as race, class, or place within national institutions are less significant than gender; and d) there is a sisterhood between First and Third World women; e) women activism and feminist mobilization is an effective tool to promote changes in the sphere of women's rights (Bruno 2006). Western feminism has a tendency to see

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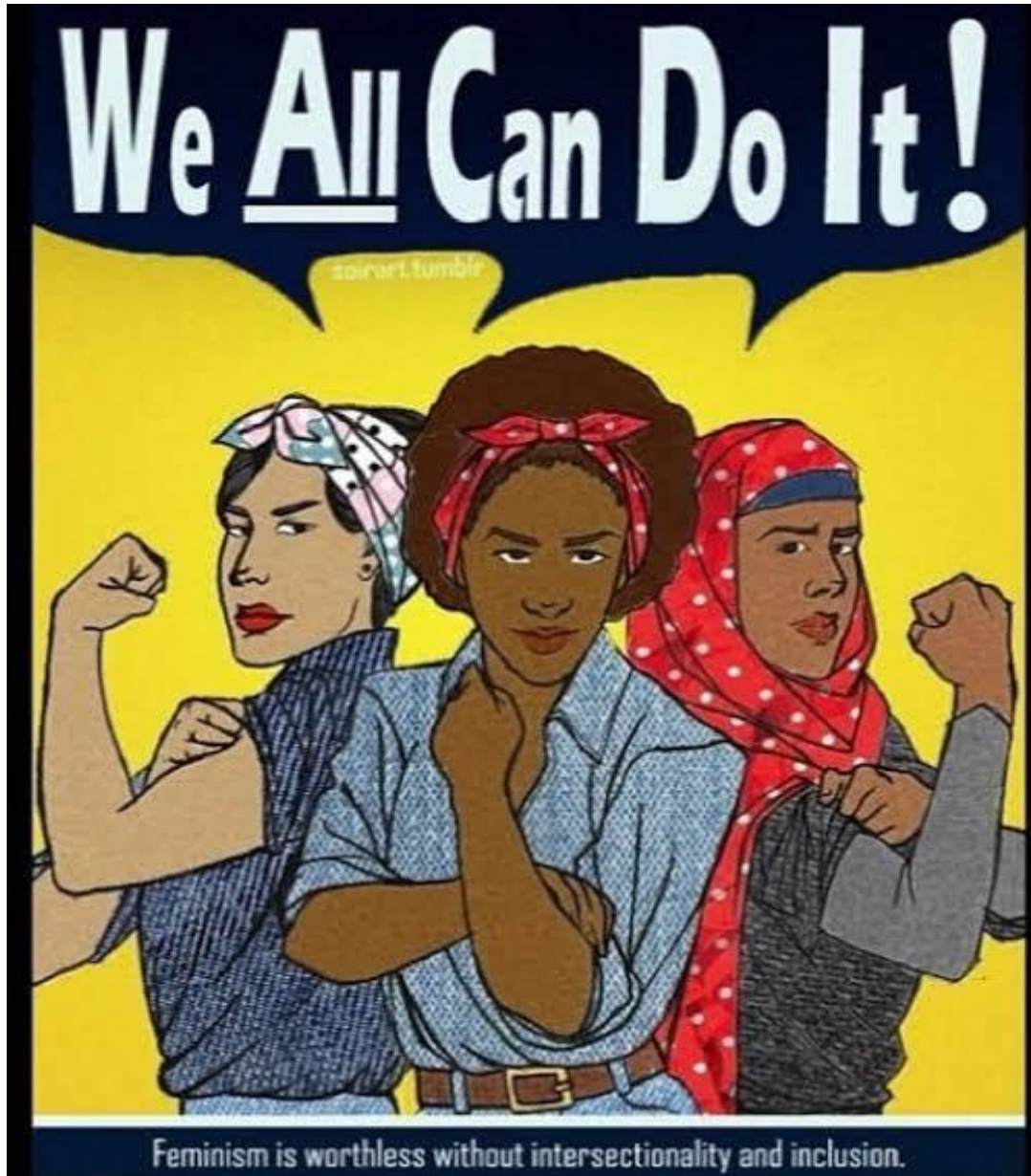
gains for women's rights as the consequence of bottom-up organizing and growing pressure. Hence, feminist movements are seen as major driving force behind political system to consider women's rights and necessities. Women in the Third World were often criticized for not having enough of a feminist philosophy, for being too in sync with local institutions, and for being too submissive to the (patriarchal) might of the State (Mazumdar 1977).

This strain of feminism may be limited in scope since it does not advocate for the rights of women in countries where they are not as secure as in the United States. As the bonds between nations and cultures strengthen due to globalization, the need for a unified worldwide language will grow. It is the feminism of women in developing nations, who may not share the same identity and cultural aspirations that Western feminism does, that has inspired a new movement known as Third Wave Feminism (Dixon 2011). They have made it abundantly evident how crucial it is to pay attention to diversity by calling into question essentialist, monolithic Western feminism, which overlooks the multiplicity of women in the third world as their "politics of difference" contrasts the narrow gender emphasis of western feminism with the need of including class, race, and imperialism into the discussion of gender subjugation (Yu 2009).

Third-World or non-western feminism is an alluring notion that, by addressing the concerns of women who are underrepresented in the global stage, seems to be bringing about more major change internationally than Western feminist approach ever could. Some feminists in the Third World adopt a radical stance by denying that women everywhere have a common experience. They celebrate the variety and unique viewpoints of women even as they highlight the hybridity and multitude of identities. They reject the homogenization of female experience and instead acknowledge the variations among women of various social positions, all while acknowledging the importance of identifying many sources of dominance in women's life. Feminism is better equipped to handle the complicated and many problems we confront today because of their recognition of the various distinctions among the category "women" (Yu 2009). "Western feminism, which overlooks reality of women who are being faced with diversities of values and religious lifestyle, has frequently been attacked as being essentialist, monolithic, and ethnocentric

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(Yu 2009)" hence a new strategy is required. Many women place religious values on par with feminist ones, therefore it's up to them to strike a balance that works for their communities.



Riveter poster highlighting women from different races (Nasr 2021).

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A significant distinction between western and third-world feminism is their respective conceptions of women as subjects of struggle. Non-Western feminism, in contrast to western feminism's focus on sex equality, "stressed satisfaction of basic material needs as a pressing issue in the context of disadvantageous international economic order" (Saunders 2002). In this context, women's plight is seen as the outcome of a variety of repressive conditions that cut beyond gender lines and are linked to racial, economic, and political divides.

A well-known network of activists, scholars, and policy officials from diverse nations called DAWN-Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era articulates an agenda and objectives that are reflective of Third World feminism (Dixon 2011). According to its members, the primary battle of women in the Third World should revolve on the fulfilment of fundamental necessities, regarded as basic rights. They contend that women should be liberated not only from gender-related injustices but also from those resulting from racial, economic, and national asymmetries since these groups are connected in the actual and practical lives of women. Most women in the Third World have to deal with repressive settings because of their class, ethnicity, or nationality in 1987 (Sen and Grown 1987).

In her article "Feminism as Imperialism", Katharine Viner argues against western feminism by saying, "This theft of feminist rhetoric is not new, particularly if its function is national expansion; in fact, it has a startling parallel with another generation of men who similarly cared little for the liberation of women" (Viner 2002). The Victorian male elite, which led the major imperialistic endeavors of the 19th century, battled furiously against women's increasingly loud feminist demands and occasional triumphs (a few going to university; new laws allowing the ownership of property to married women); yet, they utilized the rhetoric of feminism to obtain the plunder of the colonies around the world (Viner 2002).

Katharine has also mentioned a few notable cases pertinent to her theory, the most noteworthy being George Bush's justification for invading Afghanistan for liberating the women by unveiling them from their burqas. Bush was not a feminist at home, and on his first day in office, he slashed

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funds to foreign family-planning groups that provide abortion services or counseling which was likely to cost the lives of thousands of women and children (Viner 2002). Lord Cromer, the British Consul General in Egypt (1883-1907), is another archetypal colonizer who attacked Islam's treatment of women forcefully (Viner 2002). The "fatal hurdle" to Egypt's "attaining that elevation of intellect and character which should follow the advent of Western civilisation", he added, was Islam's demeaning treatment of women, namely its emphasis on veiling and isolation (Viner 2002). To "civilize" themselves, Egyptians must be "persuaded or compelled" to abandon the veil (Viner 2002). Despite the fact that he helped form the Men's League to Prevent Women from Voting, an organization that used all legal means at its disposal to prevent women from gaining the right to vote.

This is the case with Asian women, whose historical and cultural aspirations are vastly different from those of Western women, and who have suffered with the stereotype that feminism is "incompatible with Asian customs" (Yu 2009). They must learn to reconcile the gaps across cultural barriers as they fight for their own feminist identity, which is "inevitably dragged between Western and Asian feminist ideas" (Yu 2009). Women's concerns linked with those of class, community, race, country, and religious identity also played a role in their conflicts with western feminism, as did the simultaneous moulding of women's integrity by all these discourses.

To support their own complaints against patriarchy, "Islamic feminists" examine Western feminism. Motiee writes that Western feminists are wrong to believe in "total resemblance between women and men" in her book "Feminism in Iran: In Search of an Indigenous Approach" (Shahidian 1998). She claims that this focus has led to gender homogenization, with women increasingly taking on male traits since masculinity is privileged in a patriarchal society.

In contrast to the United States and Europe, where "equality feminism" has been widely adopted by feminist groups, it has never been completely embraced by women's action in Latin America (Bruno 2006). This might be because women still place a high value on motherhood and other traditionally feminine roles. The arguments put out by Charrad and Htun demonstrate the fallacy of

using Western paradigms for gender policy to account for changes in North African nations (Bruno 2006). Western feminists may be surprised to learn that “the government of the nation where the most drastic changes happened (Tunisia) was not the target of pressures from below by an organized women’s movement” (Charrad 2001). Htun illustrates this argument by noting that “middle-class male attorneys contributed significantly to the shift in gender equality” (Htun 2003). In a similar vein, Charrad describes the adoption of the Tunisian Code of Personal Status as a change that was supported by “the leaders of the urban, reformist side...in the absence of a feminist grassroots mass movement.” (Charrad 2001).

As a result, several Third World feminist activists, such as those affiliated with DAWN, prefer to reject the concept of a uniform and unified feminist movement, recognizing the variety resulting from many causes of oppression (Bruno 2006). Feminism, in their opinion, encompasses a fight against all kinds of injustice and calls for improvements on all frontiers in order to enhance women's rights. As a result, the following part investigates whether feminism’s multiculturalist perspective is effective in addressing the marginalization of women across the globe.

Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?

Benedict Anderson maintains that a feeling of common culture (sometimes a homogenized and glorified culture) among the citizens of a country is essential to its survival and cohesiveness. Culture facilitates the collective identification of a nation's citizens. Ernest Gellner once said, “nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it invents nations where they do not exist” (Gellner 1964). According to David Miller, “Multiculturalism” is “an ideology that attaches positive value to cultural diversity, calls for the equal recognition of different cultural groups, and calls upon the state to support such groups” (Miller 2006). Academics and politicians often debate the compatibility of feminism with diversity in the actual world. Susan Moller Okin, a Western feminist political scholar, is often regarded as the debate's originator, and she is persuaded that feminism and multiculturalism are incompatible since traditions in most countries pose a danger to women. People, as specified by Okin (1999), have assumed too soon that both

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feminism and diversity are beneficial and compatible (Okin et al. 1999). She has elucidated these arguments in her publications : “Multiculturalism and Feminism: Some Tension” in 1998 and “Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?” in 1997.

Okin argues that it would be detrimental to women if minority groups were granted “special privileges” that equalized their prospects inside the mainstream culture, since many cultural customs impede women from having a decent life as they want (Okin et al. 1999). These customs often disregard the welfare of women and might even result in their demise (Okin 1998). For instance, women may perish as a result of cultural customs like female circumcision. Okin argues that every individual should have the chance to have a happy life, regardless of how that term is defined for them. However, women born into patriarchal minority cultures do not have equal opportunities to live a fulfilling life. Therefore, women face danger in a multicultural society since it limits their freedom to pursue their own goals. And since the goal of most minority organizations is the subjugation of women to males, women within such groups face additional obstacles to advancement (Okin et al. 1999). Most societies strive to regulate women’s sexuality and reproductive capacity so that their lives will be dominated by the private sphere (Okin 1998). Cultural practices like clitoridectomy facilitate men’s power over women. Female genital mutilation, forced marriage, and polygamy are frequently referred to as “cultural” practices (Ku 2012). These practices are frequently used to describe controversial customs that are oppressive to women, such as types of violence related to “honor” (including honor killings and victims of rape being forced to marry their rapist to protect family honor), female genital mutilation, and forced marriage (Ku 2012). These behaviors subjugate women and serve the interests of males. Patriarchal cultural behaviors need not be as harsh as the ones given above. Limiting women to domestic spheres of responsibility is another type of patriarchal oppression. This is why Okin advocates for the eradication of non-Western cultures or the structural modification of these cultures in accordance with Western liberal governments, which basically encourages cultural imperialism.



Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women? (Mohan and Lilananda 2021)

In addition, feminist academics who have written on the link between multiculturalism and the domestic sphere have emphasized the importance of the family in regard to the country and gender, since the family is frequently seen as “natural” and hierarchies get naturalized in turn (Janssen 2015). Trade-off theorists such as Okin have shown the link between micro-foundations and the household division of labor in immigrant homes (Kwon, Mahutga and Admire 2017). First, when multiculturalism isolates immigrant communities from the more gender egalitarian norms of host nations, it diminishes the symbolic importance both male and female immigrants put on the additional resources that women bring to their negotiations over the home division of labor (HDDL) (Kwon, Mahutga and Admire 2017). It is less likely that increases in relative resources will increase the bargaining power of immigrant women in negotiations over the household division of labor if the valuation of these resources remains layered with “less egalitarian” cultural expectations regarding the role of women in the family (Kwon, Mahutga and Admire 2017). Second, as diversity makes conventional gender norms “stickier” among immigrant men and women, immigrant women



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self-select into more feminine jobs that pay less, thus diminishing the monetary value that women offer to discussions over the HHDL (Kwon, Mahutga and Admire 2017). Lastly, they argue that multiculturalism fosters a decoupling of theory and practice, in which immigrant women confront contradictory demands to assimilate to the gender norms of their host nations and to preserve their cultural heritage (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Insofar as women and maybe men ease these constraints by claiming adherence to host gender norms in public but continue to participate in gendered behaviors in the privacy of the home, these pressures appear as a gap between public ideology and private practice (Barajas and Ramirez 2007).

Unlike Okin, Cathy Young emphasizes the need to accept other cultures, refrain from judging non-Western civilizations by Western norms, and in no way consider Western culture superior to other cultures. This is seen as ethnocentric (Young 1992). There are academics who continue to believe that diversity and feminism may coexist, such as Will Kymlicka and Monique Deveau (Janssen 2015). They argue that disputes may be avoided thanks to peaceful discussions in which all parties' interests are reflected and non-discrimination tests. Ayelet Shachar, a disciple of Kymlicka, argues that women make a significant contribution to the transmission of collective identity, and he describes the fivefold link between women and the social creation of group identity (Shachar 2001). Women's reproductive behaviors are among the first to be actively observed by their identity groupings since they create the collective's future members. Women's reproductive choices, including marriage and motherhood, are strictly regulated. In other words, they must reproduce in a manner that preserves the membership borders and autonomous character of their group. Secondly, the circumstances under which marriages and childbirth are deemed lawful are of particular significance. Thirdly, as cultural conduits for the group's distinctive history and identity, women are obligated to convey the group's social norms, rituals and traditions, collective memories, and particular expectations to the next generation. Fourth, women may represent the whole of their group's symbolic importance, especially under culturalist circumstances of reactivity. Women's public displays of group membership, such as the wearing of the veil, may serve as powerful symbols of group identity and solidarity, especially when the abstract female



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image is presented as vulnerable who requires protection. Fifth, women may join with males in political fights to increase the group's autonomy in relation to the larger society (Shachar 2001).

It is common for "nomoi" (plural of 'nomos') communities to advocate for more autonomy in family law, including marriage and divorce, from the state in order to protect their way of life (Shachar 2001). This allotment of legal authority may undoubtedly aid the group's battle for self-preservation. However, adapted family law traditions control the division of rights, responsibilities, and eventually power relations between male and female in the society. Another scholar, Ranjoo Seodu Herr, presented three key feminist criticisms of multiculturalism: a) Undermining socioeconomic parity; b) "Identity" as inherently essentialist; and c) Perpetuating the subordination of racial ethnic women (Herr 2004). Here, the first two objections resemble Shachar's criticism of multiculturalism, while the third complaint reflects Okin's stance on the dialectic between feminism and multiculturalism. Shachar, in order to facilitate the reconciliation of multiculturalism and feminism, has put out the "joint-governance" concept, which recognises the essential role of family law in sustaining individual identities and aims to provide women who belong to close-knit cultural communities or religious societies, the same legal protection as state citizens (Shachar 2001).

The Shah Bano case in India is a notable example of the feminist multiculturalism conundrum which also portrays the "joint governance" system's failure. Shah Bano Begum, who belonged to Indore, Madhya Pradesh, got divorced in 1978. She acquired the right to get alimony from her husband after filing a criminal complaint with the Supreme Court of India (Mullally 2004). Nonetheless, several Muslim leaders campaigned for the verdict's annulment. The verdict in this case, which sided with the lady, has been criticized by Muslims, who have pointed to verses in the Quran to demonstrate that it goes against Islamic law. It sparked debate on the degree to which various civil rules exist for different faiths in India. A further instance of the failure of multiculturalism in Europe is France's approval of a multiculturalist policy that prohibits Muslim women from wearing the hijab and niqab. Australia's constitution likewise recognizes diversity, but it vehemently opposes the insertion of Shariah Laws in order to allow minority communities to

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address their difficulties privately. Few minority communities again have cruel cultural traditions, such as the Halakhah's "blood" taboos regarding the status of children born to a Jewish father who marries outside the religion. Since group membership in the Jewish community is transmitted via matrilineal lines, a kid born to a Jewish husband and a non-Jewish wife cannot become a member of the Jewish community at birth (Shachar 2001). A child of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother would be required to undergo official, though simplified, conversion processes in order to attain full membership (i.e. religious affiliation as a Jew) (Shachar 2001).



"A Swiss woman wearing a niqab distributes fliers to protest against a ban on face-covering garments in public places" (Steinhauser and Landauro 2014).

Ayelet Shachar and Susan Okin have offered a variety of answers to the challenge of feminism vs diversity. The former has explored how a “joint governance” system may facilitate the reconciliation of feminism and multiculturalism which is pretty much controversial in practice; while the latter has essentially suggested western cultural imperialism as a solution; hence, Mandy Mckerl has referred Okin as the “Devil's advocate”. In the next part, an actor-oriented approach of feminism will be examined to propose a reformed framework of feminism to remove gender disparity from every community along with protecting equality of cultures in the post development era.

An Actor Oriented Approach of Feminism

Norman Long in his book “Development Sociology : Actor Perspectives” does not explicitly address gender relations, however his examination of development projects along with the necessity to include an actor-oriented viewpoint into analysis serves as the foundation for a germane criticism of more conventional feminist methods. As a reaction to structural and generic theories of development that Long deemed “people-less and obsessed with the conditions, contexts and driving forces of social life,” he advocates an actor-oriented perspective that examines how participants in the field are “locked in a series of intertwined battles over resources, meanings, and institutional legitimacy and control” (Long 2001). Quite interestingly, this perspective indicates a conversion of the orthodox development approach by changing the balance in favor of actor agency and away from structural determinants of social change.

Long based his research on the cultural output of the field's participants, with a focus on the function of discourse and language as conduits for the negotiation of everyday meanings and representations. As he puts it, “the processes by which particular actors and networks of actors connect with and therefore co-produce their own (inter) personal and collective social worlds” is what this study is all about (Long 2001). A view of social existence that is contingent and provisional is required for this approach. This “work in progress” is described as “never being finished and consequently not formed in an ultimate sense.”

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The analytical tools provided by Long's theoretical assertions help support more culturally contextual approaches to women's rights, which are the focus of the most recent wave of feminist criticisms. Following a similar pattern, numerous feminist academics have addressed how women negotiate meaning in patriarchal contexts. A few instances show how an actor-oriented approach might help analyze women's position in developing countries.

The first illustration is taken from Kandiyoti's study of the "patriarchal belt" and patriarchal systems in Sub-Saharan Africa (Kandiyoti 1988). Beyond general and undertheorized notions of patriarchy, Kandiyoti recognises its particular forms and implications across situations. She discovered that women living under various patriarchal structures had opportunities for negotiation and bargaining, allowing them to increase their autonomy and develop resistance measures. The author describes the prospect of a "patriarchal bargain" as having "strong effect on the development of women's gendered subjectivity and determining the character of gender ideology in diverse situations" (Kandiyoti 1988). The author supports the premise that women negotiate concessions and rewards by using a variety of techniques ranging from subtle forms of non-cooperation to open opposition, using convincing examples regarding the role of women in agricultural work and marriage under "classic patriarchy" (Kandiyoti 1988).

In Kandiyoti's view, a "regression" to feminine conservatism as a response to a quandary in patriarchal society may maintain and strengthen women's autonomy "within the underlying rationale of a particular system". The view of an external observer, only searching for the existence or absence of women's rights, may supervise these sophisticated system techniques. Reintroducing the actor oriented perspective is hence vital to assessing women's location in a certain culture.

Hoodfar's research of veiling practices in Cairo offers yet another illustration of the contributions an actor perspective may make to feminist studies (Hoodfar 1997). Hoodfar's study shows how local patriarchy is not always adverse to women's rights. Despite the injustices masked behind veiling, the author highlights the tradition's potential for reducing the gap and boosting women's

opportunities. He argues that Acco wearing a veil gives Cairene women an alternative interpretation that counterintuitively increases their sense of personal sovereignty while also providing protection. Using examples from actual Cairene women, he demonstrates how the veil may be utilized as a personal barrier to discourage male harassment or as a visible indication of allegiance to traditional values to lessen the suspicion associated with an unorthodox job. The veil offers the chance to minimize women's restrictions and limits in a patriarchal culture, even yet it still serves as a symbol of sex inequality. Hoodfar contends that in certain settings, cultural and religious normative practices that were seen as limiting women's rights in general be stripped of their repressive connotation and transformed into a vehicle for achieving these universal rights (Hoodfar, 1997).

Conclusion

Through this analysis, we have identified many of the most prominent attacks on Western feminism. The history of women's struggle or gender parity and equal opportunities in relation to men's position is reflected in the postulates of Western feminism, which in turn portrays the trajectory of those efforts. The struggle for women's rights has taken different forms in different regions of the globe, with varying outcomes that have prompted varying theoretical frameworks.

This paper has focused on one potential discrepancy between Western and non-Western feminisms: the differences in how they perceive "women". The cultural essentialism which has been predominating within the realm of feminist thinking in the developed societies seems to be undermined by the fact that gender inequalities, in addition to other forms of oppression, work in concert to create a conspiracy. In addition, many academics are of the opinion that the propagation of Western feminist ideas is an imposition that brings about new kinds of colonialism, so depriving the feminist movement of a considerable part of its political substance.

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The intriguing challenges of Western feminist paradigms in structural and cultural analytic traditions has been discovered as well in this paper. In the instance of Latin America and North Africa, it has recognized the limits of U.S. feminist theory when used to explain developments in other settings, as well as the necessity to integrate this analysis with broader historical and institutional methods. In addition, the cultural analysis provided by an actor-oriented approach has proven to be an effective tool for looking beyond formal patriarchal systems and exploring the opportunities for negotiation and maneuverability that women may experience within them. Overall, both methods seem to be important if we wish to elucidate women's location in terms of legal rights as established in social institutions and the cultural agreements as negotiated by actors who are practiced in the field.

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