# What Role Does Neoliberal Feminism Play In Western Democracies?

## Introduction

Neoliberal feminism is defined as the radical perception that women are individuals too, and hence economic, political, and social equality among all genders must be respected. In the recent past, feminist movements have come up to defend the rights of women and advocate for justice as well as the empowerment of the feminine gender. Various feminist political ideologies assert that neoliberalism feminism is both politically problematic and historically inaccurate. However, recent studies indicate that the concept of neoliberal feminism plays a crucial role in the establishment and maintenance of the western democracies. The rationality of neoliberal feminism has contributed significantly to the development of western democracies such as the United States, Japan, Canada, and the European Union among others (Ferree, 2006). The following essay will critically analyse the role played by neoliberal feminism in the western democracies.

## Feminist Activism and Role of Women in Western Democracies

A number of generations of the western democracies feminists struggled to achieve the full status of citizenship and the creation of a participatory democracy that ensures equality among all citizens. The struggles of the late 20th-century feminist highlighted the importance of adopting neoliberalism and guaranteeing equality among all genders. As a result, women have acquired the right to vote, receive equal wages and opportunities for work, combine work and motherhood, retain control over capital and make significant capital-related decisions, and gain gender-specific care. In the past few decades, individual western countries such as France and Norway have passed laws that grant women the right to fully participate in the voting process (Duggan, 2012). Several waves of feminism have strived to eliminate the notion of patriarchal dominance that was notably founded after the Second World War and propose for a socially equal society. The attainment of legal rights for women is symbolic of neoliberal feminism whose impact in the western democracies has led to a state of equality rationality. The constant feminist women movements continue to engage with inner struggles that anticipate to end the patriarchy and promote democracy.

According to Ferguson (2009), neoliberalism in western democracies exists in freefall where the markets are self-correcting, and there is an efficient allocation of resources, thus ensuring adequate service to public interests. Numerous debates explore the role played by neoliberal feminism in the establishment of most democracies in the west. Therefore, investigating the obscured issues and theorizing the various feminist interventions is significant in understanding the different roles played by the concept in developing neoliberal institutions. For instance, the modern neoliberalism’s internationalised companies and micro-financing programs have created a socially diverse labour market and entrepreneurial opportunities that are accessible to women across the globe. For instance, neoliberal feminist movements in the United Kingdom and India have played a significant role in increasing women’s self-esteem, participation in political and economic decision-making process, development of market-driven solutions, and individual empowerment. As a result, women have been in a position to overcome various stereotypical forms of social oppression and strengthened their sense of personal ownership in the modern world (Ong, 2006). Additionally, continued awareness of the feminist mantra in the western democracies has contributed to the reduction of numerous cases of marginalization as well as unequal power balances. Ultimately, this has led to the development of interactive social, political, and economic structures.

## Role of Neoliberal Feminism in Western Democracies

Neoliberalism asserts that most of the unregulated capitalist economies in the western countries enhance the maximization of economic effectiveness, technological growth, an embodiment of free personal choice, and distributive justice. Therefore, through global economic and political institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organisation (WTO), and the World Bank, neoliberal feminism has helped to achieve tare liberalization, deregulation, estimation of social welfare programs, and restrictions on immigration. Feminist philosophers argue that neoliberal policies have widened the gap between the rich and the poor in most of the western democracies, hence leading to poverty for the millions of the poor people globally. Postcolonial feminists, feminists who approve the ethics of care, and transformational feminists have in the recent past come up with various perspective concerning the growth of democracy. Global issues such as war, migration, global governance, and climate change have been associated with gendered injustices which are often linked to neoliberal feminism (Gould, 2009). Most of the women in the western democracies experience systematic disadvantages that arise from the socially assigned responsibilities relating to domestic work. Due to the existing structural injustices, the feminine gender tends to be politically marginalized, overworked, rooted in poverty, and socially deprived. As a result, neoliberal feminism has been deemed essential in propagating feminist values. Women from all walks of life have teamed together to oppose the aspect of subordination which ultimately hinders the advancement in the democratic inclusion of all genders. Neoliberal feminist policies are duly criticized for failing to interpret the major moral and political ideals such as democracy, equality, and neutrality in human rights.

According to Jaggar (2001), the neoliberal domestic norms in the western democracies are not morally binding because of inequality in power distribution. Feminist theorists argue that gender oppression is deeply rooted in systems of abuse and other forms of systematic disadvantages evident in various countries. The western perspectives on neoliberal feminism dictate that the universal feminist ideas and values imitate the norms of the dominant cultures. Jaggar further asserts that women have the freedom to make their decisions because they are well-educated. Additionally, the women from the western democracies tend to share the responsibility of gender injustices, and hence they articulate their obligations to contribute to the development of neoliberal political, social, and economic institutions.

One of the most distinctive neoliberal feminist approaches focuses on the ethics of care. The school of feminist theoretical response dictates that western democracies concentrate on the moral ideal of care and the maintenance of political, social, and economic households. Therefore, neoliberal feminism prioritises more on the ethics of care thus providing a systematic critique of neoliberal assumptions that posit that people are atomistic, self-interested, inaccurate, and independent in line with the established social ontology (Jaggar, 2005). The concept of social philosophy asserts that human relationships are formed by choice rather than factors such as dependency and necessity. In this case, the ethics of care argue that people are fundamentally rational and interdependent and hence they are more likely to collaborate to prioritise on economic growth, social justice, and political democracy. Feminist movements in the western countries consider dependency, vulnerability, and other social needs as critical human qualities that require an adequate political response. According to Rottenberg (2014), the neoliberal economic reforms tend to reinforce the conservative notions associated with feminism and the role of a woman in the family. Nevertheless, neoliberal feminism has ensured that global institutions such as the World Bank and the WTO give women more active roles in economic development. Therefore, the feminine gender has been hailed as a resourceful being resourceful when it comes to provision, experienced micro-entrepreneurs, and cosmopolitan citizens (Scharff, 2016).

Neoliberal policies have been criticized continuously by feminist movements because they contribute to the feminisation of labour and deterioration of the working conditions. Eventually, this has led to casualization and violation of international labour laws that guide the economic sector in western democracies. Economists such as Diane Elson argue that the market does not always operate against the interest of the feminine gender. By focusing on the neoliberal reforms that demean democracy, neoliberal feminism has helped in destabilising the patriarchal social structures that dictate how the society operates (Weedon, 2002). Additionally, the aspect of neoliberal feminism has played a vital role in women empowerment particularly in the western democracies and other developing nations. As a result, women have been viewed as being more responsible and efficient in complying with the normative expectations. Ultimately, this has enabled women to improve their situations and be in a position to benefit their communities, families, and countries. The empowerment of the feminine gender has led to economic growth, political participation, social justice, and reduction of poverty.

Different authors present the United States and other western democracies as the pinnacles of civilization which have made significant progress in ensuring equality between men and women. Eventually, gender equality becomes the benchmark for culture while the neoliberal policies become the unassailable values of the good. In other countries, full democracy has not been achieved, and countries struggle to ensure that women occupy positions of power and leadership (Cruz & Brown, 2016). In the industry, government, and in corporations, women continue to lag behind which is a clear indication that neoliberal feminism has not fulfilled its role entirely. However, feminist theorists such as Duggan (2012) argue that neoliberal feminism is responsible for producing the modern cultural, economic, and political landscapes which offer equal opportunities for both men and women. Therefore, equality is a central principle that has ensured progress in the slightly stalled feminist revolution experienced in the 1970s. In the United Kingdom and other notable western democracies such as India, institutional barriers need to be eliminated to give women equal chances of success in the contemporary society.

Transnational feminism has also facilitated globalization across democracies by creating new political and economic spaces that allow feminist movements to thrive. The aspect of transnational feminism is sensitive to the differences that exist among women based on shared experiences regarding gender oppression. The differences in class, race, and sexuality dictate the manner in which women approach globalisation. Additionally, neoliberal feminism is considered as a model of accounting for solidarity among women in the western democracies (Scharff, 2011). For instance, the people who have benefited from injustices in the past are required to team up with those who have experienced oppression or injustice indirectly to create a socially inclusive community. By focusing on the overall growth of the economy rather than the theorised globalized patriarchy, neoliberal feminism has ensured the empowerment of women. Therefore, it is imperative that women remain focus in advocating for equality.

Another critical role played by neoliberal feminism in the western democracies concerns economic justice and migration. Feminist economic philosophers argue that neoliberal policies have led to significant economic inequalities in the west of republics (Mohanty, 2008). Therefore, neoliberal feminists are required to identify ways in which the policies reinforce various disparities based on nationality, class, gender, and race of an individual. For example, the feminist theorists need to clarify on the disproportionate consequences of neoliberal policies for various groups of women in the society. Gendered systems and ideologies help in shaping the process of globalisation. In this case, neoliberal feminists focus on democratic tare policies which ensure equality between men and women. Trade liberalisation in the west has contributed to a large-scale movement of once well-paying jobs mainly in the free trade zones. Companies are compelled to outsource labour resources from countries which offer it a cheaper compensation rate. The numerous people who relied on the well-paying jobs now are unable to meet their basic needs as service-sector and part-time jobs are replacing them.

As a result, the reduction in real wages has negatively affected women who tend to be marginalised due to racial and gendered stereotypes. According to Moghadam (2005), feminist’s increased economic power has ensured that there is freedom within families and that women as are not exploited by foreign corporations. As workers, they experience a type of labour control that is almost primitive in its requirement of subservience and reliance. Additionally, feminist political theorists are concerned with the impacts caused by structural adjustment policies which occur as a result of neoliberal feminism. For example, excessive borrowing affects significant sectors of the economy including the publicly-funded health and childcare, education, and well-being of the society. The burden has been disproportionately borne by the women in the community where they are required to work header to maintain their expenditures.

Neoliberal feminism has also contributed to a higher proportion of women migrants. In this case, gender, class, race, and immigration status combine thus adding to the disproportionate burden on women in the western democracies. Feminist theorists argue that this is problematic because such women linguistically, economically, and psychologically dependent on their spouses. The redistribution of caring responsibilities between genders is a significant issue that is advocated for by neoliberal feminists to stimulate a socially-inclusive society of both sexes. Numerous global care chains in the western democracies recognise the problematic problems faced by feminists often associated with background injustices. Therefore, acknowledgment of human vulnerability and dependence will help women develop a sense of self-identity and play an essential role in reducing the many challenges that people suffer. One of the propositions for a socially-inclusive society is the inclusion of specific provisions in the immigration policies that allow women to move with their families to places where they can obtain better job opportunities.

Another significant role played by neoliberal feminism in western democracies relates to human rights which refer to various things such as a set of norms and laws, moral language, and a framework for analysing injustices experienced by both genders in a specific jurisdiction. Feminist theorists argue that a more significant number of women is subjected to the violation of fundamental human rights. Neoliberal policies have been criticised for infringing several social and economic rights. For instance, the right to better healthcare and the freedom to security in the event of unemployment due to disability and old age are continuously being violated in the contemporary society. In the western democracies, it is evident that there is a trend of the diminishing status of women’s economic security. The aspect of neoliberal globalisation has enabled women to claim a share of their human rights by creating institutions and new spaces that encourage the notion of the universality of human rights. Various feminist social movements and non-governmental organisations have combined efforts to make sure that women are treated equally with the male counterparts. Furthermore, these changes have challenged the international human rights dealing with sexual violence which has been rampant in most of the western countries. Neoliberal feminists propose that sexual assault, rape, forced pregnancy, and forced prostitution be included in the document that contains the crimes against humanity.

Furthermore, neoliberal feminism has contributed to democracy and global governance particularly in the western democracies. According to critics of neoliberalism, it has reduced national sovereignty, thus excluding women and other marginalised groups from the democratic process. The creation of transnational communities in the west has led to the establishment of new means through which people can participate in the democratic process (Torres, 1998). Many countries in the western region are coming up with formal democracies where women are given opportunities to serve in the national legislature although the number is significantly lower when it comes to participation in global politics. Structural adjustment policies favour the implementation of specific domestic policies which unduly harm women. The neoliberal governmentality is as a result of neoliberal feminism which has been fundamental in reorienting women towards equality.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, neoliberal feminism has ensured that there is redistribution, political representation, economic, and social equality among all genders. The inequalities created by racial, class, sexual, and gender differences have been debated by neoliberal theorists for the past few decades with the aim of changing how social, political, and economic institutions interact. Feminist economics has been considered as the alternative to the dominant and patriarchal economic thought that has been in existence in the western democracies for many years. As a heterodox approach to economics, feminist economics in the west have established empirical and theoretical frameworks that individuals can relate with and determine when negativities arise. For example, the conceptual framework of globalisation has reduced the challenges experienced by women in the contemporary society.

Additionally, feminist political, social, and economic philosophers argue that justice and equality have not been achieved in most of the western democracies. The passive victims of neoliberal seductions is a clear indication that the democratic governments of individual countries in the west have realized the importance of equality. The new idea of neoliberalism has depressed the wage levels, increased the level of poverty, decreased living standards, and loss of job security. However, the relentless efforts by neoliberal feminists have facilitated autonomy in the labour market of most of the western democracies. Feminism has also contributed to the neoliberal ethos where people are concerned about the ethics in the various fields of life including political leadership, healthcare, economy, and society. In the modern era of state-organised capitalism, the issues of inequality have been on the rise, and this has hindered efficient political economy. Lastly, neoliberal feminism has criticised welfare-state paternalism where the male gender seems to be favoured. Therefore, the bureaucracy and the free-market nature brought about by neoliberal feminism has helped in repossessing the function of participatory democracy in the western nations.

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