

DOES A FOCUS ON THE QUESTION OF GENDER RE-FRAME OUR UNDERSTANDING  
OF WORLD POLITICS, IF SO HOW?

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**Does a Focus on the Question of Gender re-frame our understanding of World Politics, If so how?**

The question of gender balance is mainstreaming across the world. Critical issues geared to liberate women have been addressed and implement the notion of gender equality (Baylis, Smith and Owens, 2014). These issues have sought to establish the plight and role of women in leadership and other matters of national and international importance. A number of questions were raised over the 20<sup>th</sup> century addressing the commonality of the fate experienced by women across the nations of the world. In response to these questions, where is the woman now? What is the role of women in politics? In addition, many others, feminist movements were established. The movements and other international non-governmental organisations have become the voice of women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The discussion that follows endeavours to determine if the focus on gender equality reframes our understanding and perspectives of world politics today. Feminist theories, issues of gender mainstreaming, the role of women in politics, and international relations theories will be critically analysed to achieve this purpose.

On a meta-level of reasoning, concerning international relations, two fundamental ways should be adopted. These are positivism and constructivism (Bacchi and Eveline, 2010). The application of the positivist and constructivist theories has a great contribution to resolving issues of global relations. Normative decisions that cannot be legitimized by science, but instead derived from norms, values and plausibility are of great essence. The positivist theory postulates that there are actors who have interests, and preferences and that they act accordingly to achieve them. The essential item of concern is the fact that these interests, preferences and actors can be analyzed. Positivism focuses on establishing the actors that shape events, processes, and the inbuilt tension between the actors and institutions as an interaction that can be handled

productively. Constructivism refutes this credence. In their view, all preferences and interests are subject to changes during the process of social interaction.

Evaluating international relations theories in this application, positivism presents assumptions that are more pragmatic. The core of the positivist approach is a rationality assumption based on the methodical principle of rational choice. The positivists stipulate that the global actors have similar patterns of doing things in all spheres of life. They argue that the players have fixed and stable preferences for survival, security, reproduction and resource accumulation. These agents act in a specific way in pursuit of their preferences. People around the world are rational and utility maximizers. Regardless of their gender, they scrutinise the available options and act accordingly (Baylis, Smith and Owens, 2014).

The dire need for understanding the dimensions in which to evaluate the issue of the world view of gender requires a critical analysis. Principles that universally cut across cultures, activities and global activities are required for the application. These laws require an analysis based on modernity, enlightenment and rationality. The knowledge of ontology and epistemological know how are of critical contribution to understanding humanity. While these two collect hypothetical information, hermeneutics and heuristics come in to draw informed conclusions. The question of gender-related issues and their impact on reshaping the world are a question of idealism and realism (Bell, 2010).

The human nature and their external aspirations for power have made a significant contribution to the understanding of the world today (Brecher and Harvey, 2010). Many of these aspirations are founded on the assumption that the states interact in the framework of international systems in the same way as consumers and producers do in the market. The core ideas of realism explain that the state's environment is anarchic and dangerous based that states

are only interested in relative gains and not absolute advantages. With the primacy of societal actors and other social groups, a more reformed perception of the world steered by the changing view of gender issues.

The question of gender equality has become a widely contested area in the world today (Duncan, Jancar-Webster and Switky, 2009). Many theoretical and political debates that crosscut the gender equality visions have been discussed the world over. Multiplicity of feminist political debates emerged because of the ideas of reversal, inclusion and displacement. These set the theoretical background of the discussions. Contextual locations, where these studies have been carried out including Netherlands, Spain, Austria, Hungary, Greece and Slovenia, and United Kingdom. The exploration of gender issues comparatively in relation to domestic violence, family policies, anti-discrimination and inequality in politics has revolutionised the world's view in several respects.

The character of gender equality has partly been obscured by its frequent appearance as a conflicting and harmonious concept (Dunne, Kurki and Smith, 2013). Varieties of Feminist paths in the view of creating a society free of exploitation, domination and oppression have strongly articulated the visions of gender equality. The famous feminist route claims that women have been isolated from the political arena. They need an inclusion into the world as it is. Their inclusion does not necessarily have to induce a challenge for the male norm. Every individual, irrespective of gender has a right to access the opportunities enjoyed by men. The very principles, norms and standards used in treating men, should be used for women. The aspiration to a gender-neutral world relates to the liberal tradition of feminism. In effect, positive actions have been taken to consider gender issues in establishing criteria for employment, decision-making, and promotions in institutions.

One can argue that the world has transformed. There has been an endeavour to go beyond the fictitious dilemma of differences and equality. Political discourses have been deconstructed to adopt diversity bound politics. The vision of gender equality in the world, today conceptualizes the dire need for gender mainstreaming. Its changing character has made it particularly suitable in embracing the challenge of incorporating gender into the mainstream. The emphasis on displacement and diversity linked with the aspect of empowerment has advocated the opening of public space to accommodate the on-going feminist political debates. Gender mainstreaming across the policy areas requires the interaction between the complex gender regimes and the policy areas. Therefore, understanding the specificity of each domain and its particular circumstances with relation to gender equality and policies is paramount (Ferree, 2012).

Differences in women are majorly due to race, age, class, sexual orientation, ability, ethnic origins, and other complex inequalities. Contemporary feminist scholars have identified the risks of homogenization and essentialism present within the feminist movement. The plurality of women's ability to transform the everyday and diverse struggles for social justice cannot be undermined. However, this has been counterbalanced by the worry of possible loss of resources and attention on gender resulting in a multiplicity of social collectives (Gelb and Palley, 2009).

The feminist theory has brought a new dimension into the international relations table with respect to world politics (Geeta and Nair, 2013). According to this theory, the word gender does not refer to the biological difference between men and women. It instead refers to the complex social constructions of men and women behaviours and identities in relation to each other. The notion of power dynamics between the two genders is fundamental in the gender

discourse. Feminists have analysed the power relations of men and women. The dimensions of this analysis consider how this power is exerted, and how the interaction has been historically and socially implemented over time. Lorraine in this theory defines the term patriarchy as a system in which females are subordinate to men in terms of status and power. Men base this definition on the credence that it is right for women to obey their commands. The assertion by Aristotle about the woman's biological inferiority to their reasoning capabilities marks the roots of patriarchy. The claim received perpetuation from the Judaeo-Christian world.

Key players in the international relations, as observed by the feminists, are still men with patriarchal political and social grounds (Gelb and Palley, 2009). Heads of government, policy makers, diplomats and academic professionals have been and still are males. Discussions of international relations are largely constrained by the actors in world politics who disregard women's role in politics. Feminism applies the terms gender and patriarchy in analyzing how circumstances have been shaped to eliminate women from the international political arena. Blanchard refers to a 'catch-22' situation where women will be disadvantaged in a political office-seeking mission if success depended on military service experience. Women in general have a less military experience and hence a female candidate will most likely lose the chance. Therefore, women have significantly limited chances of achieving national government positions directly involving matters of international defence and security (Gormley-Heenan and Lightfoot, 2012).

Tickner argues that international relations have been structured to marginalize women's voices. A further argument is that women have experiences, perspectives and knowledge required for the study of international relations. Tickner used the example that security, a topic in international relations did not only mean defending the state from attacks but also protecting

women. The argument here is that women are vulnerable to attacks by men they know than strangers they do not know. The case contrasts the traditional international relations perspective of security as protecting the state from other states. The case of feminists is that the topic of security should be shaped to address the issues of rape and violence from their fellow citizens, as well as perpetrators. Matters of security concerning gender consideration result to policy making that are detrimental to women (Hepburn and Simon, 2008).

The radical feminist theory views the experiences and lives of women as having been made invisible on the international scene. This argument is likened the feminist writer, Cynthia Enloe's question 'where are the women?' In her response to the feminist campaigns, Enloe adds that women should not only fight for inclusion in higher realms of leadership and policymaking but also establish women fulfilled roles. Such identification would service in ensuring that international systems work efficiently and smoothly (Hooper, 2008). The work done by military prostitutes and diplomatic wives was used to support this argument.

Realism theories view the state as the most important player in international relations. However, the contribution and the role of the individual should not be overlooked. Giving much value to the contributions of the state compared to those of the individual is unrealistic. The internal structure of the state both socially and politically involves the contributions of the individual. The state can be viewed as including the views of the individual citizen. Domestic views of citizens are translated to foreign policies. In essence, the state is inseparable from the individual. The concept of the states' defence for its national interests involves the question of by whom and how these national interests are defined (Knudson-Martin and Mahoney, 2009). An essential question to ask would be; are women involved in determining these interests? If no, how would their involvement influence national interests' definition? There is no doubt that their

participation would change the international policy.

Matters of gender, feminism and international relations influence our perception and understanding of the world. More liberalised perceptions would reveal that women are not more pacific than men in their attitudes towards international conflict. International disputes involving various countries require resolution through compromise and diplomacy. The global power sought by the realists can be equated with military and strength (Krook and Childs, 2010). This viewpoint would change if feminism were included in finding this global power balance.

Liberalism explains that the struggle for consensus defines the world of politics. The effort is viewed as being central to international relations. Liberalists have emphasized the role of the individual rather than that of the state. International institutions, free trade and education are seen as tools that promote the civil and economic interests of the individual. The economic inequalities to free trade affect women. According to Jacqui True, male centred macroeconomic indicators such as the Gross National Product undervalue the work of women. Liberalism views women as a disadvantaged group in the world. For example, sources reveal that women own one percent of the world's property yet they perform sixty percent of the world's labour. The majority of the disadvantaged groups such as refugees, the poor and illiterate persons the world comprise women. The patriarchal capitalist structure marginalizes the contribution and participation of women in the world's economy (Milner and Moravcsik, 2009).

Significant measures have been made to address issues of gender and the role of women. Such include the recent Beijing Declaration International Conference and Agenda 21 held in Rio. Critical issues relating to women were addressed, and a number of consensuses made. However, the resolutions made did not implement the entire proposal made by feminists. It is disappointing that unanimity was not achieved in the definition of gender in the conference. The results of the

meeting demonstrate the inability to secure the benchmarks for evaluating progress in gender-related issues. Though held with an initial goal of attaining gender equality, the resolutions of the conference appear inadequate in striving to achieve this critical goal (Rosecrance, 2008).

The feminist criticism for the realist and liberal theories of international relations does not demonstrate that it qualifies for a separate consideration. Largely, there is unanimity between liberalism and feminism in respect to the individual. The primary argument of feminism makes it a sub-category of liberalism. With the expansion of the civil society, there is a room for gender reconstruction of freedom institutions if women led the grass root efforts. There is hope for a growing recognition of the importance of the individual in a cooperative global system (Ruane and James, 2012).

Gender mainstreaming and empowerment in the current world are concepts used in policy formulation and other relevant documents (Rudman and Glick, 2008). Most discussions around the globe aim at providing the marginalized groups with power and control over their lives. Many non-governmental organizations many of which are branches of the United Nations Organization spearhead gender mainstreaming programs in the sub-Saharan countries in Africa and Asia. These include the Action Aid group, which advocates, administers and implements gender mainstreaming at the macro and micro levels of these marginalized societies. The term gender as used in these communities refers to women and children who are most affected due to marginalization.

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals of year 2000 focused on the eradication of abject poverty, attainment of gender equality and the attainment of basic education. Improving maternal and health care and the advocacy of human rights among other goals were set to be achieved by the year 2015. Another critical goal in this agenda was the

building of a global partnership for development. Recent international conferences have been held to stress the need for implementing the millennium development goals across the globe. The current commitments by donor partner countries include the United Nations, the European Union, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The Rome Harmonisation Forum Of 2003 and the 1995 Paris High-Level Forum added into the enhancement of international cooperation in addressing issues of gender equity. Equal rights and opportunities for both men and women around the globe have been a major concern in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Shepherd, 2014). The promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women have been identified as effective means to combat poverty, disease and hunger in stimulating sustainable development.

Women movements formed in the 1970s demanded social, economic and political equality as proclaimed in the policy 'Women in Development'. The Convention on Elimination of all Forms of 1979 Discrimination against Women forms the backbone of these movements. The resolutions of this convention and later conventions have been adopted by legally binding countries like Sweden and have substantially reshaped the political environment. A landmark event in the fight for women rights in the world is the September 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women. Adopted at the conference was the Beijing Platform for Action, which recognises the essence for gender equality and women empowerment. The success of these struggles to understand the potential of women and the role played by them has received a warm welcome from the nations of the world. Women have been successfully involved in political leadership contrary to the masculine belief that men fit best in the political world (Steans, 2009).

About 35 countries in the world have had female Heads of States since mid the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. These include Argentina, Iceland, China, Malta, Guinea-Bissau, Switzerland, Philippines, Haiti, Burundi, Liberia, and East Germany. Ireland, Finland, Indonesia, Gabon,

South Korea, Brazil, Mauritius, and Malawi among others make this long list. Many Government representatives and dignitaries in the world today are female leaders. The implication of the recent trend adopted in international politics today indicates that the issues of gender mainstreaming and the fight for equality have registered reasonable success. Women leaders have demonstrated an equal ability to lead just like men. The change in gender perspectives and perceptions that discriminated against women as weak sex has changed the face of the world a great deal (Steans et al., 2013). There has been an awakening of the woman's pride and a feeling of the sense of belonging in national and international matters across the world.

In her famous presentation on the role of women in the world today, Josette Shiner, a writer of the Washington Times had a lot to explain. She told that women share a common language. Regardless of their background and culture, women are viewed as people who understand each other. The demonstration of a woman's courage begins with the experience of having a life grow in them. Josette explained that there was no more revolutionary moment in a woman's life than the breath-stopping event. For a woman, the world becomes silent as they are filled with the awesome wonder of a small, innocent miracle of life placed trustingly in their hands. Josette observes that it is an instant when a woman becomes inseparably linked to the human chain of life, the endless quest of hope and dreams and the quest for a better world (Tickamyer and Kusujiarti, 2011). The high expression is a significant demonstration of the woman's inevitable involvement in all aspects of life.

The role played by women in politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has revealed a lot about the female gender and leadership. The value of the woman does not come in the form of imitating men or becoming more like men. However, it is achieved in honouring womanhood and femininity. The woman's wisdom, as employed in world politics today, has been seen as holding

half of all humanity. Women have continued to demonstrate what their hopes, dreams, aspirations and responsibilities are in the world. Amid the verge of worldwide crisis, the women have initiated a significant global spring of New Hope. The attainment of world's peace depends on how much men and women work together to influence the direction of the world's nations. Women have played a significant role in solving the world's ills at this critical time in history (Tickner and Sjoberg, 2011). In their unwavering struggle, women have constantly stood against the strong waves of negativism and defeat that pound the world's moral shoreline.

Just as a family needs a father and a mother, so too do these two genders need to be incorporated in the social, economic and political aspects of society. We have entered an age where men and women should couple their best leadership qualities to achieve greater results. Gender roles in the ancient society had been stereotyped based on what one was expected to do according to their sex (Walby, 2013). However, gender and power determine the success derived from the opportunities received. The historical male chauvinism where men dominated the force of power in culture, society and politics is wearing out. Women have become known and more respected in areas that were male dominated. Using their femininity to convey a different aspect of power, women have made the power between men and them equal. Equality in power and gender has been attained due to great men and women of the time (Wyn Jones, 2008).

To conclude with, on a critical sense, issues relating gender have re-framed people's understanding of the world. We are in a new world where every race, gender, culture, ethnic and political affiliation recognises their rights and advocates for an equal treatment. Gender issues have refuted ancient philosophies that perceived women as weak sex and the male as dominants in all aspects of life. Today women have a voice. They equally contribute to life promoting processes as men. The old belief that the world was a ground of experimenting the strength of a

gender, race, tribe or religion is drastically losing meaning. People have developed a sense of respect for others regardless of the external features that define them. There is concurrence that we are all human, facing similar opportunities and challenges that can be tackled collectively. The ancient perceptions of world politics have been dumped with the awakening of gender-related issues and the sense that whatever a man can do, a woman can do.

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