



The Legality of Women's Presidential Power in Regard to Feminist Standpoint Theory

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Feminist Standpoint Theory has been considered as one of the most unique theories of feminism in the contemporary world. The notion of women in power has always been a serious issue for developing countries due to certain visible challenge that women encounter even today, such as cultural and religious norms that restrict women to reach power at a presidential level. As Feminist Standpoint Theory has roots in the works of sociologists like Dorothy Smith and Liz Stanley, as well as Sandra Harding who support Feminist Standpoint Theory from postmodernist criticism and tries to present a version suiting not only to the postmodern era but as well postcolonial era. This study is a descriptive study and it uses content analysis for the texts and articles as well as theory perspectives regarding power and women more specifically taking points from Feminist Standpoint Theory. The main question for this study is, can women assume the role of president? This study has three main sections: the first one deals with the status of women. The second part focuses on Feminist standpoint epistemologies, and women as presidents, the third part tries to dig deep into the Legal Perspectives of Feminist Standpoint regarding Women in Power, and the last part highlights the conclusions of this study.

Key words: *Standpoint feminism, women, gender, power.*



Introduction

According to Koester (2015) “‘Gender’ is one of the most persistent causes, consequences and manifestations of power relations. In which gender shapes power relations and distribution from the household to the highest levels of political decision-making.” the Feminist Standpoint Theory is known as a controversial theory that analyzed the relation between the production of knowledge and practices of power.”

Over the years and during human history, women have been subordinated to men and to the authority of men. In other words, women have been ruled by men always owing to the fact that society and culture described women as mother, as housewives, as girls, and as subordinators not as independent individuals who can practice their own power capacities in their lives. There is no denying that women can work as men can in the same fields, but the physical power of men has always been a excuse for men to exclude women from certain duties.

In addressing the role of women and men, Jermsttiparsert (2016) has analyzed the Thai society in explaining the metaphorical debate on “Elephant front legs-hind legs”, in a realist view that the legs are dependent, and none can move without the others.”

In this study the role of women, regarding presidential power and legal perspectives, will be discussed based on the views of Feminist Standpoint Theory. As a matter of fact, women were supposed to carry out jobs inside homes and feed kids, and their world was contained in the four walls of their homes. On the other hand, men have been rulers, warriors, and fathers for centuries because men were considered as powerful members of many communities around the world (Faizan, Nair and Haque, 2018). Regardless of power, men have control over politics, economics, religion and all other sectors of the state. In an economic perspective “women as mothers managed their homes even under extreme conditions but they were not allowed to open a saving bank account in most countries including England and North America”. (Prasad, 2005, p.4) Moreover, men were considered as the bread winners of the family, and this was considered a good reason for the exclusion of women from both politics and economics. This is why women did not have any position in the public life of the community. Moreover, in real terms, women did not have any power capacity neither in economics nor in politics, this has made women powerless and weak. To a great extent, gender equality not only costs women but the community in general. Needless to say, women



and men are both created equally but society has created distinction between them as men are male and carry masculinity and women are females and feminine. Hence, women were dominated domestically, publicly and were mostly economically dependent on men. There were few women who have studied or entered university because education was just for men in some societies. The rights of women were only in the private world which was the home, the fear of men, that women will control their places both in the economy and in politics has always been tackled by men. There has been no sharing of value between men and women, though recently in many countries, especially in Scandinavia countries and Western countries, women enjoy better rights in private and in public compared to most developing countries, where women even do not have the right to choose whom they wish to marry (Frankovsky, Birknerova and Zbihlejova, 2016).

The society has deprived women from their public lives, since women traditionally were viewed as different and inferior in comparison to men. In the developing world there is a lack of female empowerment and the goal of many governments and states is not a win-win situation for male and female members, but rather a win-lose situation, which brings discrimination and inequality to the community. For instance, ancient Greece considered that “man represented the mind, woman the body, man the creative principle, woman the reproductive impulse, man the heaven-born aspect of human nature, woman its earth-bound component” (Smith, 1995, p. 258). As men were the owner of the mind, men were always leaders, governors and presidents. To put it in another way, men of duty were men not women. Even though, women were expected to take positions of responsibility and authority while men were at war. But, when the conflict was settled, women would be expected to go back to their domestic realm. In modern times, the recent example of women in fighting terrorism has proven women’s physical and mental power, as in Syria the Kurdish women could change the history and notion about women’s power in the eyes of the people worldwide.

Women’s protection units in Syria have made a change in women’s power status from home life to the battle fields. This has changed the historical and traditional biasness against women and has shown that women can also fight and save their home lands. While, the civil war in Syria has torn the country apart, the Kurdish female fighters collected their strength to fight the Islamic State terrorists, thus “for most of these women fighting with the military forces is their first opportunity for independent and empowerment in the traditionally male-dominated society.” (Ashrafi, 2016; Yildirim, Elban & Yildirim 2018). The story of women in Syria, the Kurdish fighters have a realistic record in the war against the Islamic State terrorists. Conversely to other nations, the Kurdish women have led the war, and this war against terrorism is headed by a young woman named Nasrin Abdullah. In the past the power of men



was linked to their capacity as fighters or warriors in the world of politics. Concerning the security sector, it was defined as a men's main duty. As men are the protectors and women are protected by men. To this end, women have changed the perspective of men and the community towards their roles as protectors of their lands and prosperity and the case of the Kurdish Women, fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, has been the most influential story of women in power leading a nation.

Feminist Standpoint Theory

The Feminist Standpoint Theory concentrates on the epistemologies claim that we should centre our science on women because “what we know and how we know depends on who we are, that is, on the knower's historical locus and his or her position in the social hierarchy” (Maracek, 1989, p. 372). From my understanding, the most crucial part of feminist standpoint theory is identified in Speedy's (1991) analysis as follows: First considering women as an oppressed part of the community, and support action for changing the status of women, and also, valuing the experiences of women highly. It is important to note that Feminist standpoint is rooted in the works of “Dorothy Smith, Nancy Hartsock, Donna Haraway, Sandra Harding, Alison Wylie, and Patricia Hill Collins.” Viewing power as a main tool of governance, power is identified and designated by the majority of the people in a country, and mostly by men because men have direct influence on power domain. Hekman (1997) says that, “the feminist standpoint theory represents the beginning of a paradigm shift in the concept of knowledge, a shift that is transforming not only feminist theory but also epistemology itself”. In essence, the theory argues that women's cognitive processes and modes of research are not like men and are different (Frankovsky and Birknerova, 2017). Further, standpoint feminists have emphasized that experiencing some events make the person know the facts better than just examining it. The fact that some analytical categories are convenient for men and many are not fit for the female experience. Further, women's biological wellbeing made them to be more vulnerable than men when talking about the ideas of knowledge. The feminist standpoint epistemologies aim not simply to substitute “woman centred” for “man centred” gender loyalties, but rather to provide a basis for a more accurate understanding of the entire world. (Becker, 1967).

Concerning knowledge and experience, historically men have been counted as wise and experienced, yet that does not prove that women did have knowledge or experiences. In many societies in the past, women were considered as apart of subordinated groups, hence their experiences were hidden or not being appreciated as the society was based on the conceptual



scheme of men. So, this means that only male experiences were valued, and no values were given for female experiences. The feminist standpoint epistemologies argue that traditional methods of science have merely given priority to the dominant class's thoughts, according to them, the ideas of subordinated groups were not necessary. Taking into consideration the perspectives of women would promote their position in the hierarchy of society. From the views of Collins (1997) "standpoint theory argues that groups who share common placement in hierarchical power relations do share experiences in such power relations." Yet, as women do not share the same power with men, their experiences are different from those of men. As Pandey (2016) adds, "world feminist movement reaches to the conclusion that women participation in decision-making process with the right standpoint is required.

The Legal Perspectives of Feminist Standpoint regarding Women in Power

In this introduction, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights article 21 articulates that "Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his/her country, directly or through freely chosen representatives."¹ In this respect, the article recognizes the equal rights for both genders, without any discrimination. Referring to Johnson's view about Women's legal rights in ancient Egypt, since the ancient times, there has been differentiations in countries regarding the legal and social status of women. Indeed, only few countries in the past and similarly in the present allowed men and women equal rights socially and legally. In terms of power, "the problem is men's basic instinctive drives, and motivates them to compete, and fight, bringing about a world of violence, warfare and injustice. Men are emotionally incapable of creating a caring and compassionate world. This is why we need women to rule our world instead of men." (Bond, 2004 in: Yodhewawhe, 2011).

While, Sandra Tsing loh (2008) questions 'should women rule?' This is the question most of us do wish to ask and want to know about, yet, Sandra states "politics would be more collegial. Businesses would be more productive. And communities would be healthier." This is the time when women in politics, business and economics are equal to men. What is conveyed here is when gender does not affect the roles of an individual. Considering the legal aspects of equal gender participation in governance and politics, since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, following the UN Decade for women in 1975, then the UN Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, and UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security', this draws our attention to the fact that legally there is no constraints for women to get to power. Whistle, cultural, religious and state

¹Article 21 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights from:
<http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/studyguides/votingrights.html>



mechanisms have created challenges for women to get into governance and to be equally empowered in state affairs.

Feminist Standpoint states that women are more peaceful than men, and women generally oppose wars. In line with this view, Feminist Standpoint has pointed out some important concerns which position women as being in favour of peace rather than war. According to the feminist standpoint, women are the oppressed class in the society and during wars women mostly suffer, such as the case of rape which victimizes women. “Less powerful members of society experience a different reality as a consequence of their oppression” (Fawcett, 2000). Another challenge for women in wars in the past and present is women are not armed, and are not in arm groups, and few numbers are in government armies, thus armless groups suffer more and cannot defend themselves. This has been observed and encountered in Nigeria by Boko Haram arm groups and in Iraq too while the Islamic State Militants attacked the Yazidi community, and have taken their women as their slaves. During the civil wars, women suffer a lot, this adds to the existing threats and challenges, such as honour killings, child marriage, and gender-based discriminations. “Yazidi men and boys who had reached puberty were separated from the women and other children and often shot dead at roadsides. Women were bused to temporary holding sites and then sold to Islamic State fighters at slave markets.” (Khalifa, 2018; Loveluck, 2019).

The role of women has changed during the course of history, recently women have obtained positions in politics similar to other sectors. Examples from countries where women are at top the leading positions such as president and prime minister, is Angela Merkel the Chancellor of Germany, and so many other successful stories around the world that have shown that women have all the necessary skills for practicing their knowledge and position.

For Collins (1997) “ignoring power relations is simply to misread standpoint theory its *raison d'etre*, its continuing salience, and its ability to explain social inequality.” Besides, he mentions that all women are unique and in addressing their uniqueness we lose the ability even for speaking about certain set of categories of women.” (Hekman, in Collins, 1997). Most significantly, the role of epistemology, in standpoint feminist theory, emphasized the impact of knowledge, which makes women see the world in a different way as subordinates in society. Therefore; women have a different understanding of the world, and their reflection is highly different.

Women have historically been in power while their power has been restricted; “Napoleon has re-imposed patriarchal controls over men, similarly they did over works.” (Cockburn, 2012; Adusei, 2018). The importance of Feminist Standpoint is knowledge as women are deprived



from authority, thus women are socialized in different ways. This is why women will have different policies compared to men. This conveys that women in governance and power would be different as women as they have suffered from abuse and misuse of power and authority in the past. In a sense, women have always struggled to remove legal and social barriers that put constraints on women. Thus, “activist women hand been at pain for the vote, and for campaign to keep the country out of war.” (Cockburn, 2012).

What is noticeable is that some people think that women may act as men when they reach power, but women should be taken into consideration as human beings and not just as women. Considering Feminist Standpoint perspectives, the world of international politics would change if women moved into this field. Feminist Standpoint argues “that if most actors were female, the foundation of international politics would be different, it would be more peaceful” (Goldstein, 2001). Moreover, standpoint feminist thinks that women are naturally more cooperative than men, so the world would be peaceful if female values were predominant.

According to the General Social Survey which was conducted by the National Opinion Research Center in 1996, “majority of Americans believe that women should no longer be restricted to traditional roles, and over 89% stated that they would vote for women.” (Mitchell, in Rogers, 2002, p.72). Yet comparing that to the recent elections in the United States, even in the U.S, women could not reach presidential power. In this sense, women can be leaders as men are, and this may create a stable world when both genders take part in the politics equally. For example, (Hillary Clinton in 1996, told a radio audience that her husband finds “action” movies “relaxing” but she does not like them, explaining that “I think that’s kind of a male thing.”). (Goldstein, 2001, pp.124-137). If women are presidents, then it is hard for them to see the causalities of wars because women are naturally sensitive and compassionate. In a logical sense, women empowerment in politics and governance is necessary and is required in the developing countries, as well as in developed countries. Woman rulership has different connotations, as a feminist she thinks that women can make changes not only in world politics but also in business, to create a better society.

As has been stated, if women were in charge, things might entirely change. This is owing to the fact that women are in favour of progress in many fields. The recent change in the quota system in Rwanda is designed for better female participation in politics and governance. Rwanda as a developing country, recovered from a severe civil war and genocide, and now has the world record for women participation in parliament; “women take 67% of parliamentary seats,” the good thing about the story from Rwanda is that the people think



more women promotes better governance and development, which is the right notion of co-governance in state affairs.

“According to Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which recognizes the right of every person to take part in the government of his or her country, equal access of men and women to power, decision-making and leadership at all levels is a necessary precondition for the proper functioning of democracy”. Significantly, the article recognizes the equal right for both genders equally without any discrimination. Even though, in the past women have been excluded from power and the decision-making process, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has given the opportunity for women to participate in politics and government affair like men do, this must be considered a golden opportunity for women at the international level. In recent years many countries have elected women into ministerial and governmental posts as female governors.

Recent stories from developing countries are very supportive, such as the case of Nepal where Bidhya Devi Bhandari is the first female head of state. has shown that developing countries can also step to the ladder of development in terms of political participation and women empowerment in top level governance. The role of women in different levels of governance and leadership has been recorded in this website, (https://guide2womenleaders.com/women_state_leaders.htm). In the push for bringing more women into high level governance, these numbers may not be satisfactory, but women can take part more and more. Having women figures as presidents and even governors is a light of hope for all other women in the state. Two crucial propositions lie at the heart of these assertions and arguments: firstly, women are equal to men and nothing can change this fact, the number of women participants might not be satisfactory, but there are improvements especially in the developing world. The second thought is; women have governance and leadership capacities, and this contributes to development directly.

Conclusion

Feminist Standpoint Theory highlights the role of women in power comparable to men and supports women in power. As excluding women from power has been a serious challenge in politics and governance, the literature shows that women working at a presidential level and at the top governance levels are rare, even in the 21st century. Yet there are a few women in the mid-levels of governance, which can change the equation in the upcoming future, and a rapid increase in the number of female leaders is expected, as the developing world empowers more women than ever before. Besides, progress in narrowing the gender gap in



governance takes place in many regions of the world, though women are mainly underrepresented and less empowered in politics and economics worldwide.

To my mind female presidents can make changes in international politics by considering these approaches: Female presidents should try to open a way for other women to enter politics and public life. Further, Female presidents should use peaceful means for dealing with any conflicts whether they are internal or external. Women should have different policies for creating a sustainable world. If female presidents try to empower more women in the economic field, it will affect the country's economic development. To this end the constraints that women face in governance and politics are multiple and highly interlinked, while women complement and supplement men in power and in governance if they have the chance of being empowered.

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