

‘De-radicalizing’ Feminism on International Women’s Day

By Daniel Selormey

First off, if it is not so apparent, I am convinced the feminist movement is a radical movement. I say so because the socio-cultural landscape that led to the rise of the feminist movement was marred with several deeply deep-seated issues affecting women's lives that were not going to change by simply massaging the egos of the patriarchy. The challenges included the denial of basic legal and political rights such as voting, participating in leadership/decision-making processes, and property ownership. Economic opportunities for women were restricted, with widespread gender-based discrimination in employment and wages trapping them in low-paying jobs. Gender-based violence, often normalized within society, left women vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. This was exacerbated by the lack of legal protections and support systems. Further, traditional gender roles restricted women to domestic chores, prioritizing marriage and motherhood over personal aspirations and professional pursuits, limiting their autonomy. At the time, cultural stereotypes and norms perpetuated gender inequality, portraying women as inferior to men. Certainly, changing these deeply rooted societal norms required a radical movement.

What, though, is feminism? The Cambridge Dictionary defines it as “the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state.”

When you dig deeper into the history and meaning of feminism, you come across what is referred to as the “waves of feminism.” There are four of them, I believe, and I briefly touched on them.

The first wave emerged in the late 19th century, focusing on voting rights for women and challenging women's status as property. The second wave, in the 1960s and 1970s, expanded to address workplace equality, reproductive rights, and traditional gender roles. It gave rise to various feminist ideologies, including mainstream, radical, and cultural feminism. The third wave, starting in the 1990s, broadened the agenda to include issues of race, sexuality, and gender identity, facilitated by the internet. The fourth wave, emerging in the 2010s, builds upon previous achievements and addresses new challenges, such as digital harassment, through movements like #MeToo and increased social media activism.

Here, I summarize the feminist ideologies mentioned earlier: mainstream feminism focused on institutional reforms, which meant reducing gender discrimination, giving women access to male-dominated spaces, and promoting equality. Radical feminism wanted to reshape society

entirely, saying that the system was inherently patriarchal and only an overhaul would bring liberation. Cultural feminism had a similar view and taught that there's a "female essence" that's distinct from men.

Having made some significant gains in the push for gender equality, why is radical feminism still common today and to an extent defining the entire feminism movement? In today's society, radical feminism persists as a response to the challenges posed by a world still largely shaped by male dominance. Currently, systemic inequalities persist, perpetuating a societal structure where men hold disproportionate power and privilege. Moreover, language itself often reflects and reinforces this power dynamic, with language inherently favoring male experiences and perspectives. Despite significant strides toward gender equality, resistance to change persists, underscoring the rise in popularity of radical feminism.

Anyway, suffice it to say that by the time Ghana transitioned to democratic governance in the 1990s, globally, a lot of gains had been made in the feminism movement; hence, women had the right to vote, amongst other things. We, therefore, immediately zoomed right into the fourth wave, which gave rise to the likes of "Pepper Them" and "Sugar Them." Of course, the "Pepper Them" approach indeed is the radical feminism approach, which doesn't necessarily define all that feminism stood (or even stands) for historically.

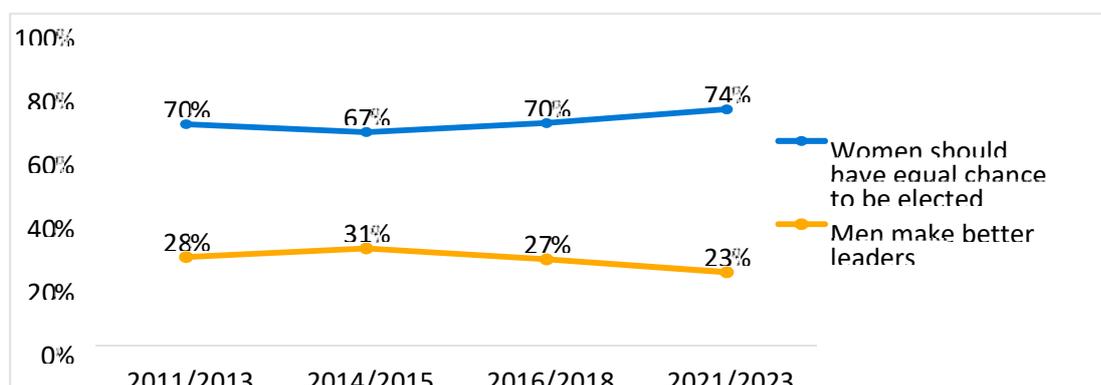
I was born in the 1990s, and by the 2000s, when I was ready for school, I had dreams of becoming a Bank Manager just like my Daddy, and I even considered being a Priest. Similarly, young girls (colleagues) of my age had dreams of becoming pilots, nurses, doctors, and lawyers, among many other laudable professions, and as it should be, no child, especially the girl child, was ever discouraged by colleagues or teachers. Though I am pursuing a career other than what I envisioned as a child, my ultimate goal hasn't shifted completely to just marrying and raising children; it is simply part of the package.

Sadly, along the line, things change for a lot of women - I find it rather disappointing to see women who dreamt large leave behind those dreams that could benefit society to be stay-at-home mothers or wives. If anything, being a wife or mother should be just one of the dreams women should seek to fulfill not the sole or ultimate dream. I feel this nullifies the struggles of women who led the fight for the liberation of women along the several waves of feminism, although the fight is not necessarily complete. Moreover, I believe that parents and women themselves do not just make huge sacrifices and investments in education to end up staying home with their kids all day long because in the context of child care, a mother is not required to possess a diploma.

In all these, I take solace in the Afrobarometer findings from 2011 to 2023 in 30 countries on the continent, indicating a decent and constant rise in the number of people who believe women should have an equal chance to be elected, especially when women were not initially allowed to vote let alone hold public office. The data further shows a decreased support for the

notion that men make better leaders. This is a clear indication that the grounds are fertile for gender equality, and women must take advantage. This is also evidence of a rising acceptance of women’s ambitions. Nonetheless, more work needs to be done since, for instance, in parliament and the cabinet, women occupy less than 20 percent (%) of spots, crucial areas where the input/voices of all are needed for an inclusive society.

Should women have an equal chance to be elected? | 30 countries | 2011-2023



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: Men make better political leaders than women and should be elected rather than women.

Statement 2: Women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men.

(% who “agree” or “strongly agree” with each statement)

I end on a lighter note – I recall, one day in my gender class, for whatever reason, the ‘patriarch’ in me raised a concern: if we continue on this tangent, aren’t we going to create a system where men become the new women (the marginalized group)? What I didn’t realize then was that this concern was simply an admission of the existing gender gap, which we must deliberately work to close. We should, in fact, be proud as men that women are striving to achieve more and leave legacies for themselves as well.

I think there is enough space in the world for all of us to flourish, so let’s INSPIRE INCLUSION.

Happy International Women’s Day!



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