



CIS EVENT

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ANNUAL BIG IDEAS FORUM

Why “Grievance Feminism” is a Threat to Serious Feminist & Humanitarian Issues



Janet Albrechtsen, Dr Andrea den Boer,
Christina Hoff Sommers and Brendan O'Neill

Over the past century the feminist movement has achieved remarkable advances in securing equal rights for women in the West, but in other regions around the world women are still treated as second class citizens – or even goods and chattels. Millions of women in developing countries live with subjugation, domestic servitude, rape, violence, honour killings, harassment, genital mutilation and restricted education as societal norms. They do not have the rights to their own bodies, their own opinions, their own lives, and often are denied rights to property as well. They are denied basic freedoms that are accorded to men in those same countries without question.

This session will explore why these issues are not a battle for women's rights but a battle for human rights, in the

truest sense of the term, and why “grievance feminism” trivialises and sidelines the real issues of fundamental gender illiberalism.

While there are clearly still serious issues to grapple with in the West in terms of gender equality (domestic and sexual violence in particular), modern feminism has been hijacked and trivialised by un-meritocratic and bureaucratic quotas, obsession with politically correct language, and the confusion of sexism with misogyny. So much so that many young women now spurn the label of feminist, equating it with vitriolic male-bashing and stridency rather than the essence of female liberty.

In September last year, the newly appointed Goodwill

Ambassador for UN Women (popular young British actress Emma Watson) said, ‘...the more I spoke about feminism, the more I realised that fighting for women’s rights has too often become synonymous with man-hating. If there is one thing I know for certain, it is that this has to stop.’ Two months later a furore erupted across the West when a male scientist from the European Space Agency held a televised address on the history-making success of the Rosetta spacecraft probe landing on a comet for data-gathering and robotic exploration. The address was overshadowed by the scientist’s poor choice of attire; a shirt depicting cartoons of scantily clad women. Undoubtedly in poor taste, sexist and

unprofessional. But not of sufficient significance to warrant a feminist storm of such magnitude that it eclipsed the incredible achievements in space.

This and other comparatively minor issues of sexism and gender inequality are re-defining feminism in a detrimental way. A wave of constant disgruntlement and offence alienates feminist supporters and downplays the humanitarian crisis faced by millions of women across the globe. We need to restore the feminist cause to its noble and libertarian origins: supporting equal political, social, economic and educational rights for women – everywhere.

Brendan O’Neill

One of the great misconceptions about the New Feminism is that it represents a war on men. You hear this argument from both sides of the discussion, from both the critics of the New Feminism and from its champions, too. The critics say, “This feminism is a really unfair attack on blokes, and it should be called off”. And the proponents of New Feminism say, “We’ve finally taken the war to the patriarchy, we’re bringing men down a peg or two, and it’s about time we did”. So both agree, in different ways, that this is a new movement which has declared war on men, or at least on male privilege.

The people who make this argument most often are men’s rights activists, who are the saddest people in the world. They live on the internet. They spend most of their time in discussion forums crying their eyes out. And they blame feminism for every problem in their lives. The reason they can’t get a girlfriend is because feminism has made all women into lesbians or bitches. The reason they can’t get a job is because feminism has taken over the workplace and men are no longer welcome. It’s from these people that you most often hear the argument that the New Feminism is a war on men, a war on boys, a war on blokeish everyday life.

I think it’s wrong to see the New Feminism in this way. Because, if anything, the New Feminism is a war on women. It explicitly calls into question the ability of women to negotiate public life without the assistance of others. It calls into question, not so much male privilege, as female autonomy, female capacity. It might mock men, but it does down women, and it does them down in a very profound way.

I was thinking recently that one of the great ironies of my life, as someone who works in the media, is that pretty much the only time I hear open contempt for women these days is when I’m in discussions with feminists. I come from a family of unreconstructed men. Pretty much every man in my family works in the building trade. They read tabloid newspapers, they watch football, they drink booze. And I don’t hear contempt from any of them, from what is today presented to us, falsely in my view, as the most sexist section of society: working-class men. Rather, I only hear contempt for women when I’m debating middle-class, media-based feminists, the very people who pose as the champions of women.

Just think about the phrases they use. One of their favourites is “internalised misogyny”. This is the idea that women have been so brainwashed by patriarchal culture that they don’t know what’s good for them anymore. The reason they pick certain courses at university and the reason they go into certain, apparently female-appropriate careers is because they’ve been “conditioned” to think that is the right road in life for them. “Conditioning”, according to my dictionary, is the process by which “the behaviour of an organism becomes dependent on an event occurring in its environment”. That’s how many New Feminists view women: as things conditioned by the corrupt, patriarchal environment that surrounds them. New Feminists also claim that huge numbers of women have “body-loathing issues”, meaning they have been educated by the media — that is, brainwashed — to hate themselves. They thoughtlessly internalise society’s alleged loathing of them.

This idea that women are malleable, fickle creatures is a rehabilitation of the old, foul notion that women don’t know their own minds — though now it gets dressed up in the pseudo-academic language of “internalised misogyny”.

Another argument that the New Feminists often make is that women have very fragile self-esteem. This is the reason they want to censor pornography, get rid of Page 3 girls in *The Sun*, restrict the availability of certain violent videogames, and keep sexist hip-hop stars away from their nations — because they believe these images and words “damage women and girls’ self-esteem”. They always say “women and girls”. It’s a real slight of hand, because in their mind there is no difference between women and girls. This speaks to their very infantilising belief that these two categories of people, adults and children, can casually be spoken of in the same breath, as if an adult woman’s response to a shocking image is no different to what a girl’s response would be: both would be equally damaged, apparently.

This idea that women need to be protected from images is based on the notion that they are weak, fragile, less capable of seeing upsetting things than men are.

Another favourite New Feminist idea is that street harassment is rampant. Apparently, over the past few years, the streets have become incredibly dangerous for women: there’s catcalling, wolf-whistling, people who might start a

conversation with you. And women can't cope with that, apparently. We are told that society needs new rules, new regulations, or at the very least a system of re-education for men and boys — to correct their habit of engaging with members of the opposite sex — in order to help women negotiate their way through the terrifying public sphere.

This New Feminist view of women as pathetic reaches its terrifying logical conclusion on campus, where female student leaders create "safe spaces" and women-only spaces in which nothing outrageous may be said. They call for trigger warnings on books, particularly books that mention sexual harassment, sexual assault or rape. Even works of classic literature that mention rape are now having trigger warnings attached, in case a fragile female student should read them and feel upset. It's worth recalling the 1960 London trial on whether DH Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* should be made freely available. One of the lawyers who wanted to restrict access to the book asked the now infamous question, "Would you wish your wife or servant to read this book?" The implication was that of course us men can read it, but women...? That statement is often held up as evidence of how out of touch was the old British establishment at the dawn of the 1960s. Yet now a very similar argument is made by supposedly radical New Feminists: "We can't possibly let women see that image or read that book, at least not without thoroughly warning them beforehand."

You see the same patronising New Feminist arguments in virtually all spheres of public life. In the workplace, in education, in government circles: it's always said that we need to change the culture in various institutions in order to make them more welcoming to women. We need to make them less male — and what that often means is that we need to make them less demanding, less confrontational, more consensual. We particularly hear this argument in relation to politics. Politics must become "less blokey" and more soft, because otherwise the wilting wallflowers that New Feminists believe make up womankind won't feel welcome and won't cope.

For years, feminists argued that women should be liberated from the home because they were more than capable of dealing with the rough and tumble of public life. Now, New Feminists argue that public life is too harsh, too scary, too brainwashing, and therefore women need special help. The arguments once made by misogynists are now made by feminists.

It's also instructive to look at New Feminist books, which have become the latest cash cow of the publishing world. They have titles like 'How to be a Woman', 'Do it Like a Woman', 'A Book for Her'. They're a weird mix of self-help and sassy broad: Germaine Greer meets Oprah Winfrey meets Frank McCourt; part misery memoir, part feminist tract. These books devote much of their content to slagging off women. Women who shave too much, preen too much, who've had plastic surgery, who've obviously been brainwashed by porno culture or pop culture. In other words, they don't know their own minds, and thus they need the help of the more spiritual New Feminists, who are heroically immune to their cultural surroundings and are therefore pure, insightful, ready to re-educate the rest of us, women and men alike.

So the New Feminism represents, not a war on men, but a massive insult to women. It's a really dangerous reversal of the enormous gains that have been made for womankind over the past hundred years. Women have won the right to vote, the right to work, they were increasingly being seen as autonomous, just as capable and free-willed as men. Now that's all being undone by the New Feminism, which has pushed a view of women as fragile, always unsafe, lacking free will, incapable of making autonomous choices due to the suffocating culture.

The Victorian view of women is making a comeback. In the Victorian era, women were often protected from certain printed material which society, or their chaperones, considered unfit for them — now New Feminists seek to protect "women and girls" from Page 3 or gangsta rape. In the Victorian era there were numerous campaigns designed to protect women from street harassment. The *Lady Magazine*, in the late 1800s, ran a campaign called "Protection of Women", which depicted the rough, ugly public sphere as unsuitable for women. That idea is coming back too. And one of the key arguments made in the nineteenth century against allowing women to attend university was that their dainty minds would be assaulted by too much controversial matter and by dodgy male behaviour. Today, it's New Feminists who claim university is unsafe for women, everywhere from the library, with its shocking books, to the university square, with its lads or frats.

But I think even this is not the full story. Even calling the New Feminism a war on women doesn't tell us everything. Because while the New Feminism most openly undermines women's standing in society, it also represents an attack on humanist, liberal values, on modern Enlightened ideals. The New Feminism is at the cutting edge of undermining the key ideals of free, democratic societies.

In the sphere of Knowledge, for example, New Feminist ideas have played a key role in questioning whether the truth is really discoverable and depicting rationalism and reason as cold, "male" values. The ideal of democracy is being undermined by the so-called feminisation of politics, the notion that we must drain politics of its edge, its argumentativeness — the lifeblood of democracy — and instead make it more consensual. The idea of justice is threatened by New Feminist ideas: the limiting of tough cross-examination in the name of protecting rape claimants in particular, and the use of kangaroo courts on Western campuses to punish alleged sexual offenders, speaks to the diminution of the idea of justice as something rigorous, fair, and open.

The values of the modern Enlightened age are being undermined by the New Feminism. But this is not down to some evil cabal of high-heeled feminists who have set out to destroy modern society. Rather, Western society itself has lost faith in those values, over the past few decades, and it is constantly looking about for a new idea or campaign through which it might make its abandonment of those values look like something progressive rather than regressive. New Feminism is its latest campaign, the new means through which a disoriented, post-Enlightened West now jettisons its values of liberty, democracy, justice, knowledge and autonomy, under the cynical guise of "helping women". And girls.

Christina Hoff Sommers

Oppression of Women: Real and Imagined

In August 2014, 12 members of Iran's Revolutionary Guard charged into 28-year-old artist Atena Farghadani's house, blindfolded her, and took her to prison. She had posted a satirical cartoon on Facebook to protest proposed legislation to restrict birth control and women's rights. Farghadani has since been found guilty of "spreading propaganda" and "insulting members of parliament through paintings." She has been sentenced to 12 years in prison.

Ms. Farghadani is one of millions of women whose basic rights are being ruthlessly violated. In countries like Iran, Yemen, Egypt, and Cambodia, women are struggling for freedoms most women in the West take for granted.

But American feminists are relatively silent about these injustices—especially feminists on campus. During the 1980s, there were massive demonstrations on American college campuses against racial apartheid in South Africa. There is no remotely comparable movement on today's campuses against the gender apartheid prevalent in large parts of the world. Why not?

Today's young feminist activists are far too preoccupied with their own supposed victimhood to make common cause with women like Farghadani. This past year I visited and spoke at several US campuses, including Yale, UCLA, Oberlin, and Georgetown. I found activist feminist students passionately absorbed in the cause of liberating themselves from the grasp of the oppressive patriarchal order. Their trigger warnings, safe spaces and micro-aggression watches are all about saving themselves from the ravages of the male hegemony.

It's not that they don't feel bad for women in places like Iran or Yemen. They do. But they believe they share a similar fate.

And they can cite a litany of victim statistics from their gender studies class that shows their plight. Someone needs to tell them that most of those statistics are specious and that, although the threat of harm is a human constant, they are among the most liberated and privileged—and safest—people on earth. Because their professors would not tell them, that someone turned out to be me; for this I was furnished with a police escort on more than one occasion.

Samantha Power, the able US ambassador to the UN and human rights champion, recently addressed the graduating class of Barnard College. Instead of urging them to

support women struggling against oppression in places like Afghanistan, she congratulated them for waging a parallel struggle on the US campus. She cited Emma Sulkowicz — a much-publicised Columbia University student who carried a mattress for months to protest her alleged rape by a fellow student—as a symbol of ongoing oppression of US women, and compared her plight with those of young women in Afghanistan struggling for elementary gender justice. Never mind that a campus discipline committee found the accused not guilty; never mind the questionable basis of Sulkowicz's public shaming campaign. Sulkowicz lives in a country where laws, institutions, and customs protect her. The women of Afghanistan do not. Afghan women are coping with the Taliban; Sulkowicz is coping with Columbia classmates. The US ambassador to the UN should be able to distinguish the two.

It is not my view that, because women in countries like Iran or Afghanistan have it so much worse, Western women should tolerate less serious injustices at home. Emphatically they should not. But too often, today's gender activists are not fighting injustice, but fighting phantom epidemics and nursing petty grievances. Two leading feminist hashtags of 2015 are **#FreeTheNipples** and **#LovetheLines**. The former is a campaign to desexualize women's breasts; the latter promotes stretch-mark acceptance. If the imprisoned women of Iran and Afghanistan were free to tweet, what would they say about these struggles?

Several years ago the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum created a small furore when she noted with disapproval that "feminist theory pays relatively little attention to the struggles of women outside the United States." Her academic colleagues pounced: Gayatri Spivak, professor of comparative literature at Columbia, accused Nussbaum of "flag waving" and of being on a "civilizing mission."

No one is suggesting American or Australian women take on the role of moral saviours out to civilise the rest of the world. Efforts to help can often be patronising and counterproductive. But that is an argument for being tactful and for taking direction from the women we are seeking to support. It is not, for those who claim to be devoted to gender justice, an excuse for doing nothing. Women like Atena Farghadani are already on a civilising mission—and it is disheartening so many feminists in the West seem to be looking the other way.

Christina Hoff Sommers is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. She is the author of several books including *Who Stole Feminism* and *The War Against Boys* and hosts the weekly video blog, *The Factual Feminist*. She will address tonight's Centre of Independent Studies Big Ideas forum: *Why 'Grievance Feminism' is a Threat to Serious Feminist and Humanitarian Issues*.

Janet Albrechtsen

The Corruption of Feminism

I am so happy to be here at Big Ideas.

If we were in a university lecture hall, I would have to issue a trigger warning that the following content may offend old-style feminists and modern day grievance warriors.

If I was speaking at a conference of university students, I would ask that there be no clapping – in case it triggers anxiety. I would ask for “jazz hands”.

So what the hell happened to feminism?

It's too early for karaoke but feminism should be summed up by Helen Reddy's iconic song.

I am woman,

hear me roar...

I am strong,

I am invincible,

Sadly, the lyrics of modern feminism go something like this:

I am woman,

hear me whine,

I am weak,

I am vulnerable,

The notion of triage – of prioritizing problems, of addressing those who most need help – has been inverted by modern feminism.

If today's feminists ran a hospital emergency department, they would be racing to fix an otherwise healthy middle-aged woman with a common cold over a young girl facing a life-threatening injury.

Don't get me wrong. As Anne Manne wrote so eloquently many years ago, women like me inhaled the benefits of feminism as naturally as the air we breathe.

Today the air is toxic. Today's modern feminism is a corruption of what feminism should be.

It's become a trivial movement that infantilizes women. And it has taken one heck of a moral detour away from real issues of freedom.

But if feminism is not about freedom, what's the point of it?

If it's not about freedom, it's just a lobby group for pet grievances.

Today's feminists feast at a smorgasbord of whinges, whines, victimhood claims, misogyny games, gender binary discussions, western world obsessions about pay gaps and quotas and glass ceilings.

Brave riders of the feminism's third-wave include pop stars like Taylor Swift who recently said: “I didn't see myself as held back until I was a woman.” As Heather Wilhelm wrote recently for The Federalist: “Held back from what?” Building a net worth of \$250m?

It's probably too much to expect celebrities to become feminist icons. But when women like Gwyneth Paltrow teach us about the wonders of vaginal steaming, you have to ask

– is that really the best they can do?

What about the media – how are they doing? How long have we got?

Let's start with the keyboard feminists who found so much offence with Mark Latham's crude tweeting about a handful of women. Latham gave up his column in the AFR last week. I'm not defending Latham. His gratuitous nastiness always detracts from what can sometimes be a kernel of confronting truth.

But it's uncanny how the sisterhood strikes when it suits – for political purposes, not as a matter of principle.

It's apparently fine for Clementine Ford to call Miranda Devine a “f....ing c...” on Twitter but it's not fine for Latham to use crude words. I say, a pox on them both.

Some years ago, Malcolm Turnbull rang me at home and asked whether I knew what Latham had said about me. I hadn't caught up with the news: Latham had called me a skanky ho in federal Parliament. I didn't know what skanky ho meant so, while I was on the phone to Malcolm, I googled the phrase.

Needless to say, I was inundated with more porn than is decent when you're sitting in your study with young children running around you.

I don't recall a single lefty feminist ticking off Latham for calling me a smelly whore. And of course, the stunt came about because he was dared to put those words about me into Hansard – dared by a lefty, feminist.

There is an in-crowd of feminists.

Like the Plastics in the Mean Girls movie, the Plastic Feminists have their own set of rules.

It's not about wearing pink on Wednesdays, tracky pants on Fridays and a ponytail only once a week. The Feminist Plastics have rigorous membership rules about believing in abortion, quotas, glass ceilings and assumed sexism.

The feminist collective is overflowing with unprincipled trivia too.

A couple of years ago an English feminist in a London newspaper, wrote this after reading something “I washed my hands with anti-bacterial soap, but couldn't cleanse my mind of rising rage and desolation.”

Was she reading about female genital mutilation? Maybe child marriages?

No.

The enraged feminist had finished reading the fictional Fifty Shades of Grey.

This poor commentator would probably have to take a vaginal steam bath if she listened to the words of Esther Perel who, in a recent TED talk, pointed out that, “most of us get turned on at night by the very same things we might demonstrate against during the day. The erotic mind is not very politically correct.”

I'll leave that subject to Cosmo magazine – save to say that feminists today don't even understand freedom in the bedroom.

And how are our politicians faring on the feminism front?

"The horror!" exclaimed Greens senator Larissa Waters last year.

Was she responding to Islamic State's propaganda which says "it is permissible to buy, sell, or give as a gift female captives and slaves, for they are merely property which can be disposed of... It is permissible to have intercourse with the female slave who hasn't reached puberty if she is fit for intercourse."

No.

The Greens senator was emoting over the fact that a Liberal MP, Michaelia Cash doesn't wear the feminist label.

Feminism has been corrupted by its skewed set of priorities.

When her leadership was in trouble, Australia's first female Prime Minister, Julia Gillard made asinine claims of misogyny and sexism against Opposition leader Tony Abbott.

To coin a phrase from Helen Garner's magnificently nuanced look at sex and power, Gillard had a grid labeled "misogyny" and she was determined to apply it to the broadest possible field of male behaviour.

When Abbott glanced at his watch in parliament, Gillard labeled that sexism too.

Yet that speech about confected misogyny became a defining moment for so many modern day feminists.

On the same afternoon that Gillard gave that speech, a young Pakistani girl, Malala Yousafzai, boarded her school bus in the northwest Pakistani district of Swat, an area where the local Taliban has regularly banned girls attending school.

A gunman boarded the bus too. He asked for her by name, pointed a gun at her and fired three shots. One bullet hit the left side of Malala's head, travelled through the length of her face, and lodged in her shoulder.

Imagine, just imagine if Julia Gillard had made a heart felt speech about Malala rather than herself on that afternoon on October 2012.

Don't get me wrong. We can walk and chew gum.

But we are so gummed up with western grievances such as sexism and pay gaps that we fail to try walking in the shoes of girls who need to escape from child marriages or women who have been the victim of so-called honour killings.

Feminism has become corrupted by its cultural infirmity too; by a deep-seated western self-loathing.

While hostages were still being held at gunpoint by a terrorist in the Lindt café last December, many high profile Australian women rushed to join a feel-good hashtag campaign - #WISH – women in solidarity with hijabs.

Putting aside the fact that these women immediately assumed Australians would default to Islamophobia, why didn't they show more concern for the hostages inside the café – or even have a more nuanced debate about the fact that millions of women are forced to wear a veil as a medieval form of oppression.

Hashtag campaigns? Pay gaps? Quotas? A man looking at his watch in parliament while a woman speaks? Trigger warnings? Jazz hands? Feminist labels? They don't make my list of Top Ten issues around the lack of freedom facing women today.

Feminism's focus on trifling, petty grievances debases our public conversations.

More importantly, it undermines the intellectual scaffolding around freedom.

The corruption of feminism is not a women's issue. It's best understood as symptomatic of a wider and deeper malaise.

It emerges from a decades long corruption of human rights.

Once the notion of human rights became untethered from classical notions of freedom, feminism was destined to do the same.

It is no coincidence, for example, that the corruption of feminism occurred at the same time as our commitment to free speech has faltered.

The very notion of free speech doesn't seem to cut it anymore.

It's about fair speech instead, about not offending or insulting people.

Forty years ago, the Left abandoned libertarian notions of human rights and embraced a new definition that elevates egalitarian rights.

As our Attorney-General George Brandis has pointed out, the shift began with the elevation of the right to "equal concern and respect" – a notion developed by legal philosopher Ronald Dworkin.

Equal concern and respect.

What on earth does that mean?

Yet here was the beginning of a recalibrated human rights movement in favour of victimhood as defined by the paternalistic Left.

Feelings have become the measurement of human rights.

This new victimhood movement has ditched Enlightenment ideas around the very notion of what it means to be a human being.

No longer are people seen as autonomous and resilient and rational beings.

Under this new framework, people are seen as weak, as vulnerable, as a quivering mass of nerves in need of protection – so weak we need trigger warnings, and jazz hands and laws that prohibit words that are offensive or insulting.

The market place of ideas, where we critique, analyse and sharpen ideas – is being usurped by a crude market place of outrage where human rights legislation and anti-discrimination bureaucracies buttress the new victimhood movement.

Two viruses – victimhood politics and a persistent strain of anti-westernism – have corroded our most basic freedoms. These viruses have weakened our ability to defend our most basic values.

Fundamental human rights – such as the right to freedom of expression – are being offered to certain minority groups at discounted prices. Hence free speech becomes fair speech.

Our cultural appeasement carries costs. It emasculates our values. It means that in Australia, a conservative government that claims to have free speech in its DNA refused to reform the Racial Discrimination Act.

Cultural appeasement has horrendous physical costs too. It means almost 4000 cases of female genital mutilation reported in Britain last year and 11,000 cases of so-called honour-based violence over the past 5 years.

There should be no reduction, no discount, no half-price sale of our fundamental human rights.

And that means no silence around the importance of these values.

A few months ago, Swedish Foreign Minister, Margot Wallstrom delivered a scathing assessment of the treatment of women in Saudi Arabia.

Remember, women can't drive, can't marry, can't have certain medical procedures without permission from men.

Child marriages are common. So is public segregation of the sexes.

What happened?

The Oppression Opera returned to town – that familiar chorus of bleating about Islamophobia that we have heard at regular intervals ever since Salman Rushdie wrote a book called *Satanic Verses*.

The Arab world condemned the Swedish Foreign Minister for Islamophobia.

Saudi Arabia withdrew its ambassador to Sweden.

At least there wasn't a fatwa this time.

What happened outside the Arab world was even more disappointing – and yet predictable.

Wallstrom's defence of women's freedom was greeted with silence in the West.

As Nick Cohen wrote in *The Spectator*: "Outside Sweden, the Western media barely covered the story...."

The scandal is that there isn't a scandal."

The scandal is the strategic silence of modern feminism around freedom for women. It's much easier to attack the gender pay gap than female genital mutilation or child brides or so-called honor killings which, logically, may require you to make judgments about cultures that oppress women.

Feminism's warriors – both male and female – have become the natural allies – or useful idiots – of those opposed to western freedoms.

Why is Ayaan Hirsi Ali derided as a "rock star who has done well for herself?" Why isn't she celebrated as a woman who has felt first hand the constraints of culture and religion, a woman dedicated to Enlightenment values of freedom, reason and inquiry?

The real feminists, those fighting for women's freedom, don't sit at the centre of feminism today.

So how the hell can we get feminism back on the freedom track?

The future of feminism is inextricably linked with the future of human rights. When the latter rediscovers classical notions of liberty, so will feminism.

As Abraham Lincoln said so eloquently and so succinctly in 1863, liberty is an "unfinished work" and it is up to us, again quoting Lincoln to "take increased devotion to that cause."

By doing that, feminism will one day return to the unfinished work of freedom – and when it does, more women, and men, will applaud it.

And not with any weird shaking of jazz hands.

Thank you.

Janet Albrechtsen, Columnist, *The Australian*

Andrea den Boer

Global women's issues, or why we still need feminism

Equality for women has been a long hard struggle throughout the world. Our achievements have often been piecemeal as exemplified by the history of the right to vote--New Zealand was the first in 1893, and Australia soon followed, with South Australia in 1894 and others shortly thereafter, but for other states the history of women's voting is much more recent--Switzerland in 1971, 1994 for black women and men in South Africa, 2005 for Kuwaiti women, and this week, women in Saudi Arabia are registering to vote for the first time in the upcoming December election.

The reform of laws and practices has enabled women to claim their space alongside men in public life, a sphere traditionally held by men. But the feminist project is unequal, even in developed, democratic states, particularly for women in lower socio-economic classes and among particular ethnic groups. For as many women who joined the 'why I don't need feminism campaign' in the US and UK, there are as many who participated in the 'why I need feminism campaign'. These recent campaigns demonstrate the fact that feminisms are multiple and varied. While I would argue that we, in the West, do not live in patriarchal states, this does not mean that women have full equality with men.

Gender stereotypes and the pressure to conform are still present in the education system, the market, and in homes.

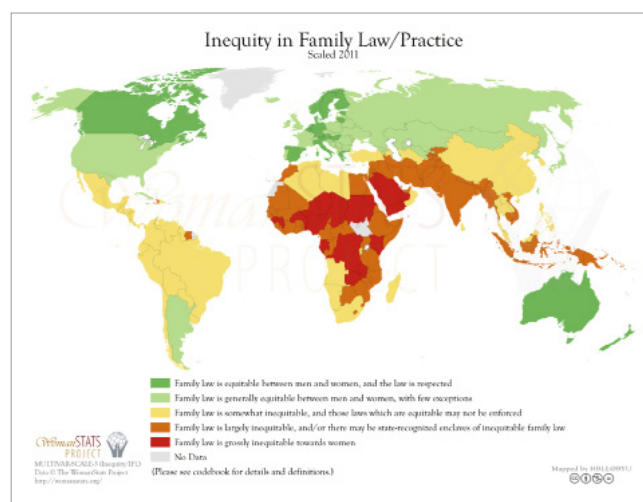
If the feminist project is still necessary, even in the West, it is particularly so in the developing world. Women's groups worldwide are struggling to achieve even the most basic rights for women, struggling to apply pressure to their governments to change laws, struggling to then change practices within their homes and communities. Many women lack the basic freedom of movement, they are prisoners in their homes unless given permission to leave by men and are viewed as male property. Afghanistan's prisons are overflowing with women who have been imprisoned because they dared to attempt to flee abusive husbands. They claim that they are better off in prison because once released, they could be killed. In criminal cases in Algeria, the testimony of a female witness is only worth half of a male witness. In Armenia the legal system should treat men and women equally, but women reporting domestic violence are asked what they did to deserve their beating, or are sent home because wife beating is a family matter.

I am one of a group of scholars participating in a global data project called WomanSTATS that is collecting and analyzing information (laws, data, and practices) concerning the situation of women. All of our information is triangulated from multiple sources, and these sources can vary greatly and final decisions require careful analysis of the datapoints. Let me share with you some of our findings.

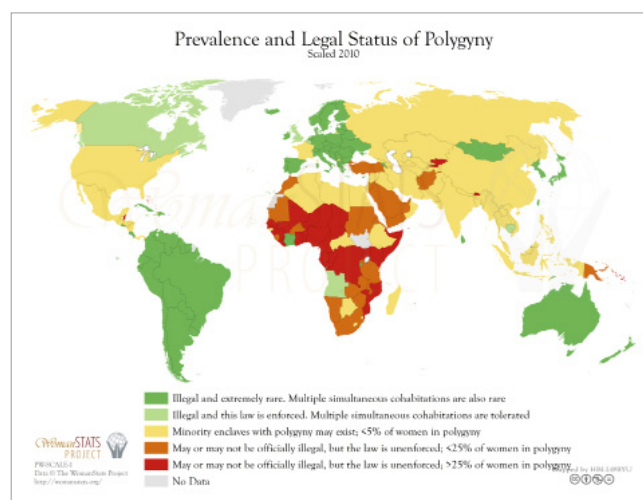
6 Slides: (scales of 0-4, with 4 being the worst practices and laws)

1. inequity in family law/practice (4: Legal age of marriage does not exist or allows girls younger than 12 to marry. Girls commonly (more than 25%) marry around the

age of 12 or even before puberty. Women are rarely asked for consent before marriage, and women are often forced to marry much older men in this way. Polygyny is legal and common (>25%). Women must overcome tremendous legal obstacles to sue for divorce, while men can seek divorce for many reasons. Women may be unaware of their right to give consent in marriage or to divorce their husbands, may not legally possess such rights, or may feel that the exercise of those rights would bring dire physical or social consequences. Women are not awarded custody or inheritance. Marital rape is not illegal. Abortions are illegal)—e.g. just under 1/3 of marriages in Albania are forced; We know we have 8,000 to 10,000 forced marriages in the UK (annually)”

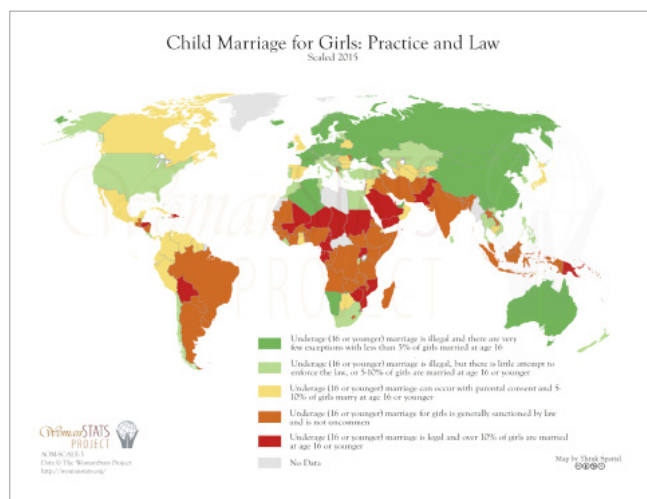


2. prevalence and legal status of polygyny (37% of marriages are polygynous in Sierra Leone; but it happens in the UK as well;



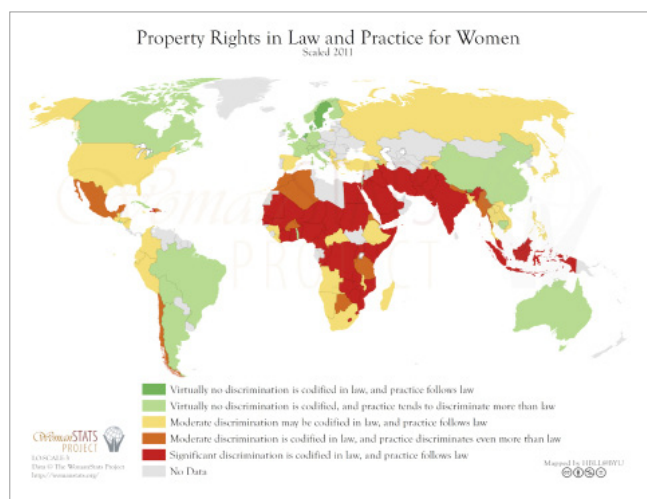
3. child marriage for girls: practice and law: **Niger has the highest overall prevalence of child marriage in the world** ... in Niger, about 30 percent of women aged 20

to 49 were married before age 15. 44 percent of women were married between the ages of 15 and 18 for a total of 77 percent of women married before age 18.



4. property rights in law and practice for women (Women are the primary food producers in many developing countries, producing between 60 and 80 percent of the food in Africa, and similar percentages in other parts of the developing world.)

Example from India: Ownership of a house, land, or both, reduced the risk of domestic violence for women: the odds of their experiencing physical violence was 20 times less if she owned a house and land, compared with 11 times less if she owned a house, or 8 times less if she owned land;



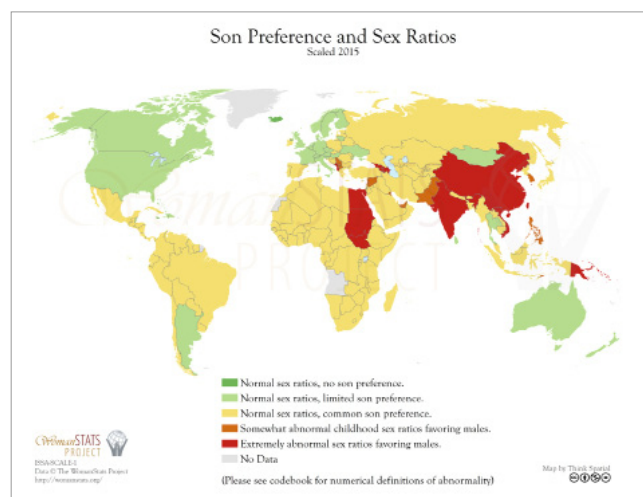
"Closing the gender gap in agriculture would generate significant gains for the agriculture sector and for society. If women had the same access to productive resources (animal power, fertilizers, labour, etc) as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20–30 percent. This could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5–4 percent, which could in turn reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12–17 percent" (FAO)

Country, 1995	0-4 Sex Ratio
China	112.6
China, Hong Kong	108.8
India	109.4
South Korea	113.4
Taiwan	109
Vanuatu	107.7

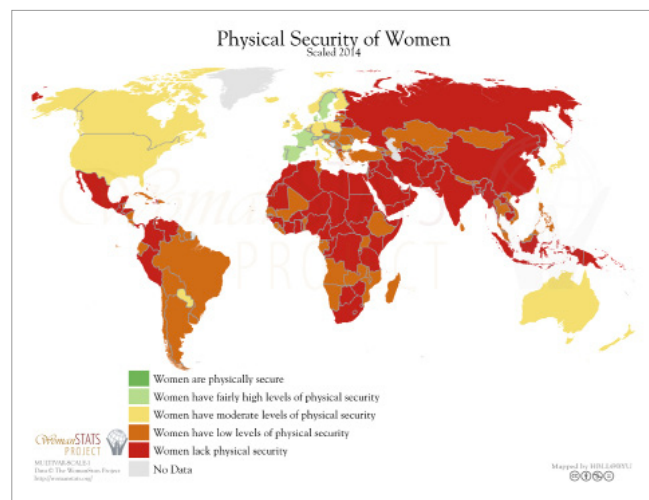
Country, 2015 (or latest available data year)	0-4 Sex Ratio
Albania	110.2
Armenia	114.0
Azerbaijan	115.0
China	119.1
China, Hong Kong	108.2
China, Macau SAR	107.7
Egypt	108.2
Fiji	107.4
Georgia	111.5
India	108.2
Kosovo	108.0
Kuwait	108.1
Lebanon	109.6
Montenegro	109.5
Philippines	107.1
Republic of South Sudan	112.2
Republic of Sudan	112.4
Taiwan	109.5
TFYR of Macedonia	108.1
Vanuatu	107.8
Vietnam	113.8

5. son preference and sex ratios

List of Countries with Abnormally High Juvenile Sex Ratios in 1995 and 2015 (from 5 states in 1995 to 19 states in 2015)



6. physical security of women (score of 4 – There are no or weak laws against **domestic violence, rape, and marital rape**, and these laws are not generally enforced. Honor killings and/or femicides may occur and are either ignored or generally accepted. (Examples of weak laws—need 4 male witnesses to prove rape, rape is only defined as sex with girls under 12—all other sex is by definition consensual, etc.)



Why tackle gender inequality?

For women themselves! But women's contributions make a difference. Through our experiences, we have insights that need to be counted. Let me give you one example that really highlighted the need to include women in development projects. I can recall a study of a development project in Mexico regarding the introduction of the use of a newly developed strain of maize that was resistant to more diseases and therefore could produce higher yields. Despite the fact that women are the primary users of the end product (the corn), they were not consulted in the months leading up to the planting of the crop, only the village men were consulted. The harvest was indeed bountiful, but when the women attempted to grind the maize to make cornmeal tortillas, they discovered that this particular strain would not grind with the right consistency and therefore was not fit for purpose.

As this example demonstrates, adopting a gender equity approach benefits more than just the women, it benefits

the family and community, in particular, empowering women leads to greater achievements in overall **child well-being, family welfare, development and economic growth**.

One of the key issues faced by women and men the world over is violence, whether violence in conflict-torn regions, or violence in the home. International relations scholars have shown that the two are inter-related. The level of violence exhibited by a state, whether in a civil or international conflict, is mirrored in the violence directed at women within the state. Peace and gender equality are thus united.

There are numerous states where the rights of women and girls are subordinated to the interests of men and to the state. Adopting a gendered lens enables us to see more than just the situation of women, but the possibilities for tolerance and governance more broadly, because as one anthropologist notes, "the degree to which men dominate women and control their sexuality is inextricably intertwined with the degree to which some men dominate others".

States in which women are oppressed through harmful laws and practices tend to undermine the possibility of a functional, capable state. The practices that are key in terms of women's subordination are those which affect marriage (child and cousin marriage in particular), family law, and property and inheritance laws. Empirical support demonstrates that states with high levels of gender inequality and violence against women are dysfunctional: they are more likely to be states 'of concern' in international relations (human rights violating), are more likely to start conflicts and to use greater force during conflicts.

Conclusion

Creating a more gender equitable world requires the mobilization of an international feminist network. This network relies on the support of feminists in developed democratic states to assist in applying pressure to states to change laws and practices that are harmful to women. We need, therefore, to add our feminist voices to those who believe that feminism has lost its meaning and reaffirm the need for feminist projects at home and globally. If some women feel that feminism is no longer necessary because they are free to enjoy equal rights and opportunities with men, wonderful! But there are many ways in which they can offer their support to women who are still struggling for those freedoms.