

Is Gender Inequality a Story of the Past?

In remembrance of the International Women's Day

Habtamu Kebede

"It is time to effect a revolution in female manners -time to restore to them their lost dignity - and make them, as a part of the human species, labour by reforming themselves to reform the world. It is time to separate unchangeable morals from local manners" Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.

Some believe that Mary Wollstonecraft's (the late English writer, philosopher and advocate of women's rights) theory about equality may have been revolutionary for the eighteenth century, and also speculate that most of what she wanted has now been achieved; therefore, they urge the theory to be regarded as little more than historical curiosity, nothing else. On the contrary, despite the plausible argument, gender inequality is still prevalent in most parts of the world. Yet, gender based discrimination and inequalities are not necessarily similar everywhere. In any case, Wollstonecraft's ideas are still valid and women across the globe continue to endure from adverse inequality. I for one contend in favor of Wollstonecraft's argument on gender inequality and defend her theory of discrimination against women in the contemporary, global political arena.

Wollstonecraft contested the general assumption that women are created to please men and male chauvinism in general. She argued that both men and women are created equal and gender inequality was not natural. In addition, she stated that if women were not allowed to use their potential freely half of the society will be confined in isolation and eventual ruin. She further advocated for radical equality and egalitarianism. As predicted by Wollstonecraft, gender

inequality persists to be a major obstacle and a stumbling block to the development of contemporary societies.

Wollstonecraft acknowledged that women has been conditioned to accept a wrong perception of themselves and was not interested in outside affairs. She also stated that women are distracted by dazzling riches from applying a rational reason to understand social affairs. In addition, Wollstonecraft indicated that men, in general, seem to use their reason to justify prejudice. Furthermore, she appealed for women to secure economic independence, acquire better education and become active citizens. Growing up, Wollstonecraft saw how her own mother used to be beaten and endure a loveless abusive marriage with her own father. Because of her own personal experiences, she was well aware of gender based abuse from early on.

Wollstonecraft's theory seems to be intended for middle class women. However, her appeals were universal and inclusive of men of all races and nationality as they are the presumed gate keepers of society and readers of her book. Yet, over two hundred years later from the introduction of Wollstonecraft theory, women are still suffering from gender inequality, and deprived of economic and political equality across the globe. The following contemporary examples will elaborate how Wollstonecraft ideas are still valid and feasible in the contemporary social hierarchy.

Under TPLF rule, Ethiopian women and girls are generally disadvantaged than men and boys. Ethiopian women are suffering from inequality in several areas that includes literacy, health, income disparity and basic human rights. Gender discrimination in Ethiopia is so rampant to the point where women are suffering from low status in society. Although the ruling regime in Ethiopia disingenuously continues in making a fabricated claim about the progress made to

narrow the gender gap, the reality on the ground disproves the regime's deceptive success stories. Women in Ethiopia are suffering from both gender and political repression, as a result, they are leaving the country in huge numbers. In many cases, they are also victims of sexual exploitation and gross human rights abuses in their host countries, predominantly the Middle East and the Gulf States.

Following the abductions of over two hundred and fifty school girls in Nigeria by the notorious terrorist group known as Boko Haram in April, 2014, the New York Times reported that people globally condemned the terror group and expressed their outrage over the brazen act. Political figures and celebrities demanded collective action and the safe return of the abducted girls. Many even raised their voice against the terror group and proposed military intervention against Boko Haram; the group claiming responsibility for the abductions.

Boko Haram claims that its struggle is to outlaw and ban Western education and to turn Nigeria into a Muslim state. As Taliban led Afghanistan regime had restricted and actively excludes women from getting an opportunity to attend school, Boko Haram also wants to create a state where women have far less opportunity to participate in social functions of their community. In addition, the terror group wants to limit women's role in only child rearing and being a housewife. Furthermore, under Boko Haram, and other Islamic fundamentalist elements, whose guiding governing principles are religious personal codes, women are suppressed and are not allowed to cultivate and use their natural talent in the social set up.

In Kenya, the issue of women is not any better than from that of Nigeria. The only difference is that there is no mass abduction of women in Kenya, which requires global society's intervention. Besides, in Kenya, it is legal for men to marry as many wives as they want with full

protection of Kenyan civil law. In April, 2014, the Kenyan president, Uhuru Kenyatta officially signed a bill which give a judicial decree for men to marry numerous women without consulting their other brides.

In my humble views, this legislation diminishes the dignities of women and down-scale their human value into commodities as wealthy and powerful older men are going to empower themselves to hoard wives. Furthermore, under these legislations, women's right will be taken away and their state of affair determine by the mercies of their patrons. In addition, it is because destitute and disadvantaged young men have to compete with wealthy and powerful older men over the brides, women will be exposed to the rages of jealousy and forced sexual encounters.

Even though gender inequality exists in most parts of the world, yet inequality between men and women are not the same everywhere. In Asia, gender inequality manifests itself in the forms of parents wanting a have a boy rather than a girl. With the availability of modern scientific mechanisms to determine the sex of the fetus, sex selective abortion has become a common practice. These sex selective abortions are widely practiced in East and South Asian countries such as China, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and India.

In many countries around the globe, women are also pressured to be self-conscious of their look and have become dissatisfied with their bodies. The pressure of having a beautiful face and attractive physique has motivated women of different age to undergo of cosmetic surgery and costly physical reconstruction. Cosmetic surgery is a hefty business where an army of plastic surgeons and other medical professionals make a fortune of predominantly women who want to construct their image for a hot look. The United States, China, and Brazil are among the biggest markets for this fast growing industry. According to JIN ZHAO's 2012 report, In 2010 alone the

plastic surgery in China amassed over forty seven billion dollars and the industry employed over twenty million people.

The United Nations General Assembly has adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Right in 1948. The declaration highlighted that each country to treat its women as well as its men in equal terms. However, many countries fall short of achieving that goal. The severities of the gender gap vary from nation to nation. For instance, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia provides extremely limited mobility of its female population. Women in Saudi Arabia are not allowed to drive a car or ride a bicycle on the public road. In addition, the strict Islamic Sharia Law prohibits women from leaving their home without men's permission. Saudi Arabia is the only nation that prohibits women from driving a motor vehicle. If this is not strange enough, women in Saudi Arabia also have to cover themselves by their veils when they are in public places. It is also important to know that many countries confine their female population by limiting their access to travel documents.

The United States of America is among the nations which stride to enhance women's empowerment. By a huge margin, women in the United States have a better opportunity to improve and cultivate their natural talent. However, the United States is not immune from gender inequality. This is because women who work full-time in the U.S. make an average 77 cents for every dollar men make. The former United States president, Barack Obama had to sign an executive order to equal pay for equal work in 2014. The lack of women in leadership position, proportion to that of the female's work force and the glass ceiling to promotion cannot be anything else other than an indication and a manifestation of gender inequality.

In countries, such as Chile and Lesotho, women are barred from owning land. All legal deeds must include the name of a male –a spouse or a parent. Should one of the men in the deed was to die, the women have no legal right to claim the land. She may have lived and worked all her life on the property, but all that will not grant her ownership. Many remain in abusive and loveless marriage so that they will not lose a place to live. Widows are left homeless because the deceased man family throws them out of their property they spend their entire life cultivating and harvesting for no pay.

In conclusion, even though many countries stride to enhance women's empowerment, and struggles to create a better opportunity to improve and cultivate their female population's natural rights, gender inequality still does exist in many parts of the world. In Nigeria, women are facing inhumane treatment and brutality by Boko Haram terrorist groups. Kenyan women's are exposed to mistreatment and violence as the Kenyan government gives a legal ground for men to marry as many wives as they want without consulting their existing spouses. In Asia sex, selective abortion to end the life of a female fetus is a common practice. In addition, Women are also pressured to be self-conscious and dissatisfied of their look and undergo to expensive cosmetic surgeries. Furthermore, in many countries, women, are forced to cover themselves in public places and their mobility is also unwillingly limited. Even in those countries where women's rights have been steadily improving, women are still not receiving equal pay for the same job done by their male counterpart. In Chile and Lesotho, women are barred from having property and are forced to live in abusive and loveless marriage. Gender inequality still exists in most parts of the world, yet inequality between men and women is not everywhere the same. In my views, Wollstonecraft's idea is still valid and women are still enduring an enormous amount of pressure and gender based inequality across the globe.

Cited Sources

1. *Http://prof.chicanas.com/readings/SenInequality.pdf*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. Print.
2. "More Than Skin Deep: Chinese Youth Increasingly Favor Plastic Surgery." *Things You Don't Know About China*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 May 2014.
3. "10 Examples of Gender Inequality Around the World: Discovery Channel." *Discovery Channel*. N.p., n.d. Web. 11 May 2014.
4. Kristof, Nicholas. "What's So Scary About Smart Girls?" *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 10 May 2014. Web. 12 May 2014.
5. "Kenya President Signs Polygamy Law." *BBC News*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 May 2014.
6. "Obama Signs Executive Order on Equal Pay for Women | Al Jazeera America." *Obama Signs Executive Order on Equal Pay for Women | Al Jazeera America*. N.p., n.d. Web. 12 May 2014.