

Feminism in the Socio-Cultural Life of Contemporary Society

¹ Zenfira Valiyeva

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Abstract. This article explores the evolving role of feminism in the socio-cultural landscape of the contemporary world. It analyzes the key directions of feminist discourse and its influence on cultural production, public institutions, and everyday social practices. The author contends that contemporary feminism is not a monolithic movement but a diverse, multilayered, and dynamic phenomenon that transcends the struggle for women's rights to engage with broader questions of social justice and human dignity. Central to this expanded agenda is the critique and redefinition of traditional gender norms, the pursuit of inclusive cultural representation, and the transformation of political, legal, and educational systems through an intersectional lens.

The article also addresses the internal and external challenges faced by feminism, including backlash from conservative forces and tensions within the movement itself regarding inclusivity, identity politics, and strategic priorities. It examines the debates among different feminist strands—liberal, radical, postcolonial, and ecofeminist—and reflects on their often divergent visions for change. At the same time, the piece underscores the resilience of feminist theory and practice, particularly its capacity for critical self-reflection, ethical engagement, and responsiveness to new social realities.

Ultimately, the article argues that feminism remains a vital and transformative force within modern society, not only as a mode of resistance and critique but as a generative framework for reimagining social relations, power structures, and collective futures. In doing so, feminism contributes to the humanization of public life and to the construction of more equitable, empathetic, and pluralistic forms of socio-cultural interaction.

Keywords: *Feminism, Gender Equality, Cultural Representation, Social Transformations, Contemporary Society*

Introduction

In recent decades, feminism has moved far beyond the confines of academic theory or grassroots activism to become a central and dynamic force in contemporary socio-cultural discourse. It has permeated nearly all aspects of public and private life, reshaping the ways in which we understand gender, identity, and social organization. From literature, film, and visual arts to social media, education, public policy, and workplace dynamics, feminist frameworks have been instrumental in challenging patriarchal norms and advocating for more inclusive, equitable systems (Butler, 1990; hooks, 2000). What was once viewed as a marginal or oppositional movement has now become a key

¹ Valiyeva, Z. Doctor of Sciences, Professor, Baku Slavic University. Email: zema-veliyeva@mail.ru. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-3906-8545>.

lens through which cultural and structural power is analyzed and contested. For instance, recent literary scholarship reflects how feminist perspectives can inform the interpretation of narrative and imagery (Ganbarova, 2024), highlighting the shifting cultural narratives in the arts.

Feminism's relevance today is reinforced by its responsiveness to emerging global challenges. In a world marked by accelerating technological change, environmental crises, shifting labor markets, and intensified geopolitical conflict, questions of gender, care, justice, and embodiment are becoming increasingly urgent. Feminist thought has provided critical tools for interrogating not only the status of women, but also the broader logics of exclusion, domination, and inequality embedded in systems of governance, economic production, and symbolic representation (Fraser, 2013; Ahmed, 2017). A central dimension of contemporary feminist discourse is its insistence on intersectionality—the recognition that gender cannot be analyzed in isolation from other axes of identity such as race, class, sexuality, ability, religion, and nationality (Crenshaw, 1991). This intersectional perspective allows for a more complex and inclusive account of social realities, revealing how multiple forms of oppression interact and compound one another. As a result, feminism has increasingly oriented itself toward coalitional, justice-based approaches that seek to transform not just gender relations but the foundational structures of society. At the same time, feminist theorists caution against one-size-fits-all solutions; they argue that claims of universality must be balanced with attention to cultural particularity (Sadigzadeh, 2024), urging the movement to appreciate diverse contexts and local knowledge.

Nevertheless, feminism remains a contested and evolving term. Its meanings differ significantly across cultural, political, and historical contexts. In some societies, feminism is seen as a progressive force driving democratization and cultural modernization. In others, it is portrayed as antagonistic to traditional values or national identity (Walby, 2011). This divergence has led to vibrant internal debates within feminism itself, with disagreements emerging around key issues such as inclusivity, sexuality, reproductive rights, secularism, and the role of the state. Generational shifts also play a role: younger activists often embrace digital activism and identity politics, while older feminists may prioritize structural change and legal reform.

Moreover, feminism must now contend with backlash on multiple fronts. The rise of authoritarian populism, religious conservatism, and neoliberal individualism has generated powerful counter-discourses aimed at undermining feminist gains. The increasing presence of anti-gender rhetoric in public debate—especially in online spaces and political discourse—testifies to the ongoing contestation of feminist ideals and the fragility of progress (McRobbie, 2009). At the same time, the digital age has offered new avenues for feminist expression and solidarity. Social media platforms, though often fraught with harassment and surveillance, have enabled the global dissemination of feminist narratives and activism. Campaigns such as #MeToo, *Ni Una Menos*, and #MyBodyMyChoice have demonstrated the power of transnational feminist mobilization in shaping public consciousness and policy.

This article therefore seeks to provide a nuanced, interdisciplinary exploration of feminism's evolving role in contemporary socio-cultural life. It examines how feminist ideas are reshaping cultural

production and transforming institutional practices, while also provoking both resistance and renewal within public discourse. Particular emphasis is placed on the tension between emancipatory aspirations and structural constraints, as well as the dialogical relationships between feminism and other ideological formations—including religious traditionalism, market liberalism, and cultural nationalism. Through critical analysis, this study aims to understand feminism not merely as a movement for gender equality, but as a transformative cultural and intellectual project with deep implications for the future of democracy, social justice, and human dignity.

1. Internal Tensions and the Evolving Nature of Feminism

Within contemporary feminism, profound internal tensions persist, reflecting the complexity of the movement as it engages with an increasingly diverse and globalized world. One of the central concerns is inclusivity—both as a theoretical principle and as a practical reality. A pressing and often contentious question within feminist discourse is: **whose voices are being centered, and whose remain marginalized or excluded?** Feminism, particularly in its mainstream academic and media forms, has historically been shaped by the experiences and perspectives of white, middle-class, educated women from the Global North. This dominant narrative has frequently overlooked or inadequately represented the lived experiences of women of color, working-class women, indigenous women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and those from the Global South (Crenshaw, 1991; Mohanty, 1988; hooks, 1992).

This critique gave rise to the concept of intersectionality, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, which remains a foundational—yet sometimes under-implemented—framework in feminist thought. Intersectionality emphasizes the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, gender, and sexuality, which produce overlapping systems of discrimination and privilege. A feminist politics that fails to account for these intersecting identities risks reproducing the very exclusions it seeks to dismantle. For instance, the concerns of migrant domestic workers, Black mothers, Muslim women, or queer and trans individuals often fall outside the scope of dominant feminist agendas, revealing blind spots in a one-dimensional approach to gender justice (Lugones, 2007; Puar, 2007). The ongoing struggle to include these voices reflects not a failure of feminism per se, but a challenge and an opportunity for its ethical and political maturation.

Furthermore, tensions arise from divergent strategies and priorities within feminist activism and theory. Some currents of feminism—particularly those influenced by radical, socialist, or Marxist traditions—advocate for structural and systemic change aimed at dismantling patriarchal capitalism entirely. Others, more liberal or reformist in orientation, focus on achieving gender equality through incremental legal reforms, policy changes, and institutional engagement (Fraser, 2013). These differing approaches can result in friction, especially when radical voices perceive reformist strategies as complicit with oppressive systems, while reformists may view radical critiques as impractical or divisive. Such debates have been prominent around issues like sex work, pornography, trans rights, and the role of religion in women’s lives, which in recent decades have produced deep rifts among feminists.

Despite these conflicts, internal criticism should not be construed as inherently destructive. On the contrary, it plays a generative role in refining feminist theory and practice. Through debate, dissent, and disagreement, feminism remains intellectually alive and ethically responsive to new challenges. As bell hooks (1984) emphasizes, the act of critique is itself an act of care—it signals an investment in the future of the movement. By engaging in honest internal dialogue, feminism fosters a culture of accountability that resists dogmatism and embraces change.

In this way, feminism is not a monolith but a living, evolving constellation of ideas, practices, and solidarities. It traverses a wide spectrum—from grassroots activism and community-based organizing to academic theorizing and cultural production (Ganbarova, 2024). It is simultaneously local and global, personal and political, emotional and rational. This multiplicity is its strength. It allows feminist movements to adapt to diverse contexts, addressing issues as varied as gender-based violence in war zones, reproductive justice in conservative societies, digital harassment in online spaces, and gendered labor in global supply chains.

Today, feminism is increasingly called upon to address not only gender inequality, but also the wider matrix of injustice that shapes contemporary life. Feminist movements have intersected with ecological activism, anti-racist movements, disability justice initiatives, and anti-colonial struggles, contributing to a broader politics of care, repair, and interconnectedness. This expansion has redefined what it means to be a feminist: it is no longer solely about advocating for the rights of women, but about reimagining the very conditions under which human life flourishes or suffers.

Feminism’s capacity to imagine alternative futures is among its most powerful attributes. It refuses to accept the status quo and insists that *another world is possible*—one where hierarchies of power are dismantled, where care and empathy are central values in governance, and where every individual, regardless of identity, is afforded dignity and voice. Feminism, in this sense, is not merely reactive but visionary. It seeks not only justice for women but transformation for all.

2. External Challenges and Feminist Resilience

Even as feminism broadens its scope, it must continually confront real-world barriers to its advancement: political backlash, cultural resistance, and strategic co-optation. In many parts of the world, feminist activism is met with hostility, repression, and even violence. Authoritarian regimes, religious fundamentalists, and right-wing populists have increasingly targeted feminist leaders and intellectuals, portraying feminism as a threat to national identity, religious morality, or social cohesion. In some contexts, even the word “feminism” itself has become stigmatized, forcing activists to navigate linguistic and cultural taboos in pursuit of their goals.

Meanwhile, neoliberal ideologies have co-opted certain feminist themes, transforming them into tools of individual empowerment divorced from broader social critique. Terms like “girlboss feminism” or the ethos of *leaning in* (popularized by corporate narratives) reflect a depoliticized, market-friendly version of the movement, one that aligns with corporate interests rather than challenging systemic oppression. As scholars note, this neoliberal feminism focuses on personal success and consumer choice, while sidelining questions of class, race, and structural inequality (Rottenberg, 2018). Such

forms of feminism risk diluting the radical edge of the movement and obscuring the material realities of most women's lives.

Despite these challenges, feminism persists—and indeed continues to evolve. Its resilience lies in its openness to critique, its capacity for self-renewal, and its grounding in lived experience. Far from being static, feminism is porous, experimental, and perpetually in the making. It offers not just a critique of existing norms, but an ethical and imaginative framework for living *otherwise*. It envisions a world not merely free from sexism, but free from all forms of domination and exclusion. By remaining responsive to new realities and embracing a plurality of voices, the feminist movement adapts and finds strength even in the face of opposition.

Conclusion

In sum, feminism today functions on multiple levels: as political resistance, cultural critique, ethical stance, and imaginative force. Its internal tensions should not be seen as signs of weakness, but as evidence of its democratic and pluralistic nature. Far from a closed doctrine, feminism is an ongoing conversation—one that continues to redefine itself in response to the needs, hopes, and realities of diverse communities around the globe. This pluralism in feminist thought resonates with the broader academic context, where multiple forms of analysis—from formal syntax in linguistics (Qasimova, 2025) to literary and cultural critique (Ganbarova, 2024)—contribute to a richer understanding of social life. Ultimately, as long as inequality persists, and as long as there are voices still waiting to be heard, feminism will remain not only relevant but indispensable. Its vision of human dignity and justice for all not only challenges existing power structures but also contributes to the humanization of public life. This ethos of empathy and inclusivity is in harmony with other humanistic inquiries into the moral and spiritual dimensions of society (Ganbarova & Abbasov, 2025), underscoring feminism's role as a generative framework for imagining more equitable and compassionate futures.

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