Review Article

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15829355

From Woolf to Nelson: A Glance at the Feminist Movement

https://orcid.org/0009-0007-5643-6734 Zülal Erdoğan[1]

https://orcid.org/0009-0002-6088-8411 Rabia Cankurtaran[2]

https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1026-7182 Semanur Şengül[3]

[1] MA Student, Department of Social Work, Sakarya University, Türkiye
[2] BA Student, Department of Translation and Interpreting, Sakarya University, Türkiye
[3] BA Student, Department of Translation and Interpreting, Sakarya University, Türkiye

abstract

The notion of feminism, in its capacity as both a movement and a conceptual framework, has demonstrated a consistent historical presence. Its fundamental tenet is the advocacy for gender equality, with the objective of achieving parity of rights for the sexes. The intellectual and philosophical currents of the Age of Enlightenment significantly shaped the historical trajectory of feminism in the 18th century. Subsequently, the feminist movement has consistently adapted its form and focus in response to the prevailing socio-political contexts of each era, thereby maintaining its enduring relevance. This movement, which questions the place and roles of women in society, initially emerged in the political and social spheres. Its influence was not limited to social and political domains. Feminism has been strongly reflected in various fields, such as literature, art, cinema, science, and business. In this study, the evolution of the feminist movement will be analysed through the works of prominent literary figures, ranging from Virginia Woolf to Alondra Nelson.

Keywords: feminism, sex discrimination, social inclusion, social justice, women's rights

Correspondence: Zülal Erdoğan, e-mail: erdgnzulal@gmail.com

Received: 23.12.2024 | Revision: 27.02.2025 | Accepted: 15.06.2025

1. INTRODUCTION

As a theory, a movement and an approach (Hooks 2000, 9) feminism has not followed a uniform line of development throughout history, but has been shaped by various phases and different views**.** It is clear that the ideas of the Age of Enlightenment and the socio-political events and phenomena of each subsequent period influenced and developed the feminist movement**.** Feminism has undergone several transformative phases throughout its historical struggle, commonly referred to as "waves" within the framework of feminist theory. Rather than unfolding in isolation, each wave has built upon the accomplishments and insights of the previous ones, contributing to a cumulative progression in both theory and practice.

The focus of the First Wave of Feminism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was the achievement of women's legal and political rights. Feminists aimed to ensure that women are recognized as having equal natural rights with men (Donovan 2006, 17). The principles put forward by Isaac Newton, one of the most influential thinkers of the Age of Enlightenment, had profound repercussions not only in mathematics but also in politics. Consequently, Enlightement thinkers argued that individuals have absolute (a priori) natural rights. This understanding paved the way for the emergence of the Doctrine of Natural Rights (Donovan 2006, 18). During this period, feminists drawing upon the doctrine of natural rights, objected to the exclusion of women from full citizenship rights (Donovan 2006, 29). The idea they put forward was that the perspective directed towards women should be about having full societal and political participation.

In line with this doctrine, the core tenet of this early feminist thought was that women possessed the same fundamental natural rights as men, necessitating the alignment of legal frameworks with this principle. Consequently, the First Wave of Feminism largely focused on securing these foundational rights that had previously been denied. This period saw women achieve crucial advancements within the political sphere, most notably the right to vote, which served as a fundamental means for their voices to be formally acknowledged and represented. The Second Wave of Feminism covers the period between 1960 and 1980. The prominent issues that this wave focuses on are gender equality, workplace rights, reproductive rights, sexual freedom. This movement defended women's social, economic and cultural rights. Unlike the first wave, it was more inclusive and emphasized gender roles. In this way, it breathed new life into the resistance for gender equality and contributed to the struggle. Third wave feminism is a movement that emerged in the 1990s and has continued until today. The focus of this wave is on issues such as intersectional feminism, gender identity and sexual orientation. The aim of the movement is to be more inclusive, considering the different groups and their identities, and to do so in a cumulative way (Schuster 2017, 248). The fourth wave of feminism emerged in the 2010s, during the rise of the internet and technology. This wave has focused on anti-sexual harassment, digital activism, body positivity and global women's rights. Accompanied by technological means, macro-level awareness has been realized (Phillips and Cree 2014, 939). This phase of the feminist movement succeeded in reaching out to the masses, breaking down the criticisms of feminism's lack of inclusiveness in the past. Thus, the struggle for gender equality gained a new dynamism.

Feminism has manifested itself across various societal spheres throughout its different phases. It has been shaped, both adversely and beneficially, by the challenges encountered historically. While this evolution has fostered a heightened awareness of diverse experiences, the movement has consistently adapted and fortified its struggle at each stage, a process that continues to this day. It is possible to see its influence in various fields such as literature, art, cinema, science and the business world. Within this context, this study attempts to understand how key figures from Virginia Woolf to Alondra Nelson in feminist movements articulated their pursuit of equality from the micro level to the macro level.

2. WAVES OF FEMINISM

2.1. The First Wave

In the historical conjuncture, women have been dominated by the masculine hegemony and exploited in various ways. Since Ancient Greece, various analogies have been established between women and nature. These associations have devalued women and nature, made them vulnerable to exploitation and negatively affected both sides. The reign of patriarchy is not a new phenomenon; its roots go back to the Pythagoreans.

Looking at the history of Western Philosophy, a table called the Pythagoras Table of Opposites on gender draws attention. When gender-based evaluations in that table are analyzed, it is seen that the distinctions are portrayed by superior features of the masculine side. That these distinctions carry gendered roles and characteristics is undoubtedly understood from the title of the table opposites (Lloyd 1984, 3).

It is seen that the Age of Enlightenment was influenced by positivism. This influence was also reflected in feminist movements and gave rise to various theories and approaches in the following periods. If the First Wave of Feminism is considered as a beginning, this beginning undoubtedly occurred in the light of values such as equality, freedom and human rights that emerged as phenomena of the French Revolution. Sir Isaac Newton, one of the most important figures of the Age of Enlightenment, laid out the basic paradigms that shaped the ideological structure of the Age of Enlightenment in his Principia Mathematica. This understanding is based on the view that the universe is regulated solely by simple, mathematical laws. Newton's proposal not only influenced the field of mathematics, but also had profound repercussions in political science. The notion that individuals are inherently entitled to absolute (a priori) rights from birth laid the groundwork for the "framework of natural rights". This framework posits that every human being is born with fundamental claims—most notably, the rights to life, liberty, and happiness (Donovan 2006, 18).

The focus of the first wave process in question includes more fundamental and natural rights compared to other waves. During the era of this wave, women fought for their political rights due to the conditions of the time they lived in. The foundations of this process were laid in the 18th century when women began to demand their rights (Ataman 2022, 286). Throughout the 19th century, social roles were redefined and women's rights were discussed more. These developments paved the way for the emergence of the Suffragette Movement in the United Kingdom at the beginning of the 20th century (Ataman 2022, 287).

The Suffragette Movement represented a struggle for women to have the right to vote. In this process, many women expressed their demands for rights through written texts, while others took direct action to improve their living conditions. The Suffragettes, who were among these determined and resilient women, were not content with merely expressing their thoughts in writing, but preferred to take more active and concrete steps to achieve their rights (Ataman 2022, 286). Acting with a radical understanding, the Suffragettes did not content themselves with mere rhetoric, but took concrete actions and resorted to strategies that exceeded legal boundaries (Ataman 2022, 291). They engaged in various acts of civil disobedience such as damaging public and private property, clandestine acts of arson, destruction of mailboxes and large-scale window breaking (Ataman 2022, 291-292). Detained suffragettes went on hunger strikes while in prison and were subjected to harsh treatments, including force-feeding. In 1913, Emily Davison—one of the movement’s most prominent figures—was killed after throwing herself under the king’s horse at the Epsom Derby, an event that marked a turning point in the global fight for women's rights (Ataman 2022, 294). The Suffragette Movement illuminated the path for women's rights activism worldwide and became a foundational pillar of modern feminist movements.

By primarily fighting for political rights, women have truly shaken the privileged position of the patriarchal policy makers who govern society. Political rights were not only important for women's voice, but they also provided women the ability to assert their existence and rightful place. In this way, women stepped into areas where they were influenced but not influential.

Virginia Woolf is one of the most important and prominent writers of English literature. Woolf created striking works with the revolutionary techniques she used. Because of her highly innovative and progressive views, Woolf is regarded as one of the pioneers of feminist criticism. Although her ideas are often seen as foundational to or more resonant with the Second Wave of Feminism, Virginia Woolf's early work is chronologically linked to the First Wave due to her contemporaneous engagement with feminist thought and social critique. Virginia Woolf advocated for women's empowered presence and their unrestricted ability to articulate their perspectives through writing.

The events that led Woolf to deal with the subject of women and fiction in her books were the lectures she gave at Cambridge University and several colleges. It could be said that the book she wrote later *A Room of One's Own* was born out of these conferences, which were profoundly shaped by her observations of gender dynamics, including the clear distribution of roles in her own childhood home. In her household, while her father handled financial and intellectual affairs, her mother meticulously cared for the needs of her husband and eight children (Woolf 2010, 854).

Woolf also had an indirect relationship with a group called the Cambridge Apostles, in which men held intellectual consultations. This group played an important role in laying the foundations of the Bloomsbury group, of which Virginia Woolf was a member and was founded in the early 20th century. Some of the members of the Cambridge Apostles group took their intellectual brainstorming to the Bloomsbury (Reed 1992, 38).
The Cambridge Apostles group appears to have consisted solely of men, while the Bloomsbury group has a wider range of members, both male and female. The Bloomsbury group not only held discussions in the fields of art, literature and philosophy, but also achieved both individual and group successes on social issues (Reed 1992, 38).
This group created a free discussion platform while discussing gender equality, in this way it became a source of inspiration for future generations. Traces of a collective struggle can be seen in the works of Virginia Woolf, who stands out as the realistic voice of that group. Woolf allegorically described the suppressed talents of women throughout history in her book A Room of One's Own by using metaphors.

Woolf employs several allegorical metaphors to communicate her feminist vision. These include the notion of equal opportunity symbolized by "Shakespeare's sister," the hope for solidarity among women as seen in the story of Chloe and Olivia, and the rejection of binary gender roles in favor of emotional and intellectual balance in her concept of androgyny. Through these metaphors, Woolf offers a transformative perspective that resembles the reflective techniques used in cognitive behavioral therapy, inviting readers to engage critically with their own beliefs. With A Room of One's Own, she not only critiques social structures but also initiates a cultural dialogue, leaving behind an enduring intellectual legacy that continues to influence generations.

Virginia Woolf's well-known statement: "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" offers more than a literary reflection (Woolf 1929, 4). It identifies the material conditions that shape, and often limit, women's ability to participate in intellectual life.

A parallel can be drawn with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, in which the pursuit of self-actualization is contingent upon the satisfaction of more basic requirements (Maslow 1970, 46). In Woolf's world, lacking money and space meant that creative freedom was out of reach. What makes her argument even more compelling today is how it fits with Amartya Sen's idea of capability.

Although Sen's capability theory emerged much later, its core ideas resonate with Woolf's emphasis on structural conditions for self-realization. Sen defines capability as "the set of valuable functionings a person has effective access to, representing the effective freedom to choose between different functioning combinations that one has reason to value" (Sen 2000, 75) .

For Woolf, then, the problem was not whether women were "allowed" to write. It was whether the conditions necessary for writing—privacy, time, money—were actually available. The absence of such conditions was not coincidental; rather, it reflected a broader pattern of exclusion rooted in patriarchal social structures. *A Room of One's Own*, in this sense, represented more than a physical location; it stood as a symbol of intellectual sovereignty and institutional legitimacy. That difference, between permission and possibility, remains just as urgent today as it was in her time. "Let me imagine, since facts are so hard to come by, what would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted sister, called Judith... She died young-alas, she never wrote a word." (Woolf 1929, 33). In this passage, Woolf, with her impressive and powerful narration, reveals that social constraints systematically inhibit women's creativity. Looking at the sub-layers of the surface narrative, it can be seen that these narrative questions the suppressed voices of women. "Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size." (Woolf 1929, 25-26). With this narrative, Woolf expresses that men's need for women's presence is motivated by self-interest. This reveals that the system is in the hands of patriarchal domination and its functioning is based on a relationship of self-interest. It is seen that the relationship of interest in question is just like capitalism. This situation led to the sprouting of the concept of ecofeminism in the following process and enriched the struggle of feminism. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* is one of the early classics of feminist thought and it laid the foundation for other waves of feminism to gain momentum.

2.2. The Second Wave

The Second Wave of the Feminist Movement is a women's rights movement that was influential in the 1960s in Western countries, particularly in the United States, and continued until the late 1970s. It is widely accepted that the initial step of this movement was initiated by Simone de Beauvoir's seminal work, *The Second Sex*, published in France in 1949 and in the United States in 1953. However, *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan, published in 1963 in the United States, was a prominent early influence on the Second Wave.

The motto of the Second Wave Feminist Movement was "the private is political" or "personal is political". Guided by the slogan "the private is political", the Second Wave sought to rectify the omissions of its predecessor. This involved foregrounding issues like the impact of perceived biological differences on women's societal roles, confronting sexual violence, and advocating for reproductive and sexual autonomy.

Carol Hanisch's essay, "The Personal is Political" written in 1969, challenges the idea that issues experienced by women in everyday life are merely private or individual. Through what she termed the "Pro-Woman Line", Hanisch argued that such struggles—often labeled emotional instability or personal inadequacy—are in fact manifestations of structural oppression (Hanisch 1970, 77). By highlighting how topics like marriage, motherhood, sexuality, and physical appearance are deeply shaped by patriarchal norms, Hanisch redefined these so-called personal experiences as inherently political. This conceptual framework laid the groundwork for feminist consciousness-raising groups, which sought to generate political insight from shared personal realities.

A powerful early expression of this framework emerged during the 1968 protest against the Miss America Beauty Pageant. Feminists, including Hanisch, used the event to call attention to the objectification of women's bodies and the ideological power of beauty standards. With slogans such as "Miss America is a big boob," the protest sought to reveal how aesthetic expectations, far from being neutral or voluntary, were saturated with political meaning (Hanisch 1970, 76-78). As Hanisch noted, the pressure women feel to be beautiful is not a matter of personal choice, but a demand imposed by patriarchal systems (Hanisch 1970, 78).

The real beginning of this change was the fact that although women supported the labor force during World War II, after the war they were brought back to the role of housewives and tried to be put into the mold of the ideal woman who only took care of housework and children (Beauvoir, Le Deuxime Sexe 1949, 425-466).

It can be said that Beauvoire emphasizing in this passage that being a woman at that time was a perception imposed on women socially and culturally. Another problem of women in this period was the inadequacy of the rights granted in the legal sense. Legal regulations such as the Equal Pay Act in 1963 for women to demand equal pay and the Civil Rights Act in 1964 for women to obtain equal rights in every sense in business life emerged in the USA, in order to solve these problems. In Europe, the effect of this situation was observed as women having more say in areas such as education, labor force and marriage (Beauvoir, Le Deuxime Sexe 1949, 608).

Feminist politics is the struggle to end patriarchy, to end the social, political, and economic systems that support male supremacy. The second wave of feminism was based on criticizing gender inequality in society and the responsibilities placed on women in this society. Feminists of this period argued that being biologically female was not a limit to participate in business life and that they were independent individuals.

During this period, the female body was one of the most important issues of feminism. Issues such as contraception, women's health, sexual freedom and abortion were the main issues of feminist struggle in this period. The widespread use of birth control pills in the late 1960s was a huge development for feminists at the time. Compared to the first wave, the second wave allowed women to express their ideas and express themselves in the fields of cinema, art and literature.

Betty Friedan, one of the pioneers of this wave, described the dissatisfaction that women experienced internally in the male-dominated system as the problem that cannot be named. This problem was dedicated to women who could not experience a sense of fulfillment despite obeying the norms imposed by society (Friedan 1963, 15).

The second wave marked the beginning of a new era of women's struggles not only in legal and family life, but also in sexuality (Rubin 1975, 276-309). Following all these problems, the second wave led to the diversification of feminism. The diversity of women in social and cultural life has been divided into different branches, focusing on deficiencies in different fields and producing solutions to them. This diversification enabled feminist thought to spread more rapidly internationally. As a result, women became more conscious about defending their rights and accelerated the feminist movement. For example, the second wave of social feminism argues that the oppression of women is not only related to gender but also to class structure. This type of feminism defines women's domestic work as exploitation by a capitalist economy. According to this idea, women's emancipation requires the overthrow not only of the male-dominated society but also of capitalism. As a result, social feminism aims to liberate women not only from economic freedom but also from the constraints of class differences. Another type of feminism is radical feminism (Daly 1968, 153).

This is because patriarchy affects people deeply, both socially and culturally, and these effects cannot be overthrown by superficial reforms. Within this diversity, one of the most prominent types is "African-American Feminism" or "Black Feminism". Compared to other forms, this perspective focuses not only on gender and class distinctions, but also on racial and ethnic identity. It deals specifically with the double-layered discrimination that black women are subjected to because of their gender and race. This discrimination is on a different level than the inequality white women face. Bell Hooks, one of the key figures of this movement, writes in her book:

> Oppression means that you are not free to fully experience the meaning of your life, to live the life you want to live. And it's not just a question of freedom from white male oppression, it's a question of freedom from all forms of oppression (1981, 117).

Another movement is Lesbian Feminism, which is still controversial today. This movement posits that women's emancipation is possible not only through gender equality but also through freedom of sexual orientation or freedom from the institution of compulsory heterosexuality.

While the terms "lesbians who are feminists" and "Lesbian Feminism" might appear conceptually similar, it is crucial to differentiate between them. "Lesbians who are feminists" refers to individuals who identify as both lesbian and feminist, embracing feminist principles within their lived experiences and political activism. In contrast, "lesbian feminism" denotes a distinct theoretical framework and political movement that emerged within the Second Wave. A central idea of lesbian feminism is the critique of compulsory heterosexuality and its role in perpetuating patriarchal systems. It advocates for women-identified women and often proposes female separatism as a strategy to create women-centered spaces and foster solidarity among women, thereby disengaging from male-dominated structures.

From this perspective, engagement in heterosexual relationships, coupled with traditional domestic labor and child-rearing within patriarchal frameworks, is often viewed as reinforcing patriarchal submission. For this reason, some prominent lesbian feminist theorists posited that challenging heterosexual norms, even for bisexual women, could be a necessary political act towards collective liberation (Rich 1980, 14). For lesbian feminists, being with men, doing housework, raising children, etc. is submission to patriarchy. For this reason, challenging heterosexual norms, even for bisexual women, could be a necessary political act towards collective liberation (Rich 1980, 14).

Another important title of Second Wave Feminism is Postcolonial Feminism. It criticizes Western-centered feminist movements from a new perspective. Postcolonial feminists aim to offer a more inclusive and equal understanding of third world women who have been colonized and discriminated against by the West (Spivak 1988, 90). This movement, which examines and presents us with elements based on colonialism and related class differences other than race and sexual orientation, has brought a new perspective to the feminist struggle. All the movements mentioned here are the building blocks of feminism we advocate today. The second wave of feminism not only defended women's rights but also created an intellectual transformation that questioned social structures and power relations, a transformation that still inspires the struggle for women's emancipation and equality (Beauvoir 1953, 641)

As the Second Wave of Feminism gained momentum, feminist social work developed as another significant branch within its diverse movements. Feminism and social work intersect through their shared commitment to social justice and the empowerment of disadvantaged populations. As a rights-based profession, social work provides an institutional framework for addressing the very inequalities that feminism seeks to challenge. Feminist social work, which emerged from

grassroots activism led by women working with women in their communities, incorporates a critical perspective on power, gender, and systemic oppression (Dominelli and McLeod 1989, quoted in Dominelli 2002, 6).

Feminist social work benefits from holistic frameworks that acknowledge the multiple layers of influence on women's lives. By addressing issues not only at the individual level but also across broader systemic and cultural contexts, it aligns with feminist values of empowerment and justice. The integration of such approaches into social work practice strengthens its capacity to respond meaningfully to gender-based inequality.

Feminist struggle is not only a critique of structural inequality but also a vision for a more just and inclusive world built through solidarity. This solidarity must transcend identity groups and evolve into a broader social commitment—one that challenges gender norms in language, media, education, and institutional practices. Feminist social work exemplifies how rights-based professions can carry feminist ideals into everyday life.

2.3. The Third Wave

Thanks to the feminist movements in the First and Second Waves, women gained rights such as voting, working in male fields and began to gain more representation in society. However, feminists who perceived the persistence of old repressive attitudes towards women, and deemed earlier feminist movements insufficient for achieving true equality, developed new ideas that ultimately triggered the Third Wave. The difference between third wave feminists and first-second wave feminists is that they include differences such as race, religion and identity in the concept of equality. "Third-wave feminism 'respects not only differences between women based on race, ethnicity, religion, and economic standing but also makes allowance for different identities within a single person'" (Snyder 2008, 180).

Furthermore, third wave feminists do not completely reject the ideas of other-wave feminists as do first and second wave feminists. While supporting women's struggle to gain individual rights and representation in society, they redefined feminism by expanding its conceptual boundaries rather than rejecting earlier frameworks.

Third wave feminists aimed to break the perception that feminists had to remain unmarried or try not to look feminine in order to go against tradition, and to show that feminism is an idea that allows women to make free choices. They claimed that feminism had no right to judge women's appearance, decisions or actions. Setting criteria to define women's lifestyles was seen by third wave feminists as incompatible with feminist perspective. "In some respects, feminism can be viewed precisely as the conscious struggle with the 'demands of femininity'. For third-wavers, feminism requires not a particular set of choices, but rather acting with a 'feminist consciousness', defined as 'knowledge of what one is doing and why one is doing'." (Snyder-Hall 2010, 256).

One of the main focuses of the Third Wave was that women did not receive equal pay as men while working to gain their economic freedom. Since men were seen as the sole source of income for the family by society, employers paid men more than women for the same job. Receiving lower wages despite putting in the same physical and mental effort bothered women and even caused them to fall into financial difficulties when they had to struggle alone. Moreover, working women still had responsibilities at home. It was their duty to come home from work, do housework, look after their children and keep the house in order.

Third wavers have developed an inclusive approach to equality and challenged sexism by addressing the challenges faced by both women and men from a non-judgmental feminist perspective.

Other issues that the third wave examined and brought to the agenda of feminism were diversity, identity, sexuality, race and class differences, apart from gender equality and equal rights.

In 1990, American feminist philosopher Judith Butler wrote her book, *Gender Trouble*, on the study about issues of gender, feminism and identity. While writing, the author observed the people on the east coast of America, where she lived, and was influenced by their lives, cultural environment and gender-based discrimination they were exposed to and reflected these observations in her book. Butler's book became more popular than even she could have predicted at the time it was published. *Gender Trouble* created a tremendous impression in France and Germany and later in other countries, while giving a rise to new discussions on gender. It became one of the important books about feminism studies that triggered third wave feminism and shaped the ideas of the Fourth Wave.

Butler basically deals with affairs such as the distinction between sex and gender, woman as the subject of feminism, controversial identities, the relationship between language-gender-politics, body politics and theories of the psychoanalysts. Gender is discussed as an abstract and rather mentally perceivable concept named by society. According to Butler, the concept of gender did not arise from biological and cultural backgrounds. She also reveals that there is no difference between gender and sex. “If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called ‘sex’ is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all” (Butler 1990, 10).Butler puts forward that the body of a human is in a constant state of construction and is nameless before society names it. She deals with the fact that gender is an act and that individuals perform it rather than displaying their own reality.

Butler criticizes feminism and accuses of making a mistake in trying to make it seem women a distinct, nonhistorical group with common characteristics. “If one ‘is’ a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered ‘person’ transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities” (Butler 1990, 6).

Furthermore, she criticizes feminist theory in her book. Butler strongly opposes the discourse in the feminist theory about the representation of women in politics matters. Because political power recreates the individual and puts her in a mold. Representation does not provide legitimacy and liberation for women.

Additionally, generalizing that feminism is only about women's problems or that all women experience the same problems is a shortcoming of feminist theory. Moreover, the term woman is not fully inclusive of the individual, it is an understatement. Labeling women by gender overshadows their other personality traits.

> Butler’s point was not that feminism should eschew such policies as reproductive choice, gender equity in pay and hiring, or parental leave. She observed only that to advocate them in the name of “women” would inevitably generate “multiple refusals to accept the category” by women who did not recognize their interests in such policies and by feminists who did not consider themselves oppressed as “women.” (Disch 1999, 546).

Biased discourses in the theories put forward by famous psychoanalytic philosophers and feminist theorists are also the target of Butler’s criticism. She questions whether the concept of masquerade

and femininity as expressed by Irigaray are the same, and the idea that femininity is the role women play not their general characteristic.

It has often been observed that transformation begins with language—a premise that appears to be deeply embedded in Cixous's work. Rather than treating literature as a neutral ground, she exposed it as a space already saturated with masculine norms. Through her concept of *écriture féminine*, she didn't just advocate for women to write—she invited them to reclaim the very act of writing as resistance.

This was not merely a theoretical contribution; it functioned as a political intervention. Cixous saw that changing language meant changing what is sayable, what is imaginable. That's why her work still resonates: because the revolution she called for starts not only on the page, but in the voice.

> Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement. (Cixous, Cohen and Cohen 1976, 875).

This passage illustrates how, according to Cixous, writing becomes the means through which women can challenge historically embedded discourses and reinsert themselves into symbolic and literary structures from which they have long been excluded.

Donna Haraway is an American scholar in the history of consciousness and feminist studies. Haraway studied ecofeminism, which intersects the women's movement with the environmental movement around discussions of equality and exploitation, and cyberfeminism, which argues that bodily boundaries are disappearing thanks to technology.

In 1985, Haraway published the essay Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the 1980s later updated to A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century. In this article, she used cyborg metaphor to argue that the fundamental contradictions in feminist theory and identity should be combined like the combination of two different structures such as machine and organism. "The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century. This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion" (Haraway, 2010, 2044)

E. Ann Kaplan is an American author, academic and teacher who researches women in film. Kaplan, who studies psychoanalysis, touched upon Freud's theory that hysteria in women arises from fantasies rather than traumatic memories, and compared hysterical women with soldiers who experienced post-war trauma. She coined the term future tense trauma cinema and examined how our cultural concerns are reflected in science fiction films.

Kaplan created a tangible example of the changes in feminist theory and feminist perspective by mentioning that the radical changes in society and the post-Cold War political process they were in effected feminist author's studies on feminism. "My increasing knowledge of efforts of women around the world to work against their specific oppressions in their own ways, including study of their national cinemas and women's roles in such institutions, together with my own travels over the years have inspired the new directions of my current work. Writing in 2004, I find myself in a vastly different social, political, and technological context from when I wrote both Women and Film (Kaplan 1983) and Looking for the Other (Kaplan 1997), such as could not have been envisaged in the 1970s, 1980s, or 1990s" (Kaplan 2004, 1241).

Laura Mulvey is a British feminist film theorist and filmmaker. Mulvey criticized the use of a male perspective in classic Hollywood cinema and the portrayal of female characters as objects to be looked at. She claimed that between 50's and 60's years, more male characters were used as subjects in films and that they were shot from a perspective that brought male characters to the forefront in the audience's impression.

She is known for her male perspective theory and has influenced third wave studies by her book on feminist film theories. Writing about visual pleasure and narrative cinema in 1975 was an act of great courage and enabled feminist studies to blow the cobwebs away. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' describes the manner in which the traditional visual apparatus of mainstream Hollywood 'narrative' film looks at women. As passive objects subordinated to the male gaze" (Mulvey 2010, 1953)

2.4. The Fourth Wave

The Fourth Wave of Feminism is strongly associated with the rise of social media and digital activism, particularly in the early 2010s. This development in the digital world enabled women to reach more people through internet. Unlike earlier feminist waves, it developed within digital spaces like Twitter and blogs. This wave enabled campaigns such as #MeToo and #TimesUp to emerge. Women used these tools to share experiences and organize collectively.

Social media allowed women to create a global awareness across race, class, and sexuality. The movement took on an intersectional character through online mobilization. This multidimensional approach empowered more inclusive participation. Feminists used digital platforms to criticize dominant social norms.

Fourth Wave Feminism became defined by its engagement with digital spaces. Issues like harassment, violence, and inequality gained broader attention. Digital activism helped normalize discussions previously considered taboo. This wave redefined feminist discourse through constant online engagement.

Critics argue that Fourth Wave Feminism is too dependent on social media. Some claim it centers white, middle-class perspectives, excluding others. Despite such critiques, it remains a powerful global force. Its immediacy and accessibility continue to attract new generations. During this period, the concept of intersectionality became one of the most fundamental principles of feminism. One of the most beneficial aspects of the fourth wave was that issues such as violence and harassment were brought to the fore, and in this context, all the norms that patriarchy had been trying to nomalize for centuries began to be discussed uncensored.

Fourth Wave Feminism is characterized by an increase in digital activism. Social media and digital platforms where women can freely make their voices heard have gained significant global popularity. One of the biggest breakthroughs that brought this wave to the forefront was the #MeToo campaign (Mendes, Ringrose ve Keller 2018, 4).

Initiated by Tarana Burke, this campaign has gained worldwide fame. It allowed women to speak out about sexual and verbal harassment without fear. However, these campaigns did not stop there, they also created a space for women to empower and unite.

Unlike other waves, social media has allowed this wave to spread faster. As of the early 2010s, fourth wave feminism has tried to achieve what they wanted by creating pressure through the media in order to achieve their goals.

With campaigns launched on social media on abortion rights, gender equality and LGBT issues, they made their demands known to the whole world. In the fourth wave, feminists defended not only women's rights but all gender identities and tried to break down social norms.

As influential as the Fourth Wave Feminism has been, it has also been subject to criticism. Some people argue that the movement is only on social media and has no impact on the real world. In addition, it has been argued that this wave was not fully inclusive and only advocated for 'white and middle class' women. Some critics even argue that activism on social media is superficial and does not fully address the intended audience (Gill 2016, 3).

The Fourth Wave of Feminism is marked by its close entanglement with digital technologies and networked communication. As online platforms have become central to feminist mobilization, concepts such as clicktivism, slacktivism, hacktivism, and hashtag activism have emerged (Castillo-Esparcia, Caro-Castaño ve Almansa-Martínez 2023).

These forms of digital engagement reflect both the democratization of activism and its commodification. While the internet facilitates access, visibility, and rapid mobilization, it also hosts growing threats such as cyberbullying, hate speech, and performative solidarity.
Feminist scholars like Alondra Nelson have called for a critical approach to digital activism, warning against the reproduction of structural inequalities through seemingly liberating technologies. Her work highlights the importance of intersectionality, digital justice, and the ethical use of technology as a means of empowerment.

Alondra Nelson emphasizes that fourth wave feminism has gained great momentum in the digital age. She states that technology and social media have enabled women to make their voices heard and organize against social problems. This is a different aspect compared to previous waves of feminism (Nelson 2016, 80).

According to her, the fourth wave is the turning point of the feminist movement. This is why egalitarian initiatives on social media feature heavily in Nelson's work.

As a result, the fourth wave has a power that continues today and whose effects increase day by day, gathering women all over the world at a common point. It is divided into sub-branches such as intersectional feminism, queer feminism, black feminism and reaches new people everyday thanks to social media.

Fourth Wave Feminism, which takes a significant stance on women's rights, continues to reach new people every day with the spread of social media.

3. CONCLUSION

This study explored the historical development of feminist thought through literary examples, interpreting feminist writers within their broader socio-political contexts. It approached the evolution of feminism as a layered process shaped by internal critique and social change. The core of feminist ideology—gender equality and social justice—has persisted through each wave, although its expressions have evolved.

The historical development of the feminist movement closely parallels the generational expansion of human rights. Just as human rights began with civil and political liberties (first generation), later expanded to include social and economic rights (second generation), progressed to cultural and

collective rights (third generation), and eventually incorporated digital rights (fourth generation), feminism has evolved in a similarly layered manner (Vasak 1977, 29).

Each wave of feminism corresponds to these categories, addressing the specific inequalities of its time. This analogy allows us to view feminism not as a fragmented or episodic struggle, but as a cumulative and transformative process of social intervention.

While the First and Second Waves focused on legal recognition and social equality, they often neglected intersecting issues of race, class, and sexuality. In response, the Third and Fourth Waves developed more inclusive and intersectional approaches, challenging binary gender systems and embracing identity-based differences. The Fourth Wave, in particular, expanded feminist discourse into the digital realm, amplifying concerns such as gender-based violence and invisible labor. Throughout these developments, literature and art have remained crucial tools for feminist imagination and critique. The works of pioneers like Virginia Woolf, centered on female autonomy, continue to serve as foundational texts of feminist consciousness. In this way, feminist thought has not only evolved alongside the framework of human rights but has also helped reshape and expand its boundaries by centering marginalized experiences.

The production of works centered on women's rights in the field of literature has enriched the theoretical framework of the feminist movement and brought it to a broad ground. All these processes ultimately show that Feminism aims to improve the well-being of women in the issues of social injustice and inequality and takes actions towards this goal.

However, for feminist ideals to move beyond discourse and take root in everyday life, they must also be integrated into institutional practices.

Meanwhile, digital platforms offer new spaces for sustained feminist engagement, visibility, and intersectional dialogue. Yet beyond digital or professional tools, what sustains feminist transformation is a culture of solidarity embedded in society at large—one that values empathy, equity, and collective responsibility across all genders. Feminist struggle does not settle for mere survival; it aims to build a life grounded in equality and dignity.

REFERENCES

Ataman, Özgün. "The Suffragette Movement: Through Anguish and Resolution Emancipation Was Achieved." *SineFilozofi* 4, no. Special Issue (2022): 285-299.

Beauvoir, Simone De. *Le Deuxime Sexe.* France: Payel, 1949.

—. *The Second Sex.* Translated by Howard Madison Parshley. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953.

Butler, Judith. "Subjects of Sex/ Gender/ Desire." In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, by Judith Butler, 3-11. New York: SAGE Publications, 1990.

Castillo-Esparcia, Antonio, Lucía Caro-Castaño, and Ana Almansa-Martínez. "Evolution of Digital Activism on Social Media: Opportunities and Challenges." *El Profesional de la Información* 32, no. 3 (2023): e320303.

Cixous, Hélène, Keith Cohen, and Paula Cohen. "The Laugh of The Medusa." *Signs* 1, no. 4 (1976): 875-893.

Daly, Marie Maynard. *The Church and the Second Sex.* Harper& Row, 1968.

Disch, Lisa. "Review of Judith Butler and the Politics of the Performative, by Judith Butler." *Political Theory*, 1999: 545-559.

Dominelli, Lena , and Eileen McLeod. *Feminist Social Work.* London: Macmillan - now Palgrave, 1989.

Dominelli, Lena. *Feminist Social Work Theory and Practice.* London: Red Globe Press , 2002.
Donovan, Josephine. *Feminist Theory.* 3th. New York: The Continuum International Publishing, 2006.
Friedan, Betty. *The feminine mystique.* 1963.
Gill, Rosalind. "Postfeminism and the new cultural life of feminism." *Diffractions*, no. 6 (2016): 1-8.
Hanisch, Carol. "The Personal Is Political." In *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation*, edited by Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, 76–78. New York: Radical Feminism Press, 1970.
Haraway, Donna . "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s." In *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, edited by Vincent B. Leitch, 2040–2071. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010.
Haraway, Donna. "From A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science. Technology. and Social-Feminism in the 1980s." In *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism. 2nd ed.*, by Vincent B., general editor Leitch, 2043-2050. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2010.
Hooks, Bell. *Ain't I a women? Black women and feminism.* Boston: South End Press, 1981.
—. *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics.* Cambridge: South End Press, 2000.
Kaplan, E.Ann. "Global Feminisms and the State of Feminist Film Theory." *Signs 30*, 2004: 1236-1248.
Lloyd, Genevieve . *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy.* London: Metheuen, 1984.
Maslow, Abraham Harold. *Motivation and Personality.* 2nd ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1970.
Mendes, Kaitlynn, Jessica Ringrose, and Jessalynn Keller. "# MeToo and the promise and pitfalls of challenging rape culture through digital feminist activism." *European Journal of Women's Studies* (Sage Publications) 25, no. 2 (2018): 236-246.
Mulvey, Laura . "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, edited by Vincent B. Leitch, 1952-1965. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010.
Nelson, Alondra. *The Social Life of DNA: Race, Reparations, and Reconciliation after the Genome.* Boston: Beacon Press, 2016.
Phillips, Ruth, and Viviene E. Cree. "What does the 'Fourth Wave' Mean for Teaching Feminism in Twenty-First Century Social Work?" *Social Work Education* 33, no. 7 (2014): 930-943.
Reed, Christopher. "Through Formalism: Feminism and Virginia Woolf's Relation to Bloomsbury Aesthetics." *Twentieth Century Literature* (Duke University Press) 38, no. 1 (1992): 20-43.
Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Journal of Women's History*, 1980: 11-48.
Rubin, Gayle. *The Traffic in Women Notes on the Political Economy of Sex.* 1975.
Schuster, Julia . "Why The Personal Remained Political: Comparing Second and Third Wave Perspectives On Everyday Feminism." *Social Movement Studies* 16, no. 6 (2017): 647-659.
Sen, Amartya. *Development as Freedom.* New York: Anchor Books, 2000.
Snyder, R. Claire . "What Is Third□Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay." *Signs* 34, no. 1 (2008): 96-175.
Snyder-Hall, R. Claire. "Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of 'Choice." *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 1 (2010): 61-255.
Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Diffractions* (Macmillan), 1988: 24-28.
Vasak, Karel. "Human Rights: A Thirty-Year Struggle: The Sustained Efforts to Give Force of Law to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." *UNESCO Courier* 30, no. 11 (1977): 29–32.
Woolf, Virginia . "A Room of One's Own." in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism. 2nd ed.*, edited by Vincent B. Leitch, 1952-1954. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010.
Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own.* London: Hogarth Press, 1929.