

## Gender Equality: #NotThereYet

By *Ioanna Gouseti*



One of the key messages of Clinton's campaign was that her victory in the 58<sup>th</sup> US presidential election would tell people, and especially younger generations, that this is now a world of limitless opportunities for women. The glass ceiling would have finally been broken, and we would have had serious evidence of this. In the morning of November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016, however, it was apparent that this day has not come yet. The glass ceiling is still unbroken, contrary to the hearts of many Americans and others around the world.

The themes of the discussions that have followed the US presidential election outcome, the victory of Donald Trump, highlight the many different aspects of the situation: Descriptive accounts of the profile of those who voted for each candidate, explanations of why, potential consequences of the elections outcome, relationship between the outcome and other phenomena, such as the Brexit vote and the rise of the far right in the Western societies, and so on. Since November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016, I cannot stop thinking about gender inequality.

The relationship between US presidential elections and inequality is not new of course. In her inspiring speech at the 2016 Democratic National Convention, Michelle Obama mentioned, among others, that her husband's election in 2008, and re-election in 2012, signified the moment where their family was able to 'wake up every morning in a house that was built by slaves', and to watch 'her daughters, two beautiful, intelligent, black young women playing with their dogs on the White House lawn'. In an America where people of colour face discrimination and inequality in their everyday lives, **where over the past 25 years, the wealth gap between blacks and whites has nearly tripled, where the unemployment rate of blacks is twice that of whites, where more than one in four blacks live in poverty compared to fewer than one in 10 whites, where 40% of those who are incarcerated are black despite being only 13 percent of the overall US population, where between 2007 and 2011, sentences for black males were 19.5% longer than those for whites, and where 24% of those fatally shot and killed by the police are black despite being just 13 percent of the US population,** American people did vote for a black president a few years ago, and they should be celebrated for this act of opposition to racial inequality. The election of a black

President, of course, did not signify the end of racial inequality; it did, however, symbolize a moment in history where hatred, intolerance, and bigotry were refuted, and change seemed possible.



*Pictured: Michelle Obama Source: Storypick*

On November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016, we all came to realize that the discourse of hatred, intolerance, violence, misogyny, bias, white supremacy, racism was not enough to turn people's attention to another major possibility of change that was in front of them; it was not enough to make them vote for someone who was arguably one of the most experienced candidates for the US presidency ever. On November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016, 47.3% voted for someone who shames sexual assault victims, attacks Muslims, embraces his support by white supremacists, calls Mexican immigrants 'criminals' and 'rapists', shares Anti-Semitic rhetoric, is accused of sexual harassment. All of these facts did not lead those who shaped the electoral outcome not to vote for a candidate of this quality, and most importantly to make history once again by electing the first female US president.



*Pictured: Graffiti saying 'black lives don't matter and neither does your votes'. Source: Twitter, discussing attacks post-Trump victory*

I cannot help but thinking that gender was a decisive factor in the electoral outcome. It might be that the female gender of one of the candidates contributed to not considering the Trump campaign's narrative to be as hideous as it was or as much as it would have been considered to be if his rival was a man. This is pure speculation, however, and I am definitely not arguing this here that if Hillary were a man, she would have won. Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the 58<sup>th</sup> US Presidential election, where for the first time in the US history one of the candidates was a woman, and the other an ex-reality show celebrity, one cannot help but looking at what's going 'gender equality-wise' in a society that ended up voting for the latter.

In the United States of America, **women's life expectancy was 82 years of age in 2011 compared to 72 years of age that was the global average; average years of schooling were 11.7 for women**

and 11.9 for men in 2010; the percentage of unemployed women was 7.9 compared to men's 8.3 in 2012; 18% of parliamentary members were female in 2010; 1 in 5 women experienced physical violence by their partner and 1 in 13 women experienced sexual violence by their partner in 2010; employed mothers are not provided with paid maternity leave in 2016. So, overall, neither bad nor great, one could cynically put it.

**Others**, and unfortunately at times 'important others' (at least for some) claimed that this is just how democracy works, and that the vote of the 'many' (by the way 44.4% of eligible voters abstained from voting) should be respected. Well, to function properly, democracy requires 'paideia', which in ancient Greek meant a system of broad cultural education. When large parts of the population are deprived of 'paideia', it is likely that an electoral outcome will look like the current one in the US. So no, it would not be exactly right to talk about democracy in this case. This is because one of the consequences of the lack of 'paideia' is the inability to see that any form of inequality, including gender inequality, affects not only those who suffer its immediate outcomes but **society as a whole**.

In 1995, at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, leaders from governments and civil society around the world came together to ensure that women and girls have the opportunity to participate in all aspects of life. Since then the status of women worldwide has been improved, but gender inequality is still here. Electing the first female US President would not have tackled gender inequality overnight, but it would have created a moment in history where the possibility would have been higher and more opportunities would have opened up. This opportunity has now been lost, until the next time that a woman will manage to run for President of the United States of America.



*Pictured: Hillary Clinton Source: ABC News*

In the morning of November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016, I cannot imagine how it must have felt for **those who did not vote for Donald Trump, who by the way are the future of the United States of America**. Most importantly I cannot imagine how it must have felt for the women who alleged Donald Trump harassed them, that this man was the US President elect. Since 2004, the London Feminist Network has organised an annual, national march against rape and all forms of male violence against women, which is called 'Reclaim the Night'. The current situation makes me think that we still need to 'reclaim the day', for in the morning of November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016, people have been unable to say their children, and all of us say ourselves, that the day has come that violence against women is disproved and that the glass ceiling is seriously cracked.

The only thing to say, instead, is that we are *not there yet*; and the only thing to do is to try to get there by fighting for a world where words and actions of hatred, intolerance, sexism, racism, bias, xenophobia and discrimination against women, people of colour, immigrants, the LGBT community, the differently abled and Muslims do not elect Presidents, but are received and perceived as they should be, i.e., a shame on the human race.

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