

Political Ideologies Context, Ideas, and Practices.
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Lec 23 INSTRUCTOR-CORRECTED Feminism Lec 3/4 - Feminism and Other Ideologies
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We can continue to look at the relationship between feminism and other ideologies. We've seen that feminism cuts across all other ideologie - most of them were propounded by men, politics today is dominated by men all over the world, and so on. But of course, different forms of feminism draw upon, they're informed by, assumptions, sometimes explicit commitments, derived from other ideologies. That's hardly surprising.

We'll start with, there are several f0rms here, liberal, conservative, socialist and radical feminism; that is liberal, socialist, we will look at conservative feminism later. Liberal, socialist and radical feminism are the main theoretically articulated forms. Some conservative feminism has been articulated, we will look at that as we proceed.

Now, through the 20th century, the general condition and position of women improved unrecognizably in most western countries. The changes were brought about by the vote - undoubtedly a first wave success - by women's access to education, often as a result of legislation, by vast changes in divorce law, by the legalisation of abortion, and by vast improvements in women's access to safe and reliable methods of contraception; that enabled them to control their own fertility.

The changes of course were not uniformly spread throughout western countries. The Republic of Ireland, for example, was founded in 1921 as a result of better sectarian divisions between Catholics and Protestants, while Ireland was a British colony, and the Republic of Ireland was culturally and by law, totally opposed to both contraception and abortion. In the Republic of Ireland, if I'm not mistaken, there has been a change since then, if I'm not mistaken. But abortion has for very long time, been illegal unless the pregnancy endangers the mother's life or the mother's endangered by, her life is endangered by it. Now that condition includes women victims of incest or rape, because they would need to show that the pregnancy was a danger in, a danger to their own lives.

But more recently - I wrote that text in 2016 or '17 - more recently, a referendum in the Republic of Ireland, an overwhelmingly Catholic country, a Catholic majority country, has stated a public preference for significant relaxation of the prohibitions on abortion. We can look through, you can look through the specifics, if you're interested.

What has also come to light in the last three or four years is that the British province of Northern Ireland, the six counties of Northern Ireland, a devolved British province, has had a blanket ban on abortion or near blanket-ban on abortion for a very long time. That is now a significant issue and has come to light in the context of the possible British exit from the European Union. It does also mean, and this is an issue within the [non] unwritten constitution of the United Kingdom, that legislation on this matter in Northern Ireland is significantly different from legislation in the rest of the United Kingdom, which is basically covered by the Abortion Act 1967 and case law since then.

But what about other Catholic or Catholic majority countries? Spain and Portugal, for their part, were ruled by fascist dictatorships from 1936 to 1975 in Spain's case, 1938 if I'm not mistaken to 1974 in Portugal's case. And these were both, both of them, both countries were marked by rigid and conservative forms of Catholicism.

All three societies that is, the Republic of Ireland, and Spain and Portugal, changed significantly as societies only after they joined the then European Economic Community - and that since the treaty on European Union was signed in 1992, has been the European Union. Ireland acceded on the first of January 1973, on the same date as the United Kingdom, and I think Denmark, and Spain and Portugal acceded in 1981, some years after both had thrown off fascist dictatorship and had reformed themselves into certainly seriously recognizable democracies.

Now, most of the relevant changes in the societies involved- we are looking here at profound cultural changes resulting from accession to the EEC, which meant effectively open borders between countries, which meant significant protections of rights throughout, throughout the then nine members of the European Union, made up to nine by the accession of Spain and Portugal and Greece at the same time. Many of the changes were social changes and they resulted from claims to rights, such as the right of access to education, the right of access to contraceptive advice and services, and such like. In employment law, for example, the United Kingdom's Equal Pay Act was passed in 1970. The Sex Discrimination Act followed in 1975.

As we have already seen, in 1986, the European Court of Justice significantly advanced women's rights by ruling in the case of Marshall that the employers involved had breached the European Economic Community's law by making Helen Marshall, a radiographer, retire earlier than her male colleagues. I've mentioned this case before. That decision, once reached, was binding throughout the EC, and is now binding throughout the European Union.

Now in ideological form, these are typically liberal changes, even if they have very substantial economic and other practical consequences. They usually involve claims to rights or to the creation of new rights within existing democratic systems. They often involve legislation intended to ensure that men and women are treated fairly and equally under existing procedures and laws. And, for example, they include things like equal access to education, and to all occupations and professions, at least in theory and at least procedurally.

In substance, of course, the picture is very different, but liberal feminism is broadly reformist in character. It relies on an individualist conception of society, as does all liberalism, and in general liberal feminism does not seek or demand radical changes in economic or political structures or systems. Those demands would of course run counter to liberal thinking in general, liberal political thought in general.

Now, liberal feminism can therefore accept that certain areas of life can be separate for men and women. Okay, Betty Friedan wrote as recently as 1983, 35 years or so, but not that long ago, Betty Friedan wrote that the family is central to women's lives. Secondly, this kind of approach, a liberal approach, runs a risk of failing to address existing patriarchal attitudes. In some parts of India, women have been employed as bus drivers, but most of them have left the job, and they leave the job soon, because male colleagues often behave very badly towards them.

In the United States military, improved reporting and recording systems have shown that sexual assaults by male personnel on female colleagues are much more common than the military had previously recognised them to be. Even the United Nations has publicly recognised the extent of that problem. Though of course, the aggregate, the overall figures, would cover male assaults on males as well.

Any changes in attitudes may well need other kinds of approach besides the purely punitive. The point is changes in attitude here. And an issue for liberal feminism is that procedural and

reformist measures may not have that much effect on attitudes, and that's, that's a familiar issue all around the world, particularly in respect of feminism.

But an approach based on liberalism has an inherent conceptual problem. Liberalism, we've seen is by definition suspicious of the state's capacity and tendency to intrude into the private sphere. And therefore, legislation affecting the family is something liberal feminists have always found to be a problem or potential problem. And that's documented in liberal feminist theory. If the family is a woman's space, well, liberalism can certainly recognise respectively different spaces for men and women, or justifiably different spaces, but that then raises the question of whether democratic assemblies have the right, the moral right to pass the, to pass legislation which could significantly enter into, intrude, and even reshape the private familial space. In practice, they do, but this is a conceptual issue and a conceptual problem for liberal theory and therefore for liberal feminist theory.

Well, what about socialist feminism? Socialist feminism differs from liberal feminism. It locates women's position in the context of the structural inequalities which shape almost all societies. In other words, socialist feminism sees the position of women in the context of structural, that is, economic and political structures, which shape almost all societies.

Liberal feminism largely neglects class-based inequalities among women, that is among women themselves. In respect of access to education or the professions or political participation and the like. Socialist feminism, on the other hand, is founded on the argument that gender equality cannot be achieved without a revolution in the control of the means of production. It's the production relations that are the issue.

This argument does have some weight. For example, in commodity producing systems or capitalist systems, women are expected to, and largely do, stay at home to bring up the children and run the house so that their respective husbands can go out to work as the family's sole or main earner. And that in turn means that women are required by the economic system - by the economic *system*, socialists would point out - to abandon occupations, careers, and higher studies so that men can have long working lives.

It also means that women in capitalist societies form, in effect, a free workforce; they're doing, they do, permanently do colossal, perhaps incalculable amounts of work, without which these economies might well collapse.

The socialist feminist response is that the answer is certainly not wages for housework, which have been proposed and which amount to a form of liberalism; the answer is not wages for housework, but a complete transformation of the entire system of production relations.

In addition, being the main earners gives men economic power over women within the family.

This power could also be transmitted across generations, for example, by patrilineal inheritance that is, inheritance through the father's line, or by the hypocrisy involved in men's having say far more opportunities for sexual liaisons as well, outside the home than women do. This is often reinforced by cultural assumptions about women's femininity, or about the idea that the home is a woman's space. And among the patriarchal assumptions which sustain such ideas are moral codes imposing monogamy.

Now socialist feminism goes even further at times, for example, by analysing the ways in which enormously profitable cosmetics and fashion business turns women's bodies into commodities to be exploited for profit. Laurie Penny argues that women's flesh itself has become a vehicle for highly profitable businesses, which themselves propagate patriarchal ideas of women's entire lives.

Anne Taylor Fleming concludes that what is in progress is a cultural war that is taking place, I quote, 'atop the female body'. Penny wrote that, and Laurie Penny wrote in 2011 and Anne Taylor Fleming wrote that in 2012. Socialist feminism extends socialist thinking by introducing such significant additional issues - and by requiring socialism to address patriarchy as a social and cultural matter, as well as a key element in capitalist economic systems. Now this greatly strengthens the revolutionary or transformative potential of socialism.

You had a question. That's a really important point. We touched upon it in our in our earlier lecture, but you've added to it, and thank you for the contribution. The point is, yes, you're quite right, Kollontai does, Alexandra Kollontai does point out that if women go out to work in commodity producing or capitalist systems, they're almost always paid less. The fact that they are paid less enables the men's wages to be kept down or to be forced to lower levels as well.

Of course, all kinds of casuistical claims are often entered, or highly convoluted claims are entered that the women aren't doing the same work, which is not necessarily true and we can see that on construction sites around the world, but or in much of the developing world certainly.

But you're absolutely right. The point is that women's work for lower wages in capitalist systems creates a form of competition not only between men and women, but also among women themselves, and serves to keep wages low. That's a really important point about the consequences of commodity production systems for women.

And that is - that strengthens the conclusion I have offered, which is that socialism has to address patriarchy, not just as a matter of economic structure, but as a social and cultural matter. And that's what in that sense, socialist feminism strengthens the revolutionary potential of socialism. Thank you for the contribution. That's absolutely right. Remarkable, a very, very good point to make.

There have been other responses to this. Quite a lot of feminist theory has said, there's no point expecting conventional socialism to change; the bulk of it is male dominated, industrial trade unions around the world are heavily male dominated, for example, both in the reach, in membership and in the posts held by the, by the senior elected officers.

It is, for example, I mean, there have been changes of a, if you like of a first-wave kind. The European Convention on Human Rights has recently been confirmed as providing a right to trade union membership under Article 5, the right to freedom of association. Now, I understand that's a case in English law, but it's quite likely to have parallels in, virtually in all other European Union countries, all of which are signatories to the European Convention on Human Rights, a separate document by the way, produced by the Council of Europe, not the then Coal and Steel Community or the EC.

But the question then is, what's the substance of trade union membership? If we look at it around the world, we find that trade union membership is overwhelmingly male. The senior posts are almost always held by men. And until relatively recently, the idea that women's work was not only deserving of union membership, of union formation, but significant in the workforce was something a lot of male-dominated unions simply didn't realise. I hope that has changed, but my guess is that it hasn't changed nearly as much as it should have done.

Now, in response, a lot of feminists have said there's no point trying to adopt socialism uncritically. It's itself a patriarchal form and in practice is deeply patriarchal. What we need is something much more radical, and radical feminism has had considerable currency. Radical feminists regard patriarchy not class or any other organizing principle, as the central problem in existing human society. Patriarchy is the issue.

One result is that women have been portrayed as inferior to men; that's a result of patriarchy. Then natural sexuality has been suppressed by highly oppressive male systems of conditioning - well documented. The radical feminist response has been to advocate various forms of independence from men and from male-dominated organizations.

There is evidence to support the likely benefits. For example, in the various British school education systems, girls get better examination results in girls-only schools than they do in mixed schools; the evidence is very clear. Now, in radical feminist thought, gender is therefore the deepest of all divisions in society, because gender is the source of patriarchy; all gender divisions are the source of patriarchy. Patriarchy pervades society, perhaps even all societies, and radical feminists are absolutely clear about that.

Susan Brownmiller, for example, holds that men dominate women by physical and sexual abuse. Not at all surprising. All over the world, when women speak frankly about physical spaces, how buildings are designed, how cities are laid out, whether areas are well lit or not, whether there are any other people around in case they need help. The minute they say so, we do something we should have done all the time, and look even at the nature of our physical spaces.

Here in this institution, we're not far from the from the city's mass rapid transit system, where as a man I have found some of the physical spaces dark and intimidating, particularly the mezzanine floors or intermediate floors, or if you're nautical, 'tween-decks. These are often very poorly lit, hardly ever occupied by anyone. And if they were occupied by someone, I'd be a bit cautious about going anywhere near them, go straight down the stairs and out again, either up to the platform or out into the street.

But a great many women say they will not use the MRTS and say it publicly, won't use the MRTS because the structures are so intimidating, and they're very much on their own even in the middle of the day. So that's an example.

And let's consider for example how our physical spaces, even shopping centres, are laid out or shopping areas are laid out. If we've ever taken small children round, either in a pram or carried children round or taken small children round, we'll know just how very difficult such spaces are to navigate to navigate and negotiate. Now these are issues that occur all around the world. And it's not just about the physical space, it's about the atmosphere and climate that women face in any kind of interaction and any kind of engagement with even the physical space.

Brownmiller's point is that men dominate women by physical and sexual abuse. Everyday forms of sexual harassment are very widespread and occur around the world all the time, even in the Nordic countries. And groups campaigning, such as the End Violence Against Women group have brought this out repeatedly.

Official agencies around the world can be part of the problem. The police and the judicial system have long been documented all around the world as not taking women's complaints of abuse, including sexual abuse, seriously. One result is that the extent of sexually motivated violence against women is very seriously underreported. Susan Brownmiller also holds that all men benefit from the fear and anxiety the very possibility of sexual violence generates among all women. It's a very comprehensive claim, but she doesn't make it lightly and there's a great deal of evidence to support it.

Those are three major, we've looked at three major ways of theorising feminism in response to and in engagement with other major ideologies - liberal feminism, socialist feminism and radical feminism.

What are the current prospects of feminism? We'll look at these, and we'll then look at more recent developments, identifying the conditions women face and articulating them in greater detail. But we'll start by looking at the current prospects of feminism. Yes, there have been enormous advances in legislation and vast improvements in women's position in many societies in the last century or so. But the global, the overall global position of women has not improved nearly as much as it could have done. And in some respects, it's even worsened. The evidence is very bleak. I can't remember the exact figures, but if I am not mistaken, women's participation in the global workforce has declined somewhat in the last decade or so. And secondly, I understand there is some research evidence to show that in the poorest classes women's position is even worse than it was a decade or more ago. We'd have to look up the evidence particularly, just to be sure of our facts there.

But in addition, movements in all faiths extreme and even less extreme fundamentalist movements in all faiths and in many countries have openly asserted rigid divisions in gender roles. And they've attempted to confine women to the home, restated roles for women that we might have thought had gone out if not, why with the dinosaur or the dodo certainly gone out with the end of the last war and perhaps with the, with the development in recent decades. But

some of the movements concerned, some of the extreme fundamentalist movements concerned, have even banned women's education.

Secondly, even within feminist theory, well - it hardly needs saying that fierce and significant controversy continues. It is right that it continues, because that's what illuminates our situation. What is said in this space of fierce and significant controversy is often highly illuminating. For example, many of the issues had to do with what it is to be a writer at all, particularly of fiction. Toril Moi, for example, has provided very clear expositions of some of the questions involved. Among other things, Toril Moi, Moi notes here that the impact of poststructuralist literary theory on the ways we locate or characterise women's writing has been immense.

We'll meet post structuralism and post modernism later on, in I think our ninth or tenth topic. But the impact of this kind of literary theory on the ways we characterize women's writing has been immense and Toril Moi is right about that. But it's caused its own problems and Moi comments on this.

She remarks on the difference between Beauvoir's accounts, Simone de Beauvoir's account of how society creates the feminine gender, with the implication that those processes can be changed - Moi notes the difference between Beauvoir and Judith Butler's apparent elimination of any sense of human agency in the process of gendering, because strong strands in poststructuralist theory regard authorship as irrelevant or meaningless.

Now, that is a kind of risk that, we'll see, runs through poststructuralist thinking and it's not surprising that it emerges in feminist thinking today. We shouldn't be surprised, but it's right that this controversy is addressed. It's absolutely right that it is addressed because that amplifies our sense of the issues and develops them further.

Now Moi's concerns, Toril Moi's concerns are mainly with literature, but the implications are obvious. If becoming a person of a particular gender is a social process, then the implication is that we can do something about it. And then, we would see - if we thought we could do something about a social process, we would see the whole world indescribably differently from anyone who sees human agency as a fiction or as non-existent, or an enlightenment conceit or something of that kind.

In addition, Moi has more recently expressed severe criticism of the extent to which feminist theory has, I quote, become so, I quote, 'abstract and overgeneralised that it no longer says

anything relevant about women's lives' - end of quotation, that was said by Moi in an interview in 2015.

It's not an issue I should address here, but the important thing is that Moi has put it on the public agenda. This has been said about a lot of literary and other academic criticism, that it's become so wordy or so, as Moi says, abstract and overgeneralised that it no longer says anything relevant about our lives. It's a significant point for Moi to make, and other people have no doubt said the same thing about various forms of, I should say, various forms of recent feminist theory.

But this matter isn't that easily, it isn't easily resolved, and for example, Maitrayee Chaudhuri has shown additional difficulties facing anyone who attempts to give an account to feminism in a formerly colonised country such as India. In India, just as in, as happens in many other former subject cultures, issues which maybe marginal or insignificant in the west are central in the non-west. Gandhi recognises that and Chaudhuri cites Gandhi is saying that.

Chaudhuri concludes, Maitrayee Chaudhuri concludes that Indian feminists have to, I quote, 'confront the question of western feminism', precisely because India's path to modernity has been, as Chaudhuri says, mediated through colonialism. So have Indian encounters with nationalism, democracy, socialism, the free market and other ideas and institutions.

Now that in turn means that as an essential element in our grasping such ideas - democracy, socialism, nationalism, feminism and so on - in grasping such ideas, we have to articulate and recognise the contexts in which those ideas originated, in which they were produced and circulated and received, if we're to grasp them at all. That may sound like stating the obvious, but it's a clear warning against uncritical acceptance of the terminology and methods of undoubtedly major, major theories, major ways of understanding the world. Nationalism, democracy, socialism, the free market - yes, these are major ideologies, they've all had an impact on the world, all over the world, but Chaudhuri's point is that we need to arrange, we need to understand the context in which they arose and think about how to understand them through the lens of colonialism, in other words, how our colonially-created encounter with these or colonially-run encounter with these needs to be understood in its own right, if we are to understand these ideas clearly in the sense, in the context, of our own historical and cultural background.

Never an easy issue, absolutely never an easy issue. It carries with it the risks that we, the risk that we reject significant areas of such ideologies in favor of an often equally unexamined sense

of what it is to inherit a culture at all. And that's something we encountered last time as well - in multiculturalism.

But the third idea in contemporary feminism is that of - or the third major issue it faces - is, is that of material inequality, that is, of structural disadvantage in the system of production relations. And that seems to remain largely unaddressed at present or seems, it seems to be much less fashionable. This may be a result of the apparently global dominance of an ideology, neoliberalism, according to which and we've already seen this, human agency is irrelevant to market outcomes. They're themselves as inexorable as natural laws, or so neoliberalism sees them anyway.

It may be impossible to change that state of affairs without vast changes in our modes of production, and therefore our entire political economy. But without that kind of change, we as humanity may well not face up to the task of bringing about global improvements in women's situation and condition.

That failure will only compound our continuing failure to accept that women are full members of the human species. It sounds ridiculous, that we even have to say that. It's a measure, I hope, of the continuing obscenity of our condition and it's a measure - that we even have to say it - is a measure of how far we still have to go.

Now the point for us to remember here is that feminism will, rightly, engage with, draw upon and in turn inform other major ideologies. It'll cut across all ideologies enter into them, participate in them, draw from them, and influence them; that's absolutely right. What feminism does is make us think about how these ideologies are to be understood, and how they are to inform our understanding of the world. And in that sense, feminism has made an enormous contribution to our sense even of the term 'ideological'.

We shall stop here, but in our next lecture I shall go on to look at the kinds of issues raised by Maitrayee Chaudhuri, for example, the idea that things like nationalism and democracy and socialism, feminism too, have to be understood in the context and in the light of the experience of colonial subjecthood. We shall look at intersectionality, which sounds like a social-scientific jargon term, but nevertheless means a very great deal - what is it to articulate a feminist sense of the world in the light of sexual, economic and political, and racial and cultural subjecthood in many different forms. We shall look at that next time around. We'll stop there and we shall look

at intersectionality next time, and then proceed to a worked exercise, looking at relatively recent texts and evaluating them in the light of other texts, that' for next time. So we'll stop there.