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Reflection #5

With so many ideas on different topics presented through the readings this week, rather than attempt to synthesize these very disparate discussions (which may be straightforward for a more perceptive individual than I), I would like to focus in this reflection on the topics within two of Mariategui’s essays – “Man and Myth” and “Women and Politics” with references to feminist politics today via *Socialist Alternative* and while touching on Salvador Allende’s speeches.

Man and Myth

*“It is useless, according to these [contemporary philosophical] theories, to search for an absolute truth. The truth of today is not the truth of tomorrow. A truth is only valid for a period of time. We should be content with a relative truth.” (119)*

We had addressed in an earlier class discussion the relativist nature of poststructuralism and postmodernism. Here, we discussed how the rejection of agency and absolute truth derived from pure experience was detrimental to the cause of socialism and the study of the social sciences as a whole. These philosophies allow for a freedom of perception that discourage debate and any arrival towards consensus, necessary for progress or effective action. They also speak to an unfortunate subjectivity in social science that denies us the opportunity to fundamentally understand social phenomena so that we can make real impact on issues that impact real people. Say what we may about the narrow microscope of the positivist, quantitative method, it is probably faster at arriving at an actionable conclusion that one can debate and improve over time. Is Mariategui a postmodernist before postmodernism had taken intellectuals by storm? I cannot pin down an exact publication date for “Man and Myth,” but it seems to have been published in 1925. Post-structuralism and post-modernism were not popular until the 1960s.

*“…But all attempts to resurrect myths are doomed to failure. Each era wishes to have its own sense of the world.” (119)*

I had always thought of a capital-driven world as having an atemporal sense of reality. But I wonder, perhaps because of the hyperdriven nature of capital in the US and some other countries, in this cultural-economic context, we often glorify or fetishize past events, past deeds, past ways of being, in search of a time before this frenzy. Perhaps capital itself can be given credit for producing an atmosphere that looks back to pre-modern lives and tries to replicate those models or learn from those models (even if it is to accumulate more capital and sell “vintage” Vinyl records).

Women and Politics

*“Their participation in public affairs has ceased to be exceptional or extraordinary.” (121).*

Almost a hundred years later, women’s *significant* status rise in public affairs is still considered extraordinary. Whether it is the idea of a woman as president or even [a state’s first black woman in Congress](https://www.cnbc.com/2018/11/07/ayanna-pressley-is-massachusetts-first-black-congresswoman.html), we spill a good bit of ink highlighting these achievements because they are not ordinary (see [Sawant, 2018](https://www.socialistalternative.org/2018/11/09/democratic-socialists-elected-letter-kshama-sawant-alexandria-ocasio-cortez-rashida-tlaib-julia-salazar/)). Women in computer science or in leadership roles in industry are more of many examples where women’s participation is seen as limited, of concern and to some degree, extraordinary.

*“The Soviet constitution gives women the same rights as men. Under the constitution, all workers, regardless of gender, nationality, or religion, enjoy equal rights. The Communist state does not distinguish or differentiate by gender or nationalities… And within its dictatorship of the working class, proletarian women may exercise any public function.” (122)*

Adding on to the previous section, even today while many progressives will emphasize the “exceptional” achievements of certain women, others claim that women enjoy equal rights to men. But it is certainly not the case in actuality (see Trump’s attack on gender and trans rights in [Johnson, 2018](https://www.socialistalternative.org/2018/11/05/trump-prepares-attack-trans-rights-build-fight-gender-oppression/)). Even setting aside Trump’s uniquely negative impacts of progress on many fronts, prior to 2016, gender pay gap and many other cases showed us that gender parity had not been achieved. Mariategui, from outside Russia, sees there being equality in Soviet Russia. But was that really the case on the ground?

*“Communism found a dangerous resistance in women.” (122)*

This surprises me. Women has always been at the forefront of protests and revolutions, particularly when there are famines and losses to the family structure, for instance the bread riots during the February Revolution.

*“An Italian scholar, Pitigrilli, classifies this type of modern woman as a type of “luxury mammal.” And thus, this luxury mammal will gradually be depleted. As the socialist system replaces the individualistic system, feminist luxury and elegance will decline. Paquin and socialism are incompatible enemies. Humanity will lose some luxury mammals, but it will gain many women. In the future a woman’s dresses will be less expensive and sumptuous, but the condition of the woman will be more dignified.” (122)*

Capital, in its need for more workers to increase capital, has achieved more or less the same goal. There seems to be little impact that socialist policies need have on this.

*“Writers who are enemies of feminism fear that the beauty and grace of women will be affected because of feminist victories. They believe that politics, academia, the courts, will turn women into less amiable beings, and even make them unfriendly. But this belief is unfounded.”*

Whereas Mariategui’s reference to relativist modes seems ahead of his time, his arguments in favor of feminist progress seems a bit outdated. In 1879, Henrik Ibsen had published *A Doll’s House,* aiming to criticize the pedestal onto which women were placed in society to preserve their feminine virtues and advocating for a proper treatment of women as human beings with minds and goals and feelings of their own. By 1925, this must have been an acceptable ideology?

This also allows us to return to the the first part of this brief that addressed how we cannot aim to replicate older methods in the modern context, that every society was unique. It seems clear that women have had similar struggles for justice across time periods and across space. Similarly, the Third and Fourth Internationals were cognizant of the similarity of worker’s struggles across the world. Thus, it seems that truth is not “only valid for a period of time” and with modifications for the specific cultural, political, historical and social context, Mariategui can and did apply the conclusions of others to the situation in Peru, clarifying his true feelings about an absolute truth.

Allende’s Speech to the Chilean Parliament

Allende refers a few times to the Popular (Unity) Government. Is this the same as the Popular Front we have discussed in class before, which lost its message and direction in its attempt to mollify too many people at once?

References:

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