

Radical Feminist

Introduction:

This branch of feminism focuses on the theory of patriarchy which is a system of power that organizes society into a complex of relationships based on an assumption of 'male supremacy' used to oppress women. Sylvia Wably[1] argues that men as a group dominate women as a group and are the main beneficiaries of the subordination of women.

Though there are differences between radical feminists over the basis of male supremacy on the appropriation of women's sexuality and bodies, while in some accounts male violence is seen as the root cause (Brownmiller 1976, Firestone 1974, Rich 1980).

Sexuality is seen as a major site of male domination over women through which men impose their notion of femininity over women[2]. Sexual practice is seen to be sexually constructed around male notions of desire[3]. They also argue that male violence against women is considered to be part of a system of controlling women[4].

The theory is critiqued by various scholars who accuse it of having a tendency to essentialism, to an implicit/explicit biological reductionism and to a false universalism which cannot understand historical change or take sufficient account of divisions between men and women based on ethnicity, race and class[5].

Important to the feminism approach is the dual systems theory which links together the Marxist feminists and the radical feminists, hence an indispensable approach in this analysis. This paper draws its content from "Theorizing Patriarchy" by Sylvia Walby, 1991.

The Dual Systems Theory

This is a synthesis of Marxist and radical feminist theories, where contemporary gender inequality is analysed as a result of the structures of a capitalist and patriarchal or capitalist-patriarchal society[6].

Eisenstein (1981) considers that the two systems are so closely interrelated and symbiotic that they have become one, for instance when an increase in women's paid work, due to capitalist expansion sets up a pressure for political change, and as a result of the increasing contradiction in the position of women who are both housewives and wage labourers.

Mitchell (1975) discusses gender in terms of separation between the two systems, in which the economic level is ordered by capitalist relations and the level of unconscious by the law of patriarchy.

Hartman (1979) wishes to see patriarchal relations crucially operating at the level of expropriation of women's labour by men and not at the level of ideology and the unconscious. She argues that within the field of paid work occupational segregation is used by organized men to keep access to the best paid jobs for themselves at the expense of women. Hartman (1981) contends that even within the household women do more labour than men, even if they also have paid employment.

She continues that the two forms of expropriation also act to reinforce each other, since women's disadvantaged position in paid work makes them vulnerable in making marriage arrangements and their position in the family disadvantages them in paid work.

Young (1981) cites limitations to the approach, arguing that specification of the nature of the separation between patriarchy and capitalism is necessary and achievable and that sustaining the duality of capitalism and patriarchy is inherently impossible.

Analysis of Patriarchy

According to Sylvia (1991) patriarchy is composed of six structures which are necessary in order to capture the variation in gender relations in westernized societies. These are:

- The patriarchal mode of production
- Patriarchal violence
- Patriarchal relations in paid work
- Patriarchal relations in sexuality
- Patriarchal relations in cultural institutions
- Patriarchal relations in the state

This paper will consider the analysis of politics and global affairs according to Waltz[7] which include the individual level, the state level and the international level. The individual has become a key security concern owing to the widening and deepening approaches to international security studies. The state is also a crucial level as it has an international legal personality hence acts as a representative of its citizens.

The combined activities of the individuals through Non-State actors, Non-Governmental Organizations and the state qualifies for the international trends in politics among other disciplines within the framework of security studies. The analysis will consider the approaches of both the Radical feminists and the Dual Systems Theoretical approaches to the issues mentioned.

1. The Individual level

Under this framework, there are issues that feminists consider vital to the security of the women. These are as categorized by Sylvia (1991), which in this paper will include:

- Patriarchal relations in paid work
- Patriarchal relations household production
- Patriarchal violence

On Paid Work

Radical feminists have little on this as most of their work is on sexuality and violence. Stanko (1988) addresses the significance of sexual harassment for occupational segregation. Women in areas of work traditionally occupied by men are more likely to report sexual harassment than those in traditional female areas of employment. Sylvia (1991) argues that sexual harassment is utilized to maintain occupational closure against women, as well as a more generally pervasive form of control.

The Dual Systems Approach

Hartmann (1979) argues that it is by excluding women from the better kinds of paid work that organized men are able to keep women at a disadvantage for instance in Trade Unions. That women's domestic work further hinders their ability to gain access to the better forms of work which require training.

On Household Production

Firestone (1974) argues that reproduction is the basis of women's subordination by men. That the biological hazards surrounding reproduction such as pregnancy, menstruation, childbirth, breast feeding and child rearing make women vulnerable and dependent on men. She continues to argue that in love, power plays as women are trying to catch the best husband and men's emotional development has been stunted by their upbringing in a patriarchal family. The solution according to Firestone is in eradication of the basic problem i.e. women's vulnerability in reproduction by developing forms of

technology to control limitations of biology in the interest of women. Rose and Hanmer (1976) on the contrary contend that Hartmann's view is naïve, the scientific progress by those who think technology is more likely to be used against women since it is controlled by patriarchal interests.

Rich (1977) considers children to be a major source of joy to women and motherhood to be a potentially blissful experience, that motherhood as an institution under patriarchy does give women a lot of problems, but this is due to patriarchy not motherhood itself as there is nothing essentially oppressive about children.

Dual Systems Theory

Delphy (1984) argues that the exploitative system is characterized as a domestic mode of production which is parallel to, but separate from the capitalist mode of production which exists simultaneously. Hartmann (1981) claims that women are forced to marry on bad terms because of their weak position in the labour market, as a result of patriarchal closure in employment. She goes on to use the 'time-budget' studies to show that husbands were a net drain on the time of a woman, not shares of domestic burden.

On Violence

Male violence against women includes rape, sexual assault, wife beating, workplace sexual harassment and child sex abuse. Brown Miller (1976) argues that men are brought up to be the Macho and are accustomed to using violence to settle disputes. The cultivation of violence among men finds its peak in the army in which many young men spend a portion of their lives 'glorifying the male strength', and that in periods of militarization and warfare the amount of rape goes up that is usual.

Davis (1981) critiques Brown Miller on the grounds of insensitivity to race and class issues. Hanmer and Saunders (1984) argue that the refusal of the state to intervene on the level of welfare provision and the other of the criminal justice system. Upon the examination of divorce petitions O'Brien (1975) came to a conclusion that men's violence was more likely to be cited if the husband:

- Was Less educated than his wife
- Had a lower occupation than the woman's father
- Was dissatisfied with his job
- Failed to complete high school or college
- Had disputes with the wife over the adequacy of the husbands income

2. The State Level

3. Patriarchal relations at the State

Radical Feminists: The state is defined as a specific set of social institutions/body which has the monopoly over legitimate coercion in a given territory or in terms of its function in monitoring social cohesion in a class society. Millet (1977:23) refers to the term politics as the power structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another. She goes ahead and claims that the relationship between sexes is political. Hanmer and Saunders (1984) sees men's violence as critical in the maintenance of the oppression of women and the lack of intervention of the state to prevent is analysed as being the state's collusion. Hamner (1978) in 'Violence and the Social Control of Women' sees the state as an instrument of patriarchal domination, its non-intervention part of the logic of the patriarchal system.

Dual Systems Theory

Eisenstein (1979) contends that patriarchy contributes to especially order and control, while capitalism provides the economic system driven by the pursuit of profit, the two are fused at the level of the state. Hernes (1984) in the context of the Norwegian State is concerned with a society which is ostensibly granting women equal rights with men. The state is important both because women have entered the labor market often as employees of the state and also because of the extension of state services which has been necessary for their movement from household to market work.

Conclusion:

The radical feminist approach sees patriarchy as a dynamic system in which men usually give up an activity only when they no longer wish to undertake it. There has also been a shift in patriarchal strategy from exclusivity to segregationist and subordinating.

Reference

- Sylvia Walby, "Theorizing Patriarchy", (Basil Blackwell Ltd., Cambridge, 1991
- Kenneth Waltz, "Man, The State and War", (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1954)
- Brown Miller 1976, Firestone 1974, Rich 1980

Researched & Written by:

- Okwemba Joel @JoelOkwemba
- Research & Policy Consultant

- June, 2015.
- For More info: Please follow [@JoelOkwemba](#)

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