



FEMINISM

Understanding Ourselves

Women's League of Burma
(WLB)

M A Y - O O M U T R A W

Feminism

“Feminism is grounded on the belief that women are oppressed or disadvantaged by comparison with men, and that their oppression is in some way illegitimate or unjustified. Under the umbrella of this general characterization there are, however, many interpretations of women and their oppression, so that it is a mistake to think of feminism as a single philosophical doctrine, or as implying an agreed political program.” (Susan James, 1998: 576)



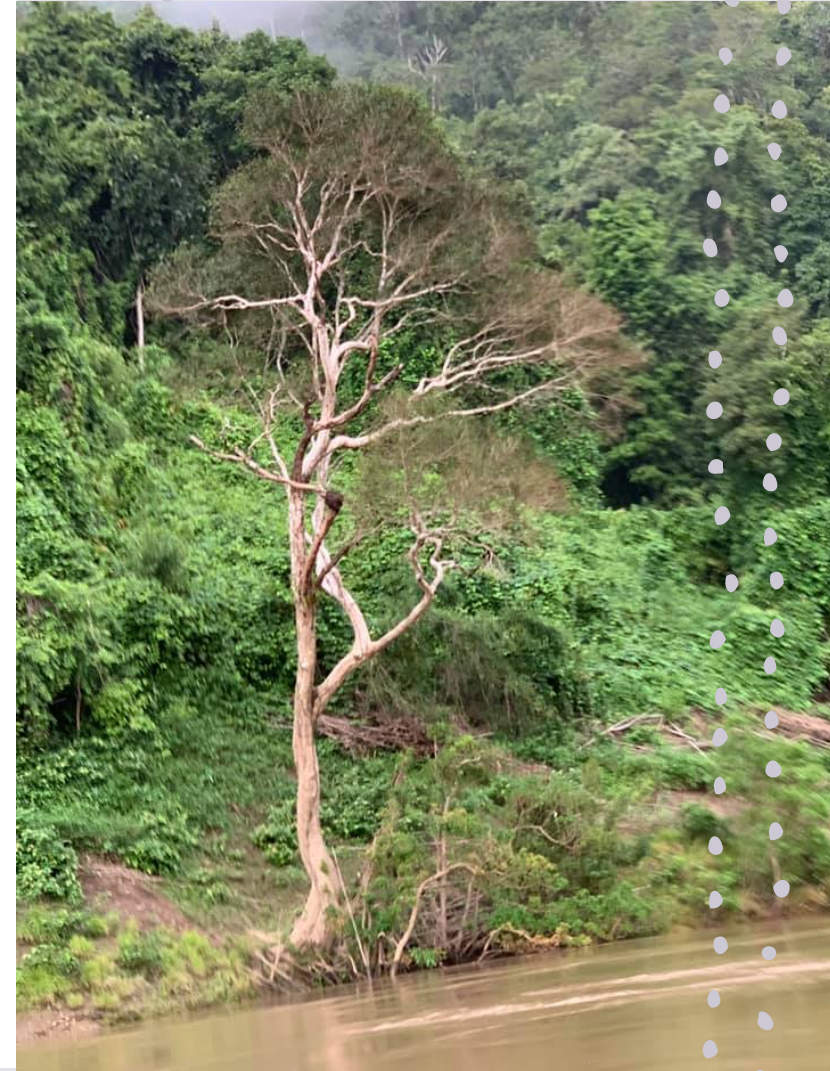
Feminism

“Feminism, as liberation struggle, must exist apart from and as a part of the larger struggle to eradicate domination in all its forms. We must understand that patriarchal domination shares an ideological foundation with racism and other forms of group oppression, and that there is no hope that it can be eradicated while these systems remain intact. This knowledge should consistently inform the direction of feminist theory and practice.”
(bell hooks 1989: 22)



What is Feminism?

- Feminism can be described but not defined as an organized activity on behalf of women's being, rights, and interests, takes many forms.
- Feminism is "a house with many rooms" (K. Mackinnon). There are different rights pursued by different thoughts or reasoning, however the common belief is that society and legal order is patriarchal.
- Feminism is both a historical movement and a political ideology.
- Feminist movement is a movement for social justice. It is a movement against sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression.



The Waves of Feminism



There are 3 recognized waves of feminism from which feminist theory is believed to have emerged:

- 1) 1st in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (campaigning for women's legal rights - rights of contract, property rights, voting rights);
- 2) 2nd was in the 1960s and 1970s (campaigning for women's right to bodily integrity and autonomy, for abortion rights, and for reproductive rights including access to contraception and quality prenatal care);
- 3) 3rd extends from the 1990s to the present (for protection of women and girls from domestic violence, sexual harassment and rape; for workplace rights, including maternity leave and equal pay; against misogyny; and against other forms of gender-specific discrimination against women).

(Not exhaustive and debatable)

Feminist Theory

- has always been about viewing the social world in a way that illuminates the forces that create and support inequality, oppression, and injustice, and in doing so, promotes the pursuit of equality and justice.
- considers how systems of power and oppression interact, which is to say it does not just focus on gendered power and oppression, but on how this might intersect with systemic racism, a hierarchical class system, sexuality, nationality, and (dis)ability, among other things.
- provides an analytic framework for understanding how women's location in and experience of social situations differ from men's.
- shines a light on social problems, trends, and issues that are otherwise overlooked or misidentified by the historically dominant male perspective within social theory.

Cont'd

- culturally looks at the different values associated with womanhood and femininity as a reason for why men and women experience the social world differently.
- believes that the different roles assigned to women and men within institutions better explain gender differences, including the sexual division of labor in the household.
- focuses on how women have been marginalized and defined as “other” in patriarchal societies, and also
- focuses specifically on how masculinity is developed through socialization, and how its development interacts with the process of developing femininity in girls.

Domestic Labor Division

Conceptualization of Expressive and Task Roles (Sociological Views)

Expressive Role - expressive roles tend to pay attention to how everyone is getting along, managing conflict, soothing hurt feelings, encouraging good humor, and take care of things that contribute to one's feelings within the social group;

Task Role - pay more attention to achieving whatever goals are important to the social group, like earning money to provide resources for survival, for example;

Sociologists believe that both roles are required for small social groups to function properly and that each provides a form of leadership: functional and social. But what does this mean to feminism?

- the man/husband as fulfilling the instrumental role by working outside the home to provide the money required to support the family. The father, in this sense, is instrumental or task-oriented --he accomplishes a specific task (earning money) that is required for the family unit to function.
- the woman/wife plays a complementary expressive role by serving as the caregiver for the family. In this role, she is responsible for the primary socialization of the children and provides morale and cohesion for the group through emotional support and social instruction.

Feminism, ultimately, is:

"Visionary feminism is a **wise and loving politics**. It is rooted in **the love of male and female being**, refusing to privilege one over the other. The soul of feminist politics is the **commitment to ending patriarchal domination of women and men, girls and boys**. Love cannot exist in any relationship that is based on domination and coercion. Males cannot love themselves in patriarchal culture if their very self-definition relies on submission to patriarchal rules. When men embrace feminist thinking and practice, which emphasizes the value of mutual growth and self-actualization in all relationships, their emotional well-being will be enhanced. A genuine feminist politics always brings us from bondage to freedom, from lovelessness to loving." **bell hooks**



Patriarchy as Invention of Men & Women

"I think I show that it was indeed a human invention; it was created by human beings, it was created by men and women, at a certain given point in the historical development of the human race. It was probably appropriate as a solution for the problems of that time, which was the Bronze Age, but it's no longer appropriate, all right? And the reason we find it so hard, and we have found it so hard, to understand it and to combat it, is that it was institutionalized before Western civilization really, as we know it, was, so to speak, invented, and the process of creating patriarchy was really well completed by the time that the idea systems of Western civilization were formed." Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*



Key areas of focus within feminist theory include:

- discrimination and exclusion on the basis of sex and gender
- objectification
- structural and economic inequality
- power and oppression
- gender roles and stereotypes

Some Issues in Feminism

- 1) Division of Domestic Labor
- 2) Media
- 3) Glass Ceiling (invisible barriers)
- 4) Social Inequality
- 5) Violence against Women
- 6) discrimination and exclusion on the basis of sex and gender
- 7) Objectification
- 8) structural and economic inequality
- 8) power and oppression
- 9) gender roles and stereotypes



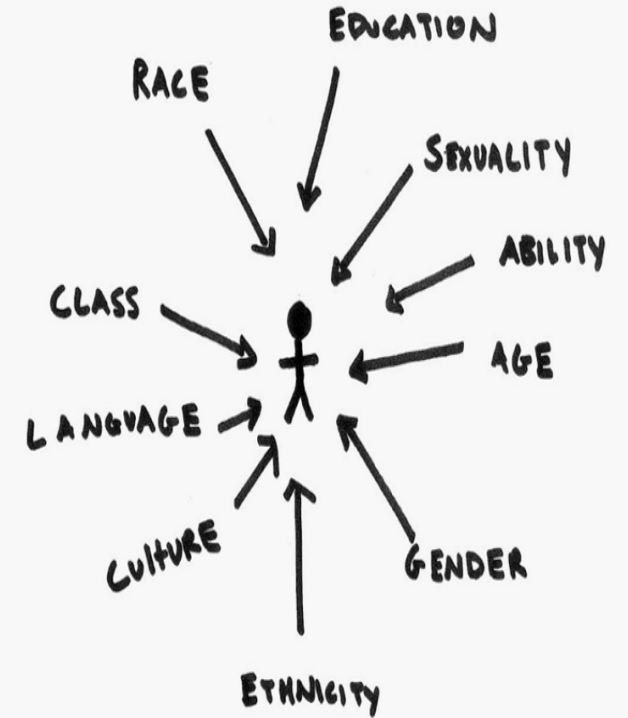
Intersectionality of Feminism

Intersectionality refers to:

- the simultaneous experience of categorical and hierarchical classifications including but not limited to race, class, gender, sexuality, and nationality.
- the fact that what is often perceived as disparate forms of oppression, like racism, classism, sexism, and xenophobia, are actually mutually dependent and intersecting in nature, and together they compose a unified system of oppression.

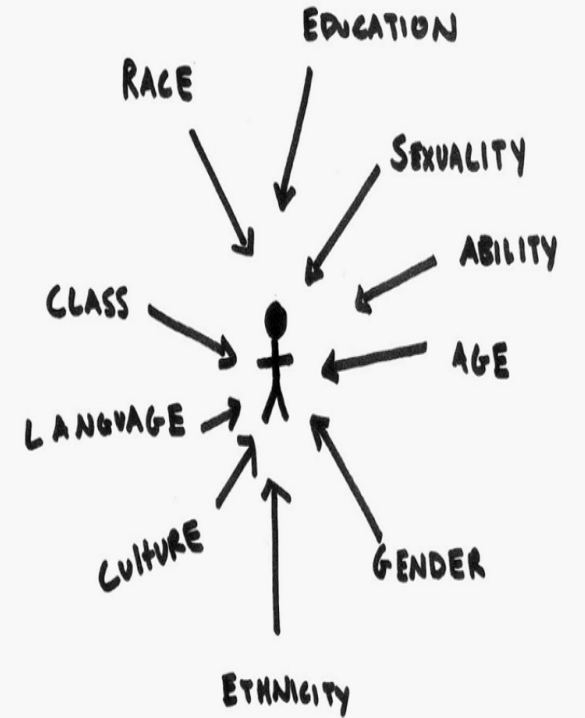
Thus, the privileges we enjoy and the discrimination we face are a product of our unique positioning in society as determined by these social classifiers.

There are many examples, but here are just a few



Intersectionality of Feminism

"...no woman is subject to any form of oppression simply because she is a woman; which forms of oppression she is subject to depend on what "kind" of woman she is. In a world in which a woman might be subject to racism, classism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, if she is not so subject it is because of her race, class, religion, sexual orientation. So it can never be the case that the treatment of a woman has only to do with her gender and nothing to do with her class or race." (Elizabeth Spelman 1988: 52-3)



The Method of Feminism

- The method of feminism is to promote awareness, for the purpose of 'consciousness raising.' K. Mackinnon
- The goal is to change and have a heavy influence over the law via evaluation of past and present laws.
- Since feminism is largely considered by some as a recent movement, it is in a lot of the past laws where we can find discrimination.
- "The constant revision of the law is needed for such a theory to survive, for this is not a chapter in human history but the instinct to survive." Adrienne Rich (feminist poet)



The Method of Feminism (Contd.)

- Deconstructing and Reconstructing - Unlearning, Undoing, and Relearning (the narrative in its entirety).
- Jurisprudence - examines the relationship between women and law. It addresses questions about the history of legal and social biases against women and about the enhancement of their legal rights.
- Sociology - By shifting the focus of social theory away from the perspectives and experiences of men, feminist theorists have created social theories that are more inclusive and creative than those that assume the social actor to always be a man.



Feminist Advocacy & Strategies

Feminist Advocacy

“Advocacy must be based on an analysis of what needs to be changed and why... this analysis must be feminist because only feminism gives an analysis of patriarchy and how it is linked to the structures and relationships of power between men and women that perpetuate violence, poverty – the crises that confront us.” -

Peggy Antrobus, Founder of DAWN, a leading feminist network in the global South

Feminist way of advocacy means infusing advocacy strategies with feminist values.



Feminist Advocacy & Strategies

Feminist Advocacy

- provides a framework to challenge local effects of the implementation of national policies and decisions.
- provides a concrete plan of action for activists from different regions to consolidate their efforts.
- allows for multisectoral approaches to issues (i.e. trade liberalization, food security, peacebuilding, and violence against women and migration).

Feminist Advocacy Strategies



Feminist Struggle

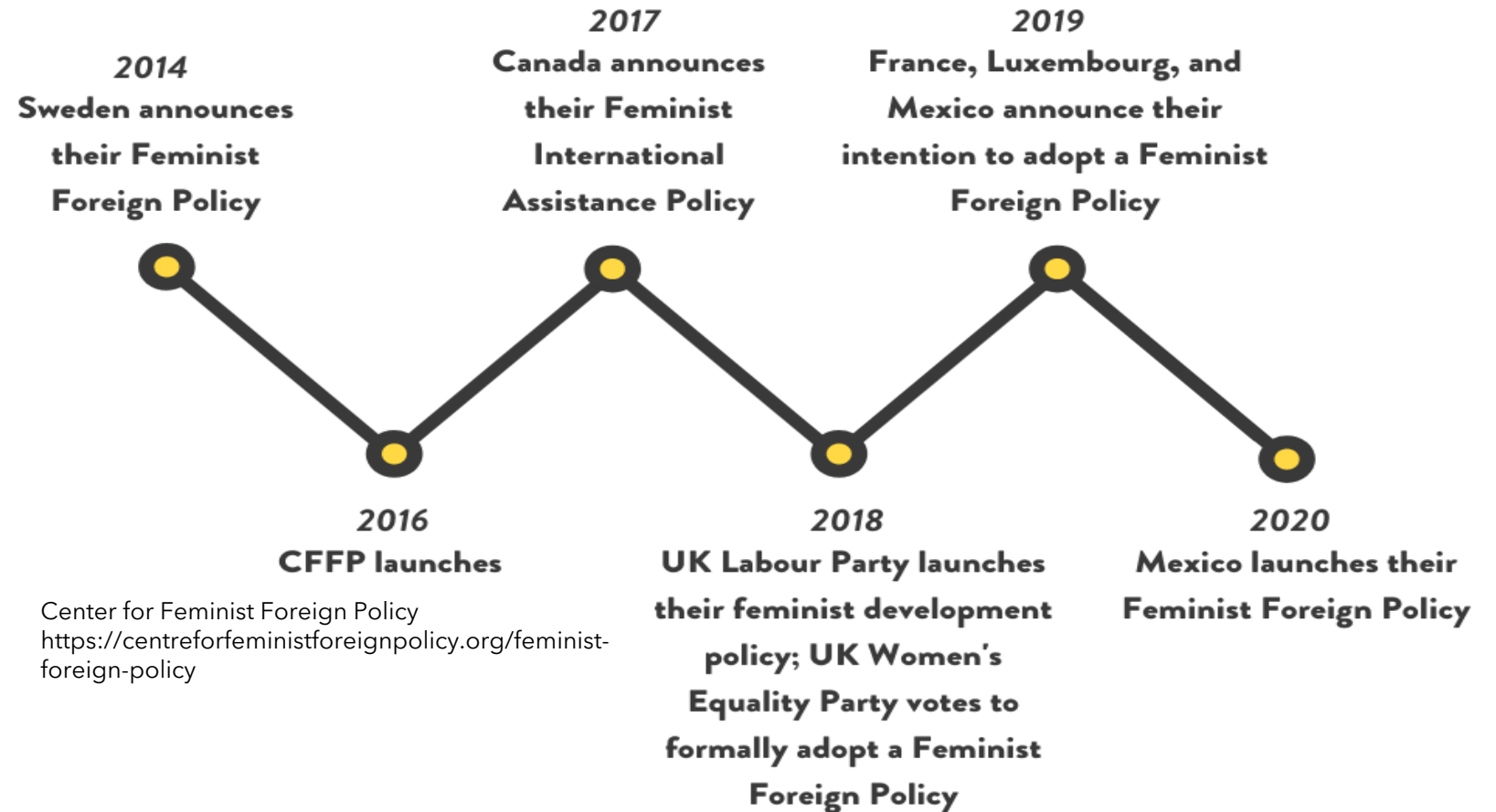
- Need to define feminist struggle in “political terms that stress collective as well as individual experience” (hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 27).
- A struggle to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression (hooks, *Feminism for Everybody*, 47).
- Struggle to end violence against women that this struggle be viewed as a component of an overall movement to end violence (hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 118).
- The goal, the soul of feminist struggle, is to end **domination** (hooks, *Feminism for Everybody*, 103).

Basic Feminist Ideas and Principles

- Feminists believe in **working to increase equality** (we should push for change toward gender equality and not just talk about it).
- Feminists also believe in **expanding human choice**, the idea that both men and women should be able to develop their human traits, even if those go against the status quo (i.e., a woman mechanic or a male nurse).
- Another feminist principle, **eliminating gender stratification** (laws and cultural norms that limit the income, educational, and job opportunities for women should be opposed).
- The final two principles are : **ending sexual violence** and **promoting sexual freedom** (women should have control over their sexuality and reproduction).



Feminism and Progress Around the world



Center for Feminist Foreign Policy
<https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/feminist-foreign-policy>

Non-exhaustive Example

The Future of Feminism, Our Future



Constant examination of feminism's relation to power

- Women must reconsider their relation to power and power structures.
- Power is complex, not negative or bad, and should not be consigned to the sole possession of patriarchy.

Textbooks on Feminism

- *The Second Sex*, Simone De Beauvoir (1949).
- *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Gerder Lerner, (1986).
- *Towards a Feminist Theory of the State*, Catherine McKinnon (1989).
- *Feminism is for Everybody: passionate politics*, bell hooks (2015).
- *Feminist Theory: from margin to center*, bell hooks (2015).
- <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-00571839/document> (*Self-determination as non-domination*, Iris Marion Young), (a federal feminist), 2005.
- K. McKinnon:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IW7hn-6j1Hw>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zpYegz1OqHA&t=4252s>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MIQfjFf5Gc>

