

than adding to our understanding but sadly are very prevalent within some sections of the Bahai community.

'Radical feminism' has a populist interpretation as very outrageous, the far side of the pendulum swing, almost a swear word or insult. This is not the meaning understood within feminist theory. Radical feminism represents a body of theoretical work where the hierarchy of the binary opposition male/female is reversed ie the female is privileged. From this theoretical base we see political action in areas such as rape crisis centres, women's refuges, anti pornography groups and an emphasis on 'women's culture'. The logical extension of radical feminism is separatism. It also relies on essentialist and universalist and ahistorical concepts of 'woman' ie that women possess some quality of femaleness that is unchanged across race, culture and history. We see some parallels in Bahai circles eg when women are valorised for being more nurturing, tenderhearted and compassionate and this is then extended to imply that all women have these qualities and all men don't. Readers not familiar with scholarly work in feminist theory may be familiar with names like Andrea Dworkin, Dale Spender, Mary Daly and Catherine MacKinnon as writers who have popularised this theoretical position. Radical feminists would often characterise 'reason' as a construct of masculine oppression and inferior to women's intuition.

Another area of feminist theory that has been popularised is 'Liberal Feminism'. In this theoretical work the binary oppositions of Enlightenment are accepted but attempts are made to move women to the other side. The 'rational man' of the Enlightenment is extended to include women. This leads to an emphasis on demands for equal rights and EEO legislation and Affirmative Action. There are parallels here too in the Bahai Writings with the emphasis placed on girls and women's education and explanations of women's inequality being caused by a denial of education and opportunity. There are difficulties here too. Of course the simplest of these being that there is an implication that women can be treated the same as men and that this leads to equality. It doesn't therefore allow for differences such as women's role as biological mothers. Writers like Betty Friedan and more recently Naomi Wolfe are informed by this theoretical base.

Socialist feminism has attempted to extend the categories of socialist theory to include an analysis of gender. This has led to important advances in understanding the material conditions relevant to the oppression of women. An extremely useful theoretical tool emerging out of this has been the concept of the 'sexual division of labour' and how this affects women's position in the home and the workplace, the kinds of work they get to do and the rewards for that work. eg women do not need to be recompensed financially for doing what comes 'naturally'. We can see implications in Bahai practice where women get to do the caring, mothering work and the cleaning, cooking and caring for children and taking children's classes especially for young children. I am not implying these are not valuable services but rather that they are not valued in communities and that men too would benefit from participating.

Postmodern/poststructuralist theories have moved the feminist project way beyond some of the theoretical impasses of other theories but once again there are problems. Perhaps one of the most important contributions here has been the deconstruction of the fundamental categories of men and women. What is a woman? What would constitute equality with men? Often the immediate response to the question 'what is a woman?' meets the response 'We all know what a woman is' Well I am not so sure we do. Deconstructing this term involves an examination of the power structures involved in establishing an understanding of this term, a historicising of this concept { Do I hear three cheers from the historians in our midst} and of the social location of women across class, race, ethnicity and sexuality. The Bahai writings do not assign essential gendered qualities to either men or women other than the biological reproductive functions. Nobody asked Abdul Baha what the differences between women and men are. A great contribution to these theoretical debates has come from the work of women of colour emerging from their discomfort with radical and liberal notions as they experience racist oppression from women and as liberal reforms do not meet their needs. For example while white middle class women might be arguing for abortion law reform, women of colour might be more interested in preventing any more black women being subject to involuntary abortions and sterilisations. (This is just an example, I know the Bahai position on abortion very well).

Postmodern feminism has also lead to important developments in the study of language and how that is gendered and how other supposedly fundamental categories such as reason and science are gendered, both in the sense of being founded on those binary oppositions and by solidifying our notions of gender. Important theoretical areas here are in looking at such concepts as 'women's experience' and 'identity', both of which are important in my own work with women mathematicians. Poststructuralist feminism provides useful tools for thinking about 'the equality of men and women' in the Bahai teachings because we have to go beyond attributing an essential female essence to women. We have to ask ourselves what 'equality' means. and most importantly to me we have to move beyond thinking of this principle merely in relation to the social position of women within and without the Faith. we have to look at how the denial of this principle informs the fundamental categories of knowledge and how our knowledges could be transformed to the betterment of all if they were founded on the spiritual principle of the equality of men and women and consequently the valuing of the feminine and the masculine. I can't write a lot more about this now because I need to bounce ideas around with Bahais about this. The kinds of discussion taking place here about science and religion need to be held about the equality of men and women.

Post feminism is a term that has appeared here lately and again has a popularised meaning [or misreading in my opinion] and another meaning in feminist theory. Postfeminism in the popular press means post in the sense of after, ie now that we don't need feminism anymore because women have got it made. {If you subscribe to this view ask yourself why the illiteracy rate amongst women in the world is rising while we are communicating globally}

Postfeminism in a feminist theory context means post/after the fundamental categories of feminism have been deconstructed., ie now that we know that `woman' is a category defined by history, culture, language, and class. Now that we know that white middle-class tertiary educated feminists cannot speak for the interests of all women across time and culture and class and that feminists have to look at how women have exploited and oppressed other women. Of course the other logical consequence is that the category `man' is also deconstructed and this has lead to some very interesting work on masculinities.

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