



Insights from Feminist Political Economy Pre-recorded lecture

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Outline

- Brief introduction to feminist economics & political economy
- Gender and feminist analyses of agrarian transformations (live session)
- Feminist research practice (live session)
- Feminist analyses of the COVID-19 pandemic (live session)

Part I. A brief introduction to feminist political economy

- What are the origins of feminist approaches to economics and political economy?
- What does it mean to take a feminist (political) economic approach?

Gender as a social construct

Sex – **biologically determined** characteristics

Gender – **socially constructed** category, based on our sex

Gender relations as socially constructed, not biologically/naturally determined – can be changed!

Gender as socially constructed – foundational cross-cutting principle of feminist theory

Key concern for feminists: understanding the origins of unequal relationships in society, between women and men

- What are the implications for the application of feminist theory to the field of economics/political economy?

FEMINISM

Feminism is the pursuit of equality between men and women. Feminists seek economic, political, social, legal and personal rights for women that are equal to those of men.

Feminist campaigns have campaigned for major societal changes such as voting rights, reproductive rights, greater political representation and fairer pay. But there is still a long way to go until men and women lead truly equal lives.



ECONOMICS

The word 'economics' comes from the Greek word 'oikonomia' meaning 'household management'. But nowadays the meaning of 'economics' has expanded to mean the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services.

When we analyse the economy we investigate the psychology of human behaviour and decision-making.



What is FEMINIST ECONOMICS?

FEMINIST ECONOMICS

Values the role of unpaid work carried out by men & women, in the home & through care work

Acknowledges that the economy depends not just on the production & distribution of goods and services, but on *co-operation & care*

Recognises that the interests of members of the same household may differ and that resources are not necessarily *shared equally*

Acknowledges that the *complexity* of human lives cannot always be quantified

Recognises that *relationships* influence how our economy functions



FEMINIST ECONOMICS

Feminist economics promotes economic equality between women and men. The activities, behaviour and decisions of men and women have a major impact on our economy. But mainstream economics has a tendency to be based on men's lives and recognises only work that is done for money.

A feminist economics perspective recognises the paid and unpaid work of both men and women.



MAINSTREAM ECONOMICS

Has a tendency to prize *money, machines & men*

Measures paid work in *Gross Domestic Product* (GDP), but fails to count the contribution of unpaid work

Builds its picture of the economy as consisting of people motivated by *self-interest & material goods*

Assumes that the influences on people's decisions can be objectively quantified & tends to build economic theories that depend on *mathematical models*

Fails to recognise *non-market activities* as important to the economy

Issues with mainstream economics

Male-bias in economics, reflected in

- **Models** - based on *homo economicus* (rational, self-interested)
- **Methods** – mathematical rigour, objectivity at the cost of robust empirical research (primary data collection), understanding context and processes
- **Topics** – narrow focus on market activities, separation of economic/social and public/private
- **Pedagogy/research practice** – transfer of pre-set knowledge, competition, male role models

(see Nelson 1995)

Feminist response

Aims to improve the discipline of economics in general

- Common misconception: FE done by women, for women, on women's issues
- **Models** – not only one model of individual behaviour (irrationality, altruism), consideration for gender dynamics, analysis of power and discrimination
- **Methods** – primary research, qualitative and mixed-methods and attention for processes
- **Topics** – beyond the separation of economic/social, public/private to understand interrelations
- **Pedagogy/research practice** – knowledge exchange, participatory methods
(see Nelson, 1995)

Not only one feminist approach

Integrate gender in economic analysis

Rethink economics as the science of social provisioning

Integrate intersecting inequalities in economic analyses

Understand power relations underpinning the functioning of economic systems

Analyse the interconnections between sociocultural systems of oppression and economic systems of exploitation

Social reproduction & capitalism

Social reproduction refers to all forms of work and activities needed to reproduce human life (e.g. care) and to reproduce societies (e.g. education, health care, basic infrastructure)

Two important processes within capitalism:

- ❖ Separation of social reproduction and capitalist production (home/market); devaluation of social reproduction
- ❖ Gradual integration of parts of social reproduction into market mechanisms; but devaluation continues and gender/class/race divides apparent in social reproduction workers

(e.g. see Federici, 2004; Winders and Smith, 2019)

A key question to consider

- Am I interested in capturing gender/intersecting inequalities as a key aim of my research?
 - > integration of gender into analysis may be sufficient
- Am I interested in understanding how gender/intersecting inequalities contribute to explain what I am interested in studying?
 - > deeper understanding of power relations and interconnections between oppression and exploitation may be needed