Course:
Latin-American Feminist Views on Social Movements, Democracy, Citizenship, and Globalisation

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Presentation

Within the historical context of the last few decades and of major recent regional and global transformations, the course intends to offer a view of theoretical production and political practice of Latin-American feminisms in the last three decades, which hold a plurality of expressions and conflicts that result from multiple intersecting identities—of class, race, ethnic group, sexual orientation—, focusing on the new directions and challenges feminisms face in the new millennium.

In particular, it addresses social practices and intellectual research that build bridges with other academic areas, and that recover the knowledge resulting from different social and cultural rationalities. It also intends to promote reflection on the action of social actors, their transforming identities and the subjective and cultural horizons in society.

In the context of these processes, it also recovers many of the strategies undertaken by Latin-American feminisms in different moments, which subverted existing interpretative codes on the condition of women and consolidated changes by making their exclusions visible and by positioning them as new actors, expanding a rights-consciousness to their own eyes and to those of society.

These issues will be analyzed regarding their influence on society’s democratic boundaries and the new meanings of citizenship that they generate.

Finally, the new interpretative frames posed by globalization will be analyzed, as well as the way in which Latin-American feminisms have confronted neoliberal globalization and built an internationalist theoretical and political perspective, in regional and global arenas, responding to new challenges in a globalized world.

From a feminist theoretical-political position, the course aims at promoting reflection and subjective experience that enables the world and change processes to be interpreted using parameters that better integrate new subjectivities, as well as their contribution to an alternative critical theory that accounts for paradigmatic changes from a perspective of intersectionality, interculturality and interdisciplinarity.

Positioning

The multiple and novel risks that emerge in a period of profound economic, labour, cultural, political, subjective, and emotional changes, have resulted in multiple and novel forms of resistance, as well as in a reconceptualization of historical movements. In this heterogeneous concert of struggles, each of them undermines traditional forms of doing politics, questioning the view of a unique subject and of privileged movements.
Many of the changes brought about by neoliberal globalization have had specific impacts on democracy and on the construction of citizenship, restricting rights, posing new risks while, at the same time, demanding new rights, new wills and new discursive capabilities to achieve them. These processes have also modified our subjectivities, leading us to re-examine practices and strategies and to create new forms of citizen power, at the local and global level.

The ways in which social movements are articulated have been crucial in this process by advancing, through their practices and proposals, new orientations and a search for a better world, opening a rich range of meanings, subjectivities and views. New actors, from multiple arenas and concerned with multiple issues, feel themselves to be protagonists in day-to-day political action, which they approach from their specific views and concerns.

The equivalence of struggles in politics – that is, the acknowledgment of their similar validity for questioning old paradigms and constructing new parameters for recognition and redistribution - is also a driving force for change. By confronting the specific exclusions and injustices they face, all the autonomous struggles of each diverse movement, expand democratic spaces and overcome issue hierarchies amongst them by establishing linkages and alliances. The struggle for recognition and the struggle for redistribution are two faces of the same democratic transformation, which, on the one side, confronts socioeconomic and resource inequalities, and on the other, enables universalizing the particular, transversalizing and confronting racist, sexist, class, sexual orientation and generational hegemonies.

New paradigms often emerge in horizons of reference once they have already begun to recreate themselves in practice. For many men and women, these new paradigms are also related to a critical view of traditional forms of doing politics, emphasizing economic justice at the same time as they address new issues, such as subjectivity, the body, difference, politicization of daily life, and interaction between the local and the global. The enormous political challenge that emerges in these new paradigms-in-construction is the management of diversity, which requires creativity in thinking and flexibility in action, as well as a permanent critical evaluation of the alternatives generated. This challenge involves cultural subversion, capable of disarticulating the grounds of power on which ‘single correct thought’ is based, in all its economic, sexual, political, cultural, day-to-day varieties.

These new subjectivities also lead to new democratic demands, from the margins of politics and not only in the institutional mainstream.

Nevertheless, the institutional arena is not alien to the influence of social movements; so another paradigmatic orientation is to visualize the kind of institutionality that corresponds with a democratic order. What kind of state, that overcomes populist, colonialist, exclusive, patriarchal and racist vices, or intends to replace state regulations with the arbitrary forces of the market, or, at the other extreme, aims at a totalitarian state that has no reference to citizenship. Many dimensions develop in this perspective. One of them is the struggle to recover some of the radical dimensions of liberal-democratic reforms: the recovery of the public space as a secular space in political life, separate from private influences. Another is the recovery of the concept of equality that emerges from the acknowledgement of the diversity – of race, ethnic group, class, gender, generation, belief, ideology, sexual preferences, even religious orientations - that equality requires if it is to be effective.

A more complex view of the nation-state demonstrates its limits regarding citizens’ rights at the local level, but also and increasingly, in relation to global problems and risks. This
acknowledgement requires us to re-think the state and its traditional ideals of sovereignty and the construction of a citizenship which is exclusively national, leading to new democratic forms and mechanisms, with appropriate regulations that enable progress in the construction of citizenship in the global arena.

These new contexts and spaces offer the possibility of inventing new kinds of democratic coexistence at the local and global levels, and nourish paradigms in which class, ethnicity, gender, age and many other categories are valid and recognizable to achieve. This is to recognize differentiation but not inequality, intersecting and interacting to construct our subjectivities, in compliance with new times.

Issues

The issues addressed will be the following:

1. Feminist contributions to critical theory. The perspectives of intersectionality, interdisciplinarity and interculturality. Feminist theory and practice: formation of the Latin-American feminist theoretical corpus. Subjectivity as a driving force and product of knowledge and change.


5. Globalization and its ambivalences. The new interpretative frames: crisis of the national homogenizing project due to the bursting of ethnic-racial, sexual, generational and gender differences. Feminist internationalism and its articulations with the global justice movements.

Methodology

The course will offer lectures of orientation and collective discussions based on recommended readings. The dynamic in class will prioritize individual and collective reflections on readings and contents of the assignments. Research on the subjects/realities developed during the course will be favored.¹

The course offers a selected but varied bibliography on feminist theoretical and political production in Latin-America, as well as from other thinkers, that contribute to alternative critical theory. It combines a set of readings - books, reflection papers, declarations, media articles - that deal with the reflection and action of social actors, as well as of the different and varied contexts in which social practices are situated.

Evaluation

¹In the majority of cases, copies of books and papers or Internet references will be available. Those which are not accessible will be replaced by similar available ones.
Readings

For each session, each student will present two or three of the readings included in the bibliography, in order to stimulate collective discussions and debates. The comprehension and assimilation of readings assigned for each session will be taken into account, emphasizing their theoretical, analytical and methodological contributions and preparing comments or questions for collective discussion.

Reaction papers

Throughout the course - and based on readings and contents of each class - each student will produce four brief essays (three to five pages) on the issues addressed. The essays will include a short summary of contents and a critical discussion of the central argument, highlighting theoretical or political contributions and methodological approach. The deadlines for each of these reaction papers will be decided in the first class.

Final work

At the end of the course, each student will produce a final essay (15-20 pages, double spacing) about any aspect of the issues addressed, developing a critical view on readings and a properly documented argument and analysis. This work may continue from the reaction papers previously presented. The final work will be presented orally and discussed in class.

Evaluation:

Participation in class: 30%
Works (reaction papers): 20%
Oral presentation: 10%
Final essay: 40%