



Assessing the destructive impact of ‘Stalinist feminism’

by **Augusto Zimmerman** (from the August 23, 2024 issue of Mercatornet.com)

With the rise of second-wave feminism in the 1960s, a significant slice of the popular culture has come to associate marriage (and motherhood) with “oppression”. Second-wave feminism is a development from late 1960s and the result of the writings of people like Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Helen Gurley Brown, and Gloria Steinem. These influential thinkers combined traditional Marxist methods with a post-modern interpretation (distortion) of reality, regarding values such as objectivity and neutrality as “the basis of inequality”. Such feminism is “result-oriented” and it postulates that, “when dealing with social inequality, there are no neutral principles”.

In the early 1980s, a British feminist candidly stated that, while the institution of marriage should be abolished it was “unwise” and “unpopular” to strike it down all at once. She advised that it would be better to destroy marriage gradually, through a package of legal incentives for freely available divorce, so that the durability and desirability of marriage would be eventually undermined. Numerous other examples could be given to demonstrate the hostility of feminists towards marriage. According to Linda Gordon, an American feminist and history professor at New York University,

The nuclear family must be destroyed... Whatever is ultimate meaning, the break-up of families now is an objectively revolutionary process... Families will be finally destroyed only when a revolutionary social and economic organization permits people’s needs for love and security to be met in ways that do not impose divisions of labour, or any external roles, at all.

In the words of another feminist writer, Marlene Dixon, “marriage is the chief vehicle for the perpetuation of the oppression of women; it is through the role of wife that the subjugation of women is maintained”. Published in 1971, the Declaration on Feminism declares:

Marriage has existed for the benefit of men and has been a legally sanctioned method of control over women... Now we know it is the institution that has failed us and we must work to destroy it... The end of the institution of marriage is the necessary condition for the liberation of women.

Kate Millet was an American feminist writer and activist. She attended Oxford University and was the first American woman to be awarded a degree with first-class honours after studying at St Hilda's College, Oxford. In *Sexual Politics*(1970), Millet states: “The complete destruction of traditional marriage and the nuclear family is the revolutionary or utopian goal of feminism”.

Millet’s book, writes libertarian feminist Camille Paglia, “introduced the Stalinist style of feminist criticism, a form of vandalism”. “It offered sanctuary to those who were looking for dogma, who longed for a religion to supplant the one they had abandoned”. Her Stalinist form of feminism, writes Paglia, “strides into great literature and arts with jackboots on and red pen in hand, checking off ‘racist’, ‘sexist’, ‘homophobic’, peremptorily decreeing what should remain and what should be discarded”.

Feminist legal theory

Catherine MacKinnon is the world’s most celebrated feminist legal theorist. MacKinnon teaches law at the University of Michigan. She is the author of many articles and books, including *Feminism, Marxism, Method and State: Toward Feminist Jurisprudence* (1983), *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (1987), *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (1989), *Women’s Lives — Men’s Laws* (2005), and *Are Women Human?* (2006).

MacKinnon approaches femininity as a socially constructed phenomenon. She claims that the very idea of femininity is a “patriarchal” construct that obscures and legitimizes the way gender is imposed by force. Her academic work, therefore, is focused on the law’s role in perpetuating “patriarchal hegemony”. “My goal is the collective critical reconstruction of the meaning of women’s social experience, as women live through it,” she says. According to law professor Denise Meyerson, her feminist approach to law can be interpreted as follows:

She argues that women do not so much speak with a different voice as have no voice at all. The domination of women as a class by men is fundamental to the legal system, and indeed, to the whole of society. Oppression on the basis of sex is, in fact, the most fundamental kind of social oppression, and the sexual abuse of women is the indispensable mechanism by which women are subjugated. Power and sexuality are therefore central to the radical feminist analysis.

Due to perceived male dominance, MacKinnon contends that “coercion is paradigmatic of all heterosexual relations and constructive of the social meaning of gender under gender

inequality". Heterosexual relations, in her opinion, inevitably result in male oppression through rape or other forms of sexual abuse and exploitation. In her own words: "All heterosexual relations are coercive in a society characterised by male supremacy: there is no clear way of distinguishing between consensual heterosexual sex and rape". Based on such an assumption, MacKinnon concludes:

Perhaps the wrong of rape has proved so difficult to define because the unquestionable starting point has been that rape is defined as distinct from intercourse, while for women it is difficult to distinguish the two under conditions of male dominance.

One may argue that MacKinnon's approach is deeply biased and sexist, not to mention incredibly condescending (women find it difficult to distinguish between two acts) and just plain wrong (rape is defined (in the WA Criminal Code at least - although the relevant laws in other jurisdictions are similar) as sexual intercourse without consent). Does anyone seriously believe that women are so powerless and hopelessly subordinated to their male partners?

And yet, MacKinnon seriously believes that "what a woman 'is' is what men have made women to 'be'". She argues that, as the "oppressed" gender group, women are hopelessly poor, weak, and hapless victims of a male-dominated world which allows men to "make the world of their sexual interaction with them the way they want it".

According to Camille Paglia, who describes herself as a "dissent feminist", MacKinnon is a "fanatic" and a "zealot" who upholds a "fundamentalist" view of the "new feminist religion". MacKinnon, she says, is an ideologue entirely trapped in a "cold, inflexible, and fundamentally unscholarly mind". Indeed, every argument MacKinnon provides begins with some big, flawed premise regarding "male supremacy" or "misogyny". She holds a rather debasing view of women.

Paglia thus concludes that MacKinnon is a totalitarian. She wants a risk-free, state-controlled world. She believes rules and regulations will solve every human ill and straighten out all those irksome problems between the sexes that have been going on for five thousand years:

... She has the dull instincts and tastes of a bureaucrat ... Literature, art, music, film, television – nothing intrudes on MacKinnon's consciousness unless it has been filtered through feminism, which has taught her, she likes to say, "everything I know". She is a Stalinist who believes that art must serve a political agenda and that all opposing voices are enemies of humanity who must be silenced.

MacKinnon is indeed a totalitarian. She holds no reasonable perspective or insight into the complexities of human nature and social interactions. In her writings there is always an assumption that the State can bring about women's empowerment, and that the realisation of women's rights necessitates the complete abolition of family life. In a rather totalitarian fashion, MacKinnon objectively recommends an ever-growing presence of the State in the private realm of the family. As MacKinnon herself comments,

When the law of privacy restricts intrusions into intimacy, it bars change in control over intimacy ... It is probably not coincidence that the very things feminism regards as central to the subjection of women — the very place, the body; the very relations, heterosexual; the very activities, intercourse and reproduction; and the very feelings, intimate — form the core of what is covered by privacy doctrine. From this perspective, the legal concept of privacy can and has shielded the place of battery, marital rape, and women's exploited labor.

These views are shared by the vast majority of legal feminists. After all, as feminist legal academic Hilaire Barnett candidly confesses: "Marxism has long been a site of special interest for feminist scholars". Marxist theory provides such feminists the view that every married woman suffers from a "false consciousness". Husbands are commonly depicted in the role of "oppressors" in much the same way as the bourgeoisie oppresses the proletariat. In *Political Visions and Illusion* (2003), Canadian political scientist David T. Koyzis explains:

Much as Marx reduces society in all its complexity to a class struggle, so also does radical feminism reduce it to a conflict between males and females, each sex (or gender, the preferred term) corresponding to oppressor and oppressed respectively. Just as Marx views capitalism as an all-encompassing system stamping its character on the entire society, so does radical feminism tend to characterise society in all its complexity as patriarchal. Much as capitalism is something to be transcended once for all, because it is the source of oppression in the world, so also is radical feminism compelled to work toward the transcending of patriarchy and the establishment of a non-patriarchal society, on whose precise contours feminists differ.

If Marxism effectively locates evil in the division of labour, radical feminists locate it in the sexual division of labour, some going so far as to advocate its abolition even in the biological reproductive process. Feminist jurisprudence thus becomes a general advocacy on behalf of women against men, much as Marxist jurisprudence takes a preferential task toward the proletariat and against the bourgeoisie. In both cases, justice, rather than carefully and impartially weighing the respective claims of diverse citizens, becomes captive to an ideological agenda. Injustice is the inevitable result, despite the rosy promises of both feminist and socialist visions.

The case of Betty Friedan

Betty Friedan (1921-2006) is particularly credited for initiating in the 1960s the second wave of feminism. A leading figure in the Women's Movement, Friedan founded the National Abortion Rights Action League and the National Organization of Women (NOW), both in 1966. Published in 1963, Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, according to the *New York Times*, "ignited the contemporary women's movement... and as result permanently transformed the social fabric of the United States and countries around the world".

Friedan claims in *The Feminine Mystique* that this book was written after she became aware of the "woman problem" in America's society. The book, she claims, would be a result of the

sudden realisation by a “naïve wife” that she was actually “trapped” within a male-dominated domestic relation. In her book, therefore, Friedan contends that marriage is a “patriarchal artifact” designed by men to force women to serve them and to have sex with them. To escape the “oppression” of marriage, here described as a form of imprisonment, Friedan recommends that every woman should join the workforce and leave her children in childcare. According to Daniel Horowitz, an American conservative writer, the radical activities of Friedan in the 1940s and early 1950s “provided the bridge over which she could approach the working class woman as the repository of her hopes and the material from which she fashioned her feminism in the *Feminine Mystique*”.

Friedan, of course, was not the “ordinary suburban housewife” that she claimed to be. In her youth, as a student at the Smith College in the 1930s, she was a notorious Stalinist and a member of the American Communist Party. After graduating at college, she worked as a political journalist for the United Electrical Workers of America, a trade union described by its own supporters and apologists as “the largest communist-led institution of any kind in the United States”. It is, therefore, no coincidence that Friedan held a hostile attitude towards marriage, combining this hostility with a support for free-fault divorce, women’s sexual liberation, and abortion on demand. As historian Sheila Fitzpatrick illustrates in her book *Everyday Stalinism*,

Communist attitudes toward the family were often hostile. “Bourgeois” and “patriarchal” were two words often coupled with “family”. The conventions observed by respectable society before the revolution were dismissed as “petty-bourgeois philistinism,” and the younger generation in particular made a point of its sexual liberation and disrespect for the institution of marriage. “Free” (unregistered) marriages were common, as was post-card divorce; abortion was legal. Communist women and men alike believed in equality of the sexes and women’s emancipation (though women were and remained only a small minority of party members). For a woman to be nothing but a housewife was shameful. Some enthusiasts went so far as to suggest that children would be better brought up by state children’s homes than at home with their parents.

Friedan embraced all these communist ideas that were tragically introduced in the former Soviet Union. She deliberately sought to subject the American family to a critical Marxist analysis. In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), Friedrich Engels contends that the economic power of the male within the traditional family subordinates the female counterpart to the condition of “a slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children”. Engels then proposes the elimination of the family as an economic unit, calling women to move into industry, for easy and unilateral divorce, and for the collective care and rearing of every child.

As a faithful Stalinist, Friedan was perfectly aware that, in the Soviet Union, the breakdown of the family facilitated by the Soviet Code on Marriage and the Family turned divorce into something easy and affordable. The result was a huge increase in casual marriages and the highest divorce rate in the world. The result of anti-marriage policies in the Soviet Union was

a dramatic increase in the number of broken homes and abortions. In 1934, in Moscow alone, there were 57,000 live births compared to 154,000 abortions. It is reported that large numbers of women died from these pregnancy terminations. Meanwhile, vast numbers of single mothers and fatherless children were generated, a situation exacerbated when the “Great Patriotic War” with Nazi Germany that wiped out much of an entire generation of young men. Soviet women were particularly affected by having to struggle as single mothers and having to work full-time, often living in pitiful accommodations. Meanwhile, the number of orphans skyrocketed. These orphans roamed the streets, dying of diseases and starvation, and forming criminal gangs that attacked people on the streets and stormed apartment blocks.

Friedan supported these Soviet policies since she perceived the traditional family as the biggest obstacle to the socialization of children. She desired to turn America into just another communist country. It is, therefore, no coincidence that Friedan was hostile to traditional marriage, unconditionally supporting no-fault divorce, women’s “sexual liberation” coupled by abortion on demand. She embraced the same experiment in social engineering that was so tragically adopted in the Soviet Union, knowing it perfectly well that her radical feminist ideas aimed at accelerating the disintegration of the “bourgeois family”. As noted by British historian Orlando Figes,

The family was the first arena in which the Bolsheviks engaged the struggle. In the 1920s, they took it as an article of faith that the ‘bourgeois family’ was socially harmful: it was inward-looking and conservative, a stronghold of religion, superstition, ignorance and prejudice; it fostered egotism and material acquisitiveness, and oppressed women and children. The Bolsheviks expected that the family would disappear as Soviet Russia developed into a fully socialist system, in which the state took responsibility for all the basic household functions... The patriarchal marriage, within its attendant sexual morals, would die out – to be replaced, the radicals believed, by ‘free unions of love’.

Due in great part to Friedan’s ideas, hostility towards marriage is one of the hallmarks of modern feminism. These radicals apply Marxist forms of analysis to groups identified by gender and race, urging them to raise their consciousness and throw off their “oppressors”. The natural effect is the lessening in commitment to marriage and motherhood. Mary Ann Glendon, professor of law at Harvard University and a former United States Ambassador, writes the following after reviewing an annotated bibliography of feminist works on motherhood: “The major works have a common thread ... the institution of motherhood is the root cause of oppression of women.”

Image credit: from left to right – Helen Gurley Brown, Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan, Simone de Beauvoir

(Available as a PDF:

<https://agape-restoration-society.org/ARC-News/Assessing-the-destructive-impact-of-Stalinist-feminism.pdf>)