Women's Studies: The Possibility of Rethinking and Designing the Foundations of Modern Culture

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Introduction to the Special Issue

Women's Studies: The Possibility of Rethinking and Designing the Foundations of Modern Culture

By Hamid Sajadi¹

The modern world is formed by the emergence of new ideas, thoughts, and actions of individuals and social groups. The transformation of authoritarian relations and liberation from domination systems in various places and contexts pushes the world forward, toward greater equality. Societies around the world have suffered from domination, inequality, and violence, and though many have been or are moving toward being liberated from these oppressive systems, these changes have not been simultaneous or to the same extent globally. In this global context, women and minority’s journeys toward freedom from domination, dependence, humiliation, violence, inequality, and oppression have not been very satisfactory.

There are still many societies where women are subjected to acts including honor killings, acid attacks, child marriage, and gender apartheid. The subordinate role of women in the public sphere is still prominent, and even in societies where women have access to education and training, there is often no equal employment opportunity for them. In fact, the fundamental inequality in political and economic opportunities has not yet been resolved, while the pay gap for women compared to men and the increasing cost of childcare has made it extremely difficult for women to continue working. Many governments also tend to protect and maintain current systems of domination and inequality, and strongly resist new developments.

Facing such challenges, women and other marginalized groups have sought liberation in many ways and have strived toward establishing a just and free society. In particular, where traditional groups—including governments and political parties—have declined assistance in these areas, the groups that have suffered the most from the domination system, such as women and cultural minorities, have found a greater opportunity to pursue their rights and aspirations. In fact, one of the principles of democratic societies is that they should seek to protect not solely the majority; rather, contemporary democracies should respect and value the rights of minorities.

The critical approach of the field of Women’s Studies has played a significant role in exposing the domination system, inequalities, and gender discrimination; the studies in this field seek to increase public awareness and disrupt the existing order. Despite the obstacles that still exist, women continue to take action toward eradicating all forms of discrimination and injustice, working toward a world in which women enjoy equal social, economic, and political rights without doing away with the concepts of masculinity and femininity—a world with a combination of both components, where neither dominates the other.

The articles that make up this Special Issue are selected research papers that were presented and discussed at the 2020 Global Conference on Women's Studies in Oxford, U.K. Highlighting gender discrimination in various spheres of society, exposing abusive attitudes towards women, identifying sources of security and insecurity for women, addressing women's lived experiences

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in specific situations like immigration, and evaluating government programs that address discrimination and gender inequalities are among some of the important topics addressed in this Issue. Adopting a critical approach, these studies depict discrimination against women in different societies and reveal the political nature of the domination system and gender-based discrimination and inequality in different contexts.

Women all over the world face a wide range of challenges. Explaining their perspectives and drawing on their experiences will help shape the future of the world. We hope that sharing this important research will be a small step towards establishing a framework for combating discrimination and violence against women and drawing a new formulation of equality in the modern world.