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Radical feminism as a discourse in the theory of conflict

Abstract

Radical feminism represents one of the types of the feminist theory, founded on the attitude that the society is based on the patriarchal grounds, because of which women are marginalized and discriminated against. This theory can be defined as a conflict theory because it is based on the assumption that a society consists of opposed fractions (sexes) whose relations are based on the domination of men over women, as well as the one that a society and different relations within it can be best described by observing these relations and the attitudes of sexes toward them. Since the radical feminist movement had been founded on the principles of Marxism, which, as well, represents the most important conflict theory, the comparative analysis of Marxism and this type of feminism is the key component of this research, in order to see similarities and differences between the two theories, and, based on those, define some of the main characteristics of the radical feminism as a conflict theory.

Key words: *feminism, radical feminism, theory of conflict, Marxism, patriarchy, power, repression, discrimination*

Introduction

Feminism is a contemporary social and political movement, motivated by individual and collective experiences of women, which is based on the claim that a society is based on patriarchal principles, according to which men are privileged over women, which results in discrimination against women in public and private life.² Although feminism is often considered a unique ideology, this

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² Although feminism as well as other social theories generally provides a critique of all social relations, most feminist analysis are focused on the nature of inequality between the sexes, through study of such areas as power politics, human rights and sexuality. Feminist political activism

theory actually makes a large number of routes created under the influence of various factors that may be related to the historical and cultural specificity, the legal status of women in certain countries or simply different feminist approaches to solving the problems that female population faces. Although there are a number of specified routes, the main differences between them are reduced to

represents the idea of social, political and economic equality between the sexes, and promotes women's rights and interests, dealing with issues such as sexual and domestic violence, reproductive rights, discrimination, sexual harassment and equal pay. At the same time, the most common areas of feminist analysis are: patriarchy, oppression, objectification (especially sexual objectification), discrimination and stereotyping. Contemporary feminist theory is generally associated with Western civilization, especially highly educated middle class in the West, since most of the known feminist theorists come from these circles, but the feminist activism is the movement that knows no national, territorial and cultural boundaries. Certain issues, such as domestic and sexual violence are universal feminist spheres of interest, while some other are tied to specific cultural contexts of different societies and include a wide range of discriminatory measures implemented against women from genital mutilation in some parts of Asia and Africa, to exercising their rights to equal pay and career prospects in North America and Western Europe. Although contemporary feminist theory has experienced its greatest expansion in the 70's and 80's of the last century, feminism as a movement has emerged in the nineteenth century, when the idea of repression against women in the patriarchy began to occupy more and more attention of intellectual circles in North America and Western Europe. Some of the earliest papers on "women's issues", though based on a criticism of the restrictive role of women, have not, however, those restrictions considered as the implication of the unfavorable social position of women within patriarchy and, accordingly, male responsibility and guilt. One of the earliest texts on this subject is the book by Mary Wollstonecraft, entitled "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman", written in the eighteenth century. Although by modern standards, the arguments presented in this book about women as a social elite, fragile and delicate creatures threatened by the intellectual and moral lethargy, does not sound feminist, social conditions of the period in which this work was created was such that it is justifiably considered to be the forerunner of feminism. One of the most important works in the development of modern feminism is a book by anthropologist Margareth Maed called "Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies", written in 1935. This book deals with the dominant position of women in Tchambuli tribe, noting that relations between the sexes can function and according to this principle, which in Western circles sparked a review of the European idea of the differences between the sexes as a fundamental and, instead, led to the conclusion that these ideas are primarily cultural and socially constructed, which means that they are subject to change. The roots of the modern feminist movement originated from the reformist period of the nineteenth century, and as the official date of the establishment of organized movement was taken the year 1848. when the first Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, the state of New York was held. Today, more than a hundred and fifty years after this convention, feminism has grown into a broad movement that includes different perspectives on what constitutes discrimination against women, and in what ways to fight for women's rights; more about the feminist movement and ideas look into: Hester Eisenstain, *Contemporary Feminist Thought*, Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1983; Catherine Eschle, *Global Democracy, Social Movements, and Feminism*, Boulder: Westview Press, 2001; Susan Stanford Friedman, *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998; Anne Phillips, *Feminism and Politics*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999; Sheila Ruth, *Issues in Feminism: An Introduction to Women's Studies*, California: Maufield Publications Co., 1990.

the extent to which relations within the patriarchal society are considered to be the cause of all forms of discrimination against women.

Radical feminism is a feminist theory course that starts from the idea of conflict between the sexes as a fundamental conflict, and oppression against women as a direct implication of patriarchy. This theory rests on the assumption that all social activity is the result of certain restrictions and coercion, and although every social system contains specific forms of interactive constraints, they do not have to cause repression. Under patriarchy, however, interaction and communication are limited in a way that creates and maintains rigidity which is seen as oppression, while patriarchy takes a central place where, and why, a fundamental power struggle between the sexes takes place. Considering that a starting point of radical feminism is the view that inequality between the sexes is the foundation of all other inequalities and oppression, it is possible to define it as part of the (discourse) theory of conflict.³

1. Basics of radical feminism

Analytically, the main difference between radical feminism and other directions of this theory lies in the extent to which the social system based on the power struggle between the sexes - ie patriarchy, the rule of men in which women are subordinate category - is considered to be the root of all further oppression, inequality and injustice. The view that the patriarchal society is generally unjust system in which women are categories of people exposed to various types of discrimination and exploitation, is a universal feature of feminist thought and the starting point for all routes within feminism, which, however, differ in the further formulation of this paragraph, its implications and desirable methods for the solution of problems of the female population. Radical feminist theory is based on the fact that gender inequality is the foundation of all other inequalities and oppression. Repression against women takes place in the patriarchy that is a hierarchical system of male domination over the female gender, which consists of, and is maintained due to the characteristics which include:

- I. The obligatory motherhood and limiting the reproductive freedom;
- II. The social construction of femininity and female sexuality through the creation and presentation of subordinative image;⁴

³ Theories of conflict assume that society is made up of opposing factions whose relationships are based on the shape and balance of power, and then analyze the social relations in line with the above mentioned factions in the fight for power

⁴ Look into: Bonnie J. Dow, *Television, Media Culture, and the Women's Movement since 1970*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996.

- III. Violence against women;
- IV. Institutions that favor the dominance of men over women, such as the church and the traditional family models.

The unique position of radical feminism is formed of the idea that, in order to end the oppression of women, the patriarchy has to be abolished, which potentially includes:

- I. Incitement and rejection of traditional gender roles and the ways in which women are presented / constructed in the language, the media, as well as in their personal lives;
- II. Anti-patriarchal constructions of female sexuality by banning pornography and rejection of traditional models of relations between the sexes;
- III. Achieving the reproductive freedom.⁵

In the development of radical feminism one of the basic concepts of Marxist theory, such as conflict, class, production, exploitation, revolution played a significant role, as evident in the works of some feminist authors where stated concepts serve as a kind of theoretical pattern in which by the “cut and paste” principle, individual, typically a Marxist, defined terms are replaced by their feminist equivalents, so that, for example, instead of the word “class” is used “sex” instead of “production”, “reproduction”, and the like.⁶ On these basis has been created an extensive feminist literature in which this theory was given its specific forms and directions that separated it from other sociological trends, including Marxism. Radical feminism is a specific feminist conceptual framework that can not be derived from Marxism or any other theoretical perspective, which explains the world from the first cutting blade on the sexual analytical axes, instead of explaining the repression of women and relations between genders in some other way. This approach assumes that the patriarchal society is the repressive system in which male individuals behave and think as “men,” but, at the same time, it claims that patriarchal tendencies are neither ideal nor inevitable for men who also suffer from limitations due to patriarchy and for them therefore, as for women, feminism would represent a liberating movement. The main feature of this feminist attitude lies in the study and the need for reconsideration of the source of power and desire for repression, which is attributed to the complex social factors which are constructed and not innate and essential.

⁵ For a detailed overview of the relationship of feminism, the Catholic Church and the pro-choice movement for the right to abortion look into: Germain Kopaczynski, *No Higher Court: Contemporary Feminism and the Right to Abortion*, Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 1995.

⁶ Look into: Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, New York: Morrow, 1970.

1.2. Basic concepts of radical feminism - the power, patriarchy and oppression

The theoretical framework of radical feminism, for the most part, consists of three key, interrelated concepts, or patriarchy, power, and oppression. In radical feminism, like in feminism in general, the patriarchal society⁷ occupies a central place where, and why, the fundamental power struggle between the sexes takes place. Patriarchy requires power, causes repression and maintains control systems without which its existence would lose purpose.

⁷ In an attempt to explain the origins and roots of patriarchal society radical feminists are faced with a very difficult task, since it seems that patriarchy exists as long as recorded history. This fact implies that any analysis of historical events and the reasons that have led so far for society to become a patriarchal society, can only be hypothetical, and beyond the information with which it would be possible to verify the obtained information. Despite this lack of data to analyze the origin of patriarchy, and given the importance of this type of social system for feminist thought, a theoretical models that explain the phenomenon of patriarchal society have an important place in the work of radical feminists. Thus, in their theoretical models, Elizabeth Fisher and Marilyn French assume that before the creation of patriarchy people existed and made the interaction in a way that did not cause the repression of women, or anyone else. The roots of patriarchal society, the authors put in the context of a set of historical conditions under which were held social pressures of material necessity that emerged during the "Neolithic Revolution", due to the transition from hunting to agriculture and animal husbandry. The social change that led to the patriarchy is described by hypothetical reconstructions involving social reactions and interpretations of real gender differences - the reproductive capacity - woman. These changes have led to control play-back replacing reproductive capacity and getting, symbolically and materially, into the hands of men. According to this model, at a practical level limiting sexuality directly affects the process of reproduction, or key field that controls the society that is faced with the threat of survival, given that any fluctuations in the birth rate in either direction, or in the social circumstances of birth, could create crisis for small and unstable society. (Look into: Elizabeth Fisher, *Women's Creation: Sexual Evolution and the Shaping of Society*, New York: McGraw – Hill, 1979; Marilyn French, *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals*, New York: Ballantine, 1985.) The roots of patriarchy, in the radical feminist analysis, are explained, in addition to reproduction, and a number of other reasons related to the relations between the sexes. Elizabeth Janeway the reason for patriarchy sees in the psychodynamics between the child and the mother, in which the patriarchal society is seen as a male response to women's power that comes from childhood. (Look into: Elizabeth Janeway, *Powers of the Weak*, New York: Knopf, 1980.) Robin Morgan in her analysis highlights the importance of women's role in the creation of social arrangements that have influenced the formation of patriarchy, while noting that at the time of creation, these social relations were not so destructive and repressive. (Look into: Robin Morgan, *The Anatomy of Freedom: Feminism, Physics and Global Politics*, Garden City New York: Anchor / Doubleday, 1982.) It can be concluded that the verification of the origin of patriarchy is difficult, if not impossible, which, however, does not affect the theoretical denial of the inevitability or positivity of this type of social system. In line with that, there is a higher degree of agreement between radical feminists when it comes to form and the effects of a patriarchal society, than when it comes to its roots.

Once established, the patriarchal system gets its own equilibrium. Deprived of the impact on the social processes, women⁸ spend their whole lives without regard to their ability to come to their own conclusions about a number of things that affect them; this situation is accepted as normal, and even those women who pay attention to their intuitive sensibility have a problem with its interpretation. Patriarchy, at the same time, within its own system of rules and values, allows the use of physical and other forms of societal violence against all those who violate the conceptual norms and rules of conduct. Patriarchy as a control - obsessed reaction,⁹ to certain forms of stress¹⁰ maintains a specific social analogy of reality, limiting interaction to eliminate individual perception, which enables the smooth functioning of the repressive system; On the other hand, the reduction or elimination of these restrictions would lead to a weakening of control and unpredictable reactions of individuals whose behavior would be motivated by the perception of the individual, rather than by a strictly defined standards, which would be a threat to the continued functioning of the entire system.¹¹

⁸ Although there is a widely shared belief that the patriarchal system adversely affects a large number of men, feminism as the direction is basically dedicated to women, and is based on women's experiences; For this reason, in this paper we talk in the feminine gender, when it comes to the subordinate category within patriarchal system.

⁹ Look into: Marilyn French, *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals*, New York: Ballantine, 1985.

¹⁰ Look into: Elizabeth Fisher, *Women's Creation: Sexual Evolution and the Shaping of Society*, New York: McGraw – Hill, 1979.

¹¹ An illustrative example of this situation are the military attitudes toward the role of free will and individual thinking. (Look into: Philip Slater, *A Dream Deferred: America's Discontent and the Search for a New Democratic Ideal*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1991.) In fact, as the military way of maintaining order and control is considered to be more appropriate than democratic in the field, and patriarchy can be defined as the ratio of the crisis, which is necessary to establish order and control, and whose benefits during the crisis go beyond the benefits of flexibility and freedom. Control requires inequality and hierarchical stratification that is useful in emergencies, since the centralization of power is the means to achieve short-term efficiency at the expense of flexibility, creativity and long-term effectiveness. Accordingly, Marilyn French and Elizabeth Fisher in their analysis take into account the possibility that the rigidity of patriarchy can be useful within the limited context of scarcity and condition of physical force. (Look into: Marilyn French, *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals*, New York: Ballantine, 1985; Elizabeth Fisher, *Women's Creation: Sexual Evolution and the Shaping of Society*, New York: McGraw – Hill, 1979.) Patriarchy, therefore, can be understood as the relationship of human beings to a situation where there is a threat to survival, resulting in the necessity of evaluating reactive control and maintenance of the same state. At the same time, however, it can be concluded that these reasons could be valid in certain historic periods, but also that the patriarchal society has long overtaken the context, and continued to exist regardless of the natural and social conditions, as well as requirements that they place upon human beings.

The concept of power, which is located in the center of radical feminist analysis, is defined as the essence of patriarchy and the central concept of abstract enemies that feminism has to face.¹² Marilyn French conceptualizes power in interactional terms, describing it as follows: "The power is the process of the dynamic interaction. To have the power, in fact, means having access to the network of relations in which an individual can influence, threaten, or persuade others to do what he wants or what he needs. Although no other syntax is available, in fact it is wrong to talk about the 'ownership' of power. The individual has no power. It is awarded by a large number of other people to the one that dominates and such allocation is irrevocable."¹³

The author emphasizes that the illusion of 'possession' of power can still be transferred to the belief in the longevity and efficiency of its effects, which, however, is not true, as the "coercion just seems simpler and shorter method of creating order than any other, but in fact, it is just so monotonous and long-term, and far more expensive than a personal encounter, persuasion, listening and participating in the process of harmonization of the group."¹⁴

In order to create and explain a radical - feminist model of conflict theory, which is based on the fundamental conflicts and power struggles between the sexes, this movement theorists pay particular attention to the analysis of interactive processes that can be identified as repressive as well as all types of communications that are part of struggle for power, instead of just studying the effects that relationships based on unequal distribution of power have on interaction.

The first aspect of the patriarchal society that represents the subject of feminist analysis on power is the process of parenting children of different sexes in accordance with the basic characteristics of patriarchy, which contributes to the traits and behavior patterns upon which this system is maintained. Although feminist theory for the most part is made up of stories and perspectives of women, arising from their own experiences, its specific analysis are related to the very strong social pressure to which male children are exposed in order to achieve 'masculinization and socialization' in accordance with the requirements of the patriarchal system, especially the fact that this pressure starts much earlier than the corresponding pressures on girls to internalize and accept the constraints and obligations of women.¹⁵ The logical question that arises in the light of this

¹² Look into: Marilyn French, *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals*, New York: Ballantine, 1985.

¹³ Marilyn French, *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals*, New York: Ballantine, 1985. p.509. Look into: Elizabeth Janeway, *Powers of the Weak*, New York: Knopf, 1980.

¹⁴ *The same*, p.509.

¹⁵ Look into: Ruth E. Hartley, "Sex-Role Pressures and the Socialization of the Male Child", in: Joseph H. Pleck and Jack Sawyer (eds.), *Men and Masculinity*, New York: Prentice Hall, 1974. p. 7-13.

analysis is: if patriarchy is a means of expression of men whose selfish, self-satisfying goals can only be achieved through repression against women, why a huge effort to impose certain behavior patterns to boys are necessary, if this behavior should be natural in the absence of constraints and balances?

Another important aspect of feminist research of concept of power is the very idea of its desirability, or the fact that many feminists, although were often accused that they have the desire to be (like) men, in fact, never showed any jealousy towards men because of their repression roles, nor it considered those roles to be desirable and worth fighting for.¹⁶ Although the need for domination over the other people is considered to be an essential aspect of patriarchy within radical feminism, this aspect is generally not seen as a 'natural' state, but as a factor of human interaction or as a principle of social organization. Anne Wilson Schaeff states that belief that the domination is desirable state, and that power operates by uniform distribution - for someone to have more, someone else must have less - is just one of the myths of the patriarchal system.¹⁷ As already stated in paragraph by Marilyn French, the establishment of power over other people is a process that takes time and requires the same amount of energy as well as other ways of directing others to cooperate, which negates the belief that repression is in the short-term interests of the one who performs it. Accordingly, if the position of hegemony and domination gradually loses its appeal after it is established, the idea that power is fundamentally preferred over others becomes hard to defend. Finally, given that the patriarchal hierarchies by feminists are blamed for many social problems such as the deliberate destruction of the natural environment, inadequate systemic reactions to individual and collective problems and political attitudes that at the international level lead to permanent confrontations, the idea that this kind power in any meaningful, functionalist way serves the interests of society, also seems indefensible.

The third key concept of radical feminism is the repression, which in this direction is explained with the help of a specific system of common beliefs and concepts that describe the patriarchal society. Radical feminism is based on the assumption that all human activity is the result of certain social restrictions and coercion, and although every social system contains specific forms of interactive constraints, they do not have to cause repression. Under the patriarchal system, however, interaction and communication are limited in a way that creates and maintains the rigidity that is perceived as repression.

¹⁶ Look into: Marilyn French, *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals*, New York: Ballantine, 1985; Anne Wilson Schaeff, *Women's Reality: an Emerging Female System in the White Male Society*, Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1981.

¹⁷ Look into: Anne Wilson Schaeff, *Women's Reality: an Emerging Female System in the White Male Society*, Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1981.

The focus of patriarchy is on the sexuality, and it operates on the principle of gender polarization of society in which the poles are rigidly defined based on competitive - or uncompetitive conduct that is related to the intensity of sexuality determined by certain specific restrictions. The value system of patriarchal society constructs experience and meaning of emotions differently for men and women, focusing sexual expression in different patterns, so that the desire to express one's sexuality fits into polarized concepts of sexual restrictions.¹⁸ The concept of sexuality in a patriarchal society has profound effects on the structure of sexually specific, appropriate models of thinking, personality, behavior and mood. These patterns are complex and complicated, but among them, the core model is the one in which the restrictions placed towards women are associated with the processes of analytical thinking. This model operates by discouraging and deterring women from analytical thought process on the grounds that they are less able than men to understand complex concepts or to have ideas that are worth of attention. On the other hand, men are also placed restrictions on the recognition, expression and interpretation of emotions. Women are, therefore, emotionally exploited as a source of empathy and intimacy, or feelings detached from meaning, power and self-assertion, and, at the same time, are methodically discouraged from analytical thinking. Encouraging women to emphasize feelings without meaning and emotional interactions in a patriarchal society is seen as a duty and moral behavior, which contributes to the retention of pleasant emotional aspects of existence that are both 'safe' and harmless for the survival of the repressive system. Advantages of emotional intimacy and interpersonal communication are, therefore, partially retained, but are separated by different mental processes. Thus, feelings, along with sexuality and reproduction, in the radical - feminist analysis take place of typically women qualities, from which they are, however, alienated. On the other hand, men, who are less constrained in the models of behavior and cognitive processes suffer from significant limitations in the sphere of emotions. Given the important epistemological role of emotions, these limitations prevent a full understanding of many processes, that

¹⁸ Sexuality is a powerful force that sometimes can be used to help individuals to overcome social barriers. When it is, however, very strictly limited, it can also function as a conservative force whose role is to maintain the constraints that consist of the fact that access to sexual experience is socially organized to be easily accessible only to those who adapt their behavior to defined roles. Patriarchal patterns of sexuality on the example of subordinative image of women in the West, explains Catherine A. MacKinnon stating that "sexual desire in women, at least in this culture, is socially constructed so that it leads to us wanting to start our own self-destruction. That is, our subordination is eroticized as a female, in fact, something like that, to some extent, and attracts us, although not nearly as much as it attracts men. This is our part in this system that is not in our interests, our share in this system that is killing us." (Catherine A. MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1987. p. 54.)

among other things, require observation from emotional angle. Due to the lack of a large amount of information necessary for understanding the certain situations, the use of power and responsibility for deciding on the procedures, are opposing the power of men to their lack of understanding of exactly that area on which they have the authority. Frustrations arised from this situation cause a desire for control - because what you can control can apparently be understood, allowing the reaction to certain circumstances. When the patriarchal value system, in which the emphasis is placed on having the power, exists in parallel with the above stated dynamic situation, the desire to control intensifies. Men, therefore, function as agents of the main guidelines of the patriarchal system: the establishment and maintenance of control for its own sake. Under these conditions, the ability to limit the extent to which norms can be extended or abolished, are becoming significantly less, and instead strongly regulated rigidity of the social processes can be achieved at the expense of flexibility.¹⁹ The end result of this process is the oppression of women that most radically - feminist theorists consider for the basic model of the male quest for power over other people, as well as the fundamental form of conflict between the sexes. The process of domination over women is spreading to many men; desire for domination, therefore, exists as the effect of patriarchy to men, as women's liberation of systematic oppression makes a fundamental prerequisite to free all people from the universally destructive social model.

After listing the main characteristics and analysis of concepts of patriarchy, power and oppression within radical feminism, it can be said that, in the perspective of feminist direction, patriarchy is seen as a multidimensional phenomenon in which the control of individuals is possible because of their own co-operation with the system. According to the radical feminists, oppression under patriarchy does not benefit anyone, but, instead, it is damaging all the inhabitants of this planet. At the same time, however, although individuals are becoming objective victims of this repression, its immediate source is not external but internal. In other words, the social structure to the fullest extent are a common conceptual structure, located in the human mind, in spite of their real existence and reality of repression they cause.

Radical feminism does not predict extreme methods of changing the patriarchal system. The reasons for this attitude, besides the fact that feminist theory the concept of power over other people generally consideres problematic, mainly lies in the real constraints in the prospect of working women, due to lack of numerical and physical strength, just have to be limited to relevant, applicable methods.

¹⁹ Look into: Marilyn French, *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals*, New York: Ballantine, 1985.

The most important place among these methods takes an individual “awareness” in which members of oppressed populations begin to make conclusions and decisions based on their own feelings and thoughts, regardless of whether they are consistent with the patriarchal norms or not. Only with this individual development of consciousness, it is possible to change the nature of social relations embedded in the patriarchal system. The “revolution of ideas” in which there will be a replacement of one model of thinking with other, is the only way to break down the patriarchy and to establish a social system based on humane relations among people, which will not be characterized by subordination and repression. In this way, considered by the radical feminists it would come to improving the status of not only women but also men, whose self-assertion would no longer depend on the degree of inferiority of other groups.²⁰

2. Comparative analysis of Marxism and Feminism

Theories of conflict²¹ assume that society is made up of opposing factions whose relationships are based on the shape and balance of power, and then

²⁰ This kind of change describes and Marilyn French in her comparative analysis of patriarchy and feminism, saying: “The only true revolution against patriarchy is the one that removes the idea of power from the central position, and instead raises the idea of pleasure. Despite the contempt which existed in relation to this quality during thousands of years, satisfaction, happiness ... in its broadest and deepest sense - is in fact, the greatest human good. In order, however, “for happiness to replace the power”, it is necessary to change the collective consciousness in which is deeply rooted the idea about inequality or inferiority of one category of the population as a measure of personal success and social position of the other, which French describes with the following words: “In order to restore satisfaction at the central position it is necessary to restore the value of beings, and, therefore, the nature ... If men and women were seen as equal, if male self-assertion would not depend on the inferior groups, other stratification would also become unnecessary.” The author further points out that this idea is just a sketch of feminist beliefs, and that the goal of the feminist movement is not the overthrow of any government or certain structure, but the replacement of one way of thinking with another. Feminism increases the welfare of all its supporters, which may attract those who initially do not consider this movement close to them. Personal well-being as a result of the application of feminist principles, according to French, is caused by integration of personality and the use of the entire range of talent that an individual possesses. The author emphasizes the fundamental differences between patriarchy and feminism, as competing ideas about social relations, and observes that “patriarchy, which in all its forms requires a kind of self-sacrifice, denial or repression in the name of some higher good that is rarely (if ever) achieved in reality, focuses on the superiority, victory and satisfaction because of the final triumph,” while feminism, on the other hand, “requires a whole being in the name of the current well-being, and focuses on the integrity, community and enjoyment of this experience.” (Marilyn French, *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals*, New York: Ballantine, 1985. p. 444-445.)

²¹ Sociological theories, according to their general analytical approaches can be divided into: the functionalist (or structural - functionalist or structuralist), theories of conflict and interactionist

analyze the social relations in accordance with the position of the factions fighting for power. Since, as already noted, radical feminism is based on the basic assumption that the poles are confronted, that men in the patriarchal system, have power and carry out repression against women, as well as company and various relations within it may be best explained by just watching the sex ratio towards this situation, this line can be defined as a theory of conflict.²² In order to establish radical feminism into the context of general sociology and sociological theories, and according to its definition as a theory of conflict, it is important to compare the similarities and differences of radical feminist with theory of conflict on whose basis this kind of feminism arose, or Marxism. In the beginning it is important only to point out that the similarities between Marxism and feminism are generally numerous, which, among other things, led to the formation of direction known as Marxist feminism. This theory, as its name tells it, was created in the ranks of the female members of the Marxist organization of the United States, such as, for example, “*Students for Democratic Society*”. These women dissatisfied with their marginal status within leftist groups used the Marxist theory in order to define the political situation of women in capitalist society and on the criticism of the limited Marxist perspectives have developed new direction of feminism, which, in fact, is the improvement of Marxist dialectical conceptualization of repression against women. These materialistic conceptualization, although previously recognized in Marxist literature, until the emergence of the aforementioned feminist directions were generally ignored as an analytical topic.²³ The starting point of Marxist feminism is the claim that capitalism, with its emphasis on the creation of economic dependence, and the root of repression carried out against women and inequalities between the sexes are ultimately determined by the capitalist mode of production, while the general social divisions are related to the class. Women’s subordination is seen as a form of oppression that is held because it serves the interests of capital.

In addition to Marxist feminism, feminist direction largely inspired by Marxism, is also a radical feminism. Since the focus of this paper is radical feminism as a theory of conflict, it is important to compare the similarities of this and the Marxist theory of conflict.

- I. As already pointed out, radical feminism, like some other feminist approaches, is basically inspired by Marxist political theory, and is based on

theories; Look into: Jože Garičar, *The Overview of Sociological Theories*, Belgrade: Publishing company Work, 1969; Randall Collins, *Conflict Sociology*, New York: Academic Press, 1974.

²² Look into: Hester Eisenstein, *Contemporary Feminist Thought*, Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1983.

²³ Look into: Robim Morgan, *The Anatomy of Freedom: Feminism, Physics and Global Politics*, Garden City New York: Anchor / Doubleday, 1982.

- the Marxist assumption that it is not enough just to study society, but it is necessary to completely transform it.
- II. Both theories are based on the basic assumption that society is made up of opposing factions defined by relationships based on the distribution of power, and then analyze the society and all its processes from the perspective of fundamental power struggle.
 - III. Social conditions which allow the maintenance of specific power relations, the long-term repression of a faction in the conflict, represents the next fundamental similarity of Marxism and radical feminism. In both cases, the process of repression is the result of two distinct but mutually dependent and complementary factors, where the first represents the direct use of force by the dominant populations against 'recalcitrant' members of subordinate categories, and the second is the internalization of the worldview of subordinate category, which is based on the belief in the accuracy and naturalness of subordination, and, therefore, in fairness of socio - political system in which the processes of repression are going on. The function of this internalized worldview or ideology, is the creation and maintenance of a system of rules and values through which members of subordinate populations themselves believe in the 'naturalness' and 'natural tradition' of their inferior position in relation to members of other categories. In other words, although the members of the subordinate class are aware of differences of their social class position as individuals in the presence of individuals from the other categories, they have a belief that this categorical distinction is the 'natural' and 'fundamental' division and not the social construction based on injustice and inequality. It is this system of 'justice illusory' that minimizes the possibility of real large-scale conflict in a society based on oppression of certain categories of people who, consciously or unconsciously, accept their inferior position, and live in illusion of 'natural' division of roles, rights and power. These psychological and cultural basis of values enable the functioning of repressive societies based on gender and / or class distinctions, and lead to fourth common characteristic of Marxism and radical feminism.
 - IV. Both theories have stated that the weak point of the repressive system is the fact that the success of repressor depends on whether or not they will forever have to use repressive methods to subjugate subordinate groups.²⁴ Radical feminism solution for repression sees in erosion of ideology and

²⁴ Look into: Karl Marx, "Manifesto of the Communist Party", in: Robert C. Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader, The Second Edition*, New York: Norton, 1978. (The Original Edition published in 1872) p. 469-501; Carol Hanish, "The Personal is Political", in: Jerome Agel (ed.), *The Radical Therapist*, New York: Ballantine, 1971. p. 152-155.

raising the awareness of subordinates, or the termination of the participation of women in the repression that is performed on them.²⁵ Within Marxist theory, there are also less radical directions²⁶, based on the propagation of non-cooperation and discipline of subordinate populations, that would lead to paralysis and inability of repressive system to function in a way that the repressors would be forced to either accept the need for negotiations in order to gain the voluntary cooperation by subordinates, or that every time they resort to lengthy and exhausting violent methods of coercion.

In addition to the fact that between radical feminism and Marxism are significant similarities, the two theories also differ on the following key issues:

- I. Although Marxism and radical feminism are based on the basic assumption that society is made up of opposing factions defined by relationships based on the distribution of power at this point, however, theories diverge on the issue of defining the opposing faction, respectively the opponents in the struggle for power. On the one hand, Marxism is crossing its formative relationship with fighting forces for the accumulation of material goods, regarding ownership and control of the means of production in order to further their accumulation, and describes two opposing classes - the working class and the class of owners of the means of production - as the opponents in the struggle for power. On the other hand, radical feminism is based on the relations between the sexes as a fundamental social conflict from which they arise and upon which other social processes are based on, and which is defined by the dominance of the male over the female sex, in the system based on the subordination and exploitation of women.²⁷
- II. In the case of Marxist analysis there is a belief that a violent confrontation of vastly superior subordinate members with the ruling class, provided that participation in this confrontation take the masses of the oppressed population, would mean their certain victory, which led to the results that within the Marxist tradition was directly suggested a violent revolution of the working class as an ideal solution to the problem of re-

²⁵ Carol Hanish, "The Personal is Political", in: Jerome Agel (ed.), *The Radical Therapist*, New York: Ballantine, 1971. p. 152-155.

²⁶ Marxism is generally based on the idea that a violent confrontation of numerically superior subordinate members of the ruling class would mean their victory, which led to the fact that, as a solution to the problem of repression, was directly suggested a violent revolution of the working class.

²⁷ Look into: Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

- pression.²⁸ Radical feminism, on the other hand, only provides methods of undermining the patriarchal ideology of “raising the awareness” and failing to cooperate with the system.
- III. Within radical feminism there is no theorizing equivalent to material wealth and what it represents in Marxism, that is one particular thing that is, and for what, parties fight. Instead, much more common is the observation that men exert repression over women from ultimately unnecessary,²⁹ or pathological irrational reasons.
 - IV. Due to the radical feminist theory, there is not a “thing” for which the struggle for power becomes inevitable, theorists of this route often considered the evaluation of power of some people over others theoretically problematic, whereas Marxism generally accepts this kind of power as a desirable, explaining the repression through the possibility of performing the same. This, fundamentally different, approach to the distribution of power is one of the most important differences between the two theories.

Conclusion

Radical feminism is one of the directions of feminist theory, formed on the view that the social system is based on a patriarchal basis, resulting in the marginalization and discrimination against women in all spheres of society. This route starts from the idea of conflict between the sexes as a fundamental social conflict, which classifies this theory as a sociological theory known as the theory of conflict. As feminist theory generally originates from Marxism, which is also the most famous theory of conflict, the comparison of the two theories is one of the best ways to set up a radical feminist theory in the context of theory of conflict. Analyzing these two theoretical directions can be pointed out that the similarities between Marxism and feminism are mainly related to the definition and characteristics of the forms of society and social conditions within which there is a conflict and repression carried out, as well as potential ways to combat the repressive processes. As part of its general characteristics, both theories are based on the common assumption that society is made up of conflicting elements engaged in a power struggle. Following common characteristic is related to the social conditions that allow repression, which consist of the use of force by

²⁸ Look into: Karl Marx, “*Manifesto of the Communist Party*”, in: Robert C. Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader*, The Second Edition, New York: Norton, 1978. (The Original Edition published in 1872) p. 469-501.

²⁹ Look into: Robin Morgan, *The Anatomy of Freedom: Feminism, Physics and Global Politics*, Garden City New York: Anchor / Doubleday, 1982.

the repressor and the simultaneous cooperation of subordinates in this process, which comes from their belief in the 'naturalness and inevitability' of their subordinate position. Marxism and radical feminism share the belief that the main problem is the fact that the repressor, in order to maintain a repressive system requires constant application of force, and as a way to change this system, both theories propagate the non-cooperation by subordinate populations with the system. Besides the indisputable similarities between these two theoretical directions, there are also significant differences. Both theories are based on the idea of social relations based on a fundamental conflict between opposing factions, but they differ in their definition: on the one hand, Marxism opposing sides defines as a different class, while, in the case of radical feminism there are various poles. While Marxism, however, in order to overthrow repressive system, among other things, proposes the methods of violence, feminism is held on a peaceful way to bring down the system by raising awareness and mental undermining the foundations of a patriarchal society. A significant difference between these directions is linked to the case of conflict, which in Marxist theory represents material wealth, while in radical feminism this case simply does not exist. Relationship to power, as the main reason for continuing the conflict, is also different in these two directions. While, on the one hand, Marxism considers power as desirable, radical feminism in most cases does not hold the view that the power over other people is necessary for the functioning of society. The essence of the feminist direction lies in the study and the need for reconsideration of the source of power and desire for repression, which are attributed to the complex social factors which are constructed and not innate and essential. Although radical feminists consider patriarchal system to be oppressive, in which women are victims of male portage for power, they, also, generally argue that patriarchal tendencies are neither inevitable nor ideal for men, who also suffer from limitations due to patriarchy, and for which, therefore, as well as for women feminism would represent a freeing movement.

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