

Session 10: 24th April 2007

### **Book Review Assignment**

The Disorder of Women, by Carole Pateman is a book that addresses the challenges and problems of democracy, citizenship and the welfare state with respect to women's participation. The essays Pateman reviewed covered democratic and contract theories, she argued that the historical patriarchal beliefs / rules of society and political structures have created an environment that is difficult for feminist theorists to actively participate in debating political theory (Pateman, 1989). The following two quotes highlight Pateman's central theme that historical political theories and structures have limited woman's capability to participate, "the disorder order of women means that they pose a threat to political order and so must be excluded from the public world" (Pateman, 1989:4). Secondly, Rousseau proclaims in his essay "the disorder of women engenders all the vices and can bring the state to ruin" (Rousseau, 1968:109). The principle of 'disorder' is Pateman's argument for engaging contemporary feminist into constructing modern political theories and ideologies through understanding that historically sexual differences and the subordination of women have been constructed by men (Pateman, 1989).

Pateman argued that the role of women will not change unless "the problem of the disorder of women begins to be seen as a question of social life, not as a fact that confronts us in nature, the reality of the structure of our personal and political lives is beginning to be revealed within the appearance presented in liberal and patriarchal ideology, and the task has already begun" (Pateman, 1989:29).

Utilising the male theories of Locke, Rousseau, Rawl, Marx and Freud to name a few Pateman constructed the historical argument that woman are regarded as incapable of developing a sense of justice or participating in society (Pateman, 1989). The following views of Rousseau and Freud highlight Pateman's research; "for woman, anatomy is destiny, the biological (natural) differences between the sexes influence and are reflected in their respective moral characters" (Pateman, 1989:21).

Throughout Pateman's book she relied heavily on these historical theories, in many ways she believed they were the foundation for the movement to patriarchal rule, and are the principles that govern most institutional, political, and societal structures today.

Many of her critiques were focused on the areas of participation and the view of public versus private spheres and how they impact democracy. The following statement by Pateman highlights the challenge of taking independent, stoic, patriarchal views and theories, and modifying them to reflect our modern society. Pateman states "given the social implication of women's reproductive capacities, it is surely utopian to suppose that tension between the personal and the political, between love and justice, between individuality and communality will disappear with patriarchal-liberalism (Pateman, 1989:136).

Pateman's thoughts around participation included the ability or capabilities of women to be represented and to participate in roles that are traditionally considered male, without having to formulate or engender the masculine identity of a man. The Disorder of Women clearly recognized the challenge in creating participation for women, Pateman argued that "writers on democracy, whether defenders or critics of the status quo, invariably fail to consider, for example, whether their discussion of freedom or consent have any relevance to women, they implicitly argue as if "individuals" and "citizens" are men" (Pateman, 1989:211). Pateman further argued that if change is to occur in participation and democracy then "it is clear that if women are to be citizens as women, as autonomous, equal, yet sexually different beings from men, democratic theory and practice has to undergo a radical transformation (Pateman, 1989:14).

Throughout *The Disorder of Women*, Pateman was able to clearly construct arguments of how theories and patriarchal beliefs greatly impact representation, welfare states, civic culture and participation, consent, and sex and love. To use the welfare as an example, it was stated "most democratic theorist recognise the patriarchal structure of the welfare state; the very different way that women and men have been incorporate as citizens is rarely seen to be of significance or democracy"

(Pateman, 1989, 190). From my perspective if the goal is to implement changes through democratic participation for men and women than the power structure that is inherent in patriarchal structures today must be challenged and modified to reflect the voice of women and men equally.

I believe Pateman successfully use her book to set the groundwork for encouraging feminist to actively participate in trying to transform personal and public relations between the sexes (Pateman 1989). Recognising the significant changes that have been made in improving women rights and participation in government and civil society, Pateman, argued that feminist need to create and define a consist message around how private and public spheres and identities of masculinity and femininity can impact or hinder democracy for women.

In summary, Pateman strongly argued the challenges of changing political and social structures that has been adapted, created, and empowered for centuries. The writings reflect the challenges and accountability of whether it is possible to change the structures that exist today in politics, and if modified would it positively impact women rights. This uncertainty I believe creates inconsistent policies, voices, and outcomes for women and by women. I would argue that Pateman had defined the challenges for women, however she provided limited insight to what policies should be developed and how to implement these policies within the limited structures that exist today for women. In closing, I would argue that woman should have a voice in creating a government that represents all, however true power and democracy occurs when women can represent men, children, white, black, etc for the purpose of in bettering the society as a collective whole. Overall I enjoyed her critique and found it insightful to many of the readings we critiqued thus far in our gender curricula.

### **References**

Pateman Carol, *The Disorder of Women*, Polity Press, 1989