

Workshop as part of the Teaching Assistantship Programme 2021

Introduction to Feminism in Times of Crisis: Its History, Themes, and Power

Organizational details

Instructor: Laura Popa

Date: May 12, 2021, from 2 to 6

Location: Online (link will be sent in advance to the workshop)

Content

Teaching concept

“Never forget that a political, economic or religious crisis will be enough to cast doubt on women's rights. These rights will never be vested. You'll have to stay vigilant your whole life.”

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

Simone de Beauvoir's 'prophetic' words from 1949 still echo in 2021. The current COVID-19 crisis shows an increased return to inequality and the relegation of women to the private sphere. Women's rights are at stake once again. Many women have quit their jobs to take care of children. Others face daily domestic and sexual violence because forced at home into prolonged lockdown with the aggressors, to name a few threats. In this context, rather than addressing questions such as who needs feminism, what to do seems more urgent. In order to provide tools to stop these negative shifts in women's emancipation, this 4-hour workshop aims to address feminism both as a historical and as a daily-life practice. On one hand, the goal is to deliver basic knowledge about the history of feminism through feminist classics from politics, literature, and arts. On the other hand, its action-oriented aim is to raise awareness, discuss, and find solutions. In doing so, the workshop starts with the instructor's input about the recommended readings written by feminists Olympe de Gouges (1791), Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott (1848), Sojourner Truth (1851), Simone de Beauvoir (1949), and Betty Friedan (1963). The instructor will circulate the readings in advance. Then, time will be allocated to the visualization of scenes from feminist movies *Thelma and Louise* (1991) and *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003). Discussions of both texts and films will take place through the first part of the workshop. In the last part, the instructor will present the global experience of women during this pandemic as shown in statistics and articles, followed by discussions and the feminist practice of consciousness-raising.

Therefore, this workshop seeks to situate historically feminism in Western Europe and the United States. Starts with the French Revolution, passes through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to present times with the so-called first, second, and third wave-feminism. It discusses its major themes and explores its power to fight inequality in 2021. Thus, the seminar aspires to both scholarly and problem-solving reflection. At the end of this session, the participants will have gained historical knowledge about what feminism is, the types, the complexity of major themes, and why feminism is still relevant. Ideally, through the consciousness-raising tactic from second-wave feminism, they will witness empowerment and a sense of personal responsibility in solving inequality, personally, locally, and globally.

Detailed Schedule

1. 'Historical' part (2 hours with 15 minutes break)

- Welcome and round of introductions
- Brief input: historical contexts of the recommended readings
- Small group and plenary discussions of texts with the help of 'guiding' questions
- Watching movie scenes from *Thelma and Louise* and *Mona Lisa Smile*
- Small group and plenary discussions of sequences with the help of 'guiding' questions

2. 'Activist' part: consciousness-raising (2 hours with 15 minutes break)

- Brief input: reports about women and COVID-19
- Small group and plenary discussions with the help of 'guiding' questions
- Participants share one specific episode of inequality in which they have been the target or have witnessed someone else's discrimination
- Brainstorming about theories and actions that might be of help
- Problem-solving from participants' experiences and ways to implement in their daily life and local communities, be they of the Faculties of Law, Economics and Business Studies, and Social Sciences, Cultural Studies, and others at JLU Giessen

Learning Targets

1. Learning goals for myself:

- How to actualize a topic that seems if not banal, outdated, i.e. about what Simone de Beauvoir's quote from 1949 about crisis and women's rights and its 'translation' into our COVID-19 crisis
- How to connect contemporary issues from *agora* and scholarly knowledge
- To foster interdisciplinary dialogue through a topic such as feminism, which might be seen at first sight as a political concept that has lost its dynamic power for societal change
- Not to find a consensus about what the 'right' feminism is, rather focus on specific ways to deal with its history and potential in present times

- To find links between past, stringent issues in the present and future developments

2. Learning goals for participants

- To gain basic knowledge about the history of feminism in Western Europe and the United States from the eighteenth to twenty-first centuries
- To gain a conceptual map in order to differentiate types of feminism
- To learn at least three key aspects of historical struggles for women's rights, i.e. politics, labor, religious rights, economics, sexuality, etc.
- To think critically of women's rights both scholarly and practically
- To articulate solutions in present times and to implement it first in their own private sphere, then in the public square, when possible
- To gain knowledge in order to fight inequality in these specific times

Target group

Students, Doctoral Candidates and Postdocs of all Faculties

Course language

English

Registration

Please register **by May 2** via e-mail at info@ggs.uni-giessen.de.