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Susan Himmelweit

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The Real Dualism of Sex and Class

SUSAN HIMMELWEIT

ABSTRACT: This paper argues that the dualism between class struggle and sex struggle, both in political practice and theoretical analysis, reflects a real separation of the struggles in current society. But that separation is not a trans-historical necessity. Rather it is a socially specific product of capitalist development, which has singled out production activities and allowed them to dominate over all other activities. But it is only within reproductive activities that sexes can be identified; hence reproduction remains an essential locus of sex struggle. The appearance that production is inherently separate from, and dominant over, reproduction has given class struggle an apparent separateness and superiority over sex struggle. But the separateness of the two struggles and predominance of production are not inevitable. Rather they are crucial aspects of what must be challenged in our society.

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, the theoretical divide reflecting the political division of the women's movement between socialist and radical feminism, turned on whether or not analysis of women's oppression should or could be based on class analysis. Socialist feminists gave primacy to production-based class struggle and hoped to be able to explain gender differentiation and oppression in terms of the demands of the dominant capitalist class (or other ruling classes in other modes of production) via its particular mode of surplus appropriation. Radical feminists, on the other hand, saw the sex struggle as primary and class divisions as subsidiary, to be explained (if at all) as imitative consequences of power relations between men and women.

In the last five years, attempts have been made within the women's movement to synthesize the two views (Kuhn and Wolpe 1978; Eisenstein 1979).¹ Politically, struggle has to be waged simultaneously both against capitalist exploitation and against women's subordination. And within theoretical analysis, neither system of oppression is to be seen as the mere consequence of the other. But such attempts at synthesis have had to contend with a problem of dualism which has beset the movement both in its political practice and in its theoretical analysis. This dualism has taken many forms: an inability to develop a consistent strategy for introducing feminist politics into the labor movement, a distinct failure to win the women's movement as a whole to even a critical support of the main tenets of socialism, and, above all, a total lack of clarity about the relation of an autonomous women's movement to movements whose primary purpose is the overthrow of capitalist production relations. Indeed, the

Faculty of Social Sciences, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA, England.

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basic question of *how* the struggle, against the oppression of women relates to that against the exploitation of the working class has not been adequately answered.

The problem resurfaces in Marxist-feminist theoretical analysis around a related question. How can categories formulated for the analysis of class exploitation and conflict in a capitalist mode of production be made adequate to the analysis of a form of oppression which predated and may well outlast that mode? In the absence of any theory which can account for both class exploitation and women's oppression — and could therefore structure our understanding of the two — the addition of the history of struggle over sexual oppression as a potentially coequal motor of history, to that of class struggle results in a dualism. Marxism as traditionally understood has failed to provide such a theoretical structure.

This paper is an attempt to apply a particular method of analysis (derived from Marxism) to this problem of dualism. This 'materialist' method requires that the categories of analysis must be both part of, and produced by, the real world. Categories, the tools of analysis, are specific to particular societies and therefore must change as society changes. I hope to show that it is the failure to follow through this method and to develop categories appropriate to the analysis of nonclass based forms of oppression which has led to the inadequacies of much Marxist analysis of women's oppression and, indeed, to an impoverishment of its view of our society as a whole.

The application of a materialist analysis will not resolve but recast the problem of dualism, in order to show that it is not a theoretical but a practical problem. Its resolution is to be found, not in the elaboration of a universal schema within which both class and sex struggle can be incorporated, but in the political process of the transformation of society. For it is specifically *our type* of society which generates separate divisions between classes and genders and hence requires separate struggles to overcome each. If we are to analyze such a dualistic society, it is not a fault but a necessity that theory too is enmeshed in dualism.

REAL ABSTRACTIONS

An abstraction is the pulling out of a certain aspect of the object in question, leaving its other aspects aside. Abstraction is a necessary part of any developmental thought, for the full complexity of the concrete can only be understood in terms of a structured development from abstract categories. Categories of analysis, if they are to be appropriate to a materialist analysis of society in the above sense, must be what can be called "real abstractions." This is what I take Marx to mean in the often quoted passage from the *Grundrisse* (Marx 1973: 101):

The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse. It appears in the process of thinking, therefore, as a process of concentration, as a result, not as a point of departure, even though it is the point of departure in reality and hence also the point of departure for observation and conception.

The point of departure is “in reality” the concrete. The abstractions out of which theory is built must therefore be ‘real’ (Himmelweit and Mohun 1981).

To clarify what this means, we can look at a prominent example of a real abstraction in Marx’s work, his concept of value. Marx criticized the writers of classical political economy for failing to recognize that the categories they used were historically specific. In particular, “value,” while an abstraction that makes sense in commodity producing society, where products are produced in order to be sold, does not apply to all production in all societies. So the first point is that not only are societies historically specific, but so are the abstractions or categories by which we can begin to analyze them.

But Marx’s critique of the method of political economy is more fundamental than this. Valid abstractions must not only be historically specific, that is, apply to particular societies; they must be carried on historically too, that is, be the result of real processes in those societies. The real process which carries on the abstraction of value is exchange. In commodity producing societies, when products are exchanged they are demonstrated to be equal in one respect, that of value, and unequal in all sorts of other respects, for example, in the uses to which they can be put. The exchange process picks out (abstracts) one attribute of commodities, their value, but is not concerned with (abstracts *from*) all other attributes. So value is an “abstraction” in that it is only one aspect of a commodity and a “real” abstraction because it is abstracted by a real social process, exchange. Abstractions, the categories of thought, must in that sense be the products of reality rather than of theory alone.

It is this requirement of abstractions, that they themselves should be produced by and thus capture real social processes, which marks off a materialist analysis from an idealist one, and real abstractions from abstractions which are mere imposed thought constructions. A materialist history is therefore simultaneously the history of a particular society and the history of the development of the categories by which it can be analyzed.

MARXIST ANALYSES OF WOMEN’S OPPRESSION

Early Marxist writings on the position of women tended to focus on their role in the wage labor system (Bebel 1971, first published 1883; Engels 1972, first published 1884). Women were seen as a superexploited section of the working class: exploited first of all as wage labor, then superexploited by low pay. This was due to their less than full proletarianization consequent upon the demands made on them by the needs of the family. Initially these needs were seen as superstructural and therefore subsidiary to, and ultimately to be explained by, forces emanating from the economic base of capitalist society. The base was unquestionably to be found in the extraction of surplus value by capital from wage labor at the point of production. The full participation of women in social production, a necessary condition for their equality with men, would be possible only with the removal of capitalist exploitation. This necessary condition was often taken to be sufficient too, suggesting that women’s equality would follow automatically when capitalist exploitation was removed.

The argument is, of course, reductionist. It reduces everything that happens under capitalism to an effect of capitalism and capitalism alone. The mechan-

ism by which class exploitation might translate into gender oppression needs to be spelled out. Empirically, this thesis became less and less tenable as postwar economic expansion, both in the west and the socialist bloc countries, brought more and more women into wage labor. In eastern Europe, nearly all women had jobs and although the most direct form of capitalist exploitation had been removed, occupational segregation and the adoption of traditional roles within the family continued. Capitalist expansion, too, showed itself to be capable of involving increasing numbers of women in its own form of social production; wage labor for capital. But in doing so, neither the unequal conditions women faced in paid labor nor the oppression they experienced in the home were removed.

The growing gap between expectations of sexual equality and the reality of the 'double shift' of paid labor and unpaid domestic work led to a postwar revival of feminism in many advanced capitalist countries. Marxism responded to the growth of the women's movement and its demands that the explanation of women's oppression be treated seriously as a theoretical problem, by allowing the family to qualify for membership of the material base. But in a limited sense; it qualified only in so far as the family was seen as a site of *production*.

Marxists were well equipped to recognize work within the family as such. They had, after all, been observing and categorizing the differences between production relations in different societies for years. The basic criticism of the classical political economists by Marx, and even more strongly of neoclassical economics by later Marxists, was of their failure to recognize that capitalist relations of production were neither natural nor universal. It was a straightforward step to apply such methods of analysis to a particular form of production that existed within capitalist society (Himmelweit and Mohun 1977).

Unfortunately, the resulting analysis of production within the family made little headway towards providing the intended materialist explanation of women's oppression. Most of the skirmishes of the "domestic labor debate" either degenerated into arguments about pure semantics, or, and often quite usefully, provided examples upon which the nascent Anglo-American interest in Marxism could refine its understanding and clarify disputes about the meaning of Marxist categories.

For the most part, all that could be done with existing categories was to take each in turn and say whether it did or did not apply to domestic labor. It should have been obvious from the start that this would be the case. Marxist categories were developed to analyze the relations of capitalist commodity production. This means that capitalist relations are the only ones to which they are fully appropriate categories of analysis. They can also be used to examine noncapitalist relations, but only partially, insofar as these relations are developing into capitalist ones. Hence capitalist categories, of wage labor, exchange, value, etc. will not be of any use in analyzing the *specifics* of precapitalist societies, that is, the parts of those societies which are not merely prefigurative of capitalist forms.

Similarly for domestic labor: to the extent that domestic labor is being superseded by capitalist production, analysis can point to tendencies towards the formation of the appropriate capitalist categories. For example, when women who have previously been full-time housewives enter wage labor, they

can buy, with their wages, certain convenience foods and household appliances which lessen, to some extent, the hours and effort they have to spend on domestic labor. This substitution of wage labor and its products for domestic labor introduces an element of accounting and measurement into domestic labor, which is a reflection of the valuation which the wage now gives to women's time. The category of exchange value thus begins to encroach on domestic labor.

But one of the points made in the debates about domestic labor was that it is a specific and necessary *complement* to capitalist relations of production, which cannot absorb all labor necessary to its own perpetuation. And domestic labor has some specific characteristics, crucially, that it is nearly always performed by women, which cannot be captured simply by talking of ways in which it is or is not being taken over by capitalist production. To have examined these particular characteristics of domestic labor it would have been necessary to say something specific about the relations under which it went on; relations within the family. The mistake was to concentrate on what could be encapsulated in existing Marxist categories, when precisely what was needed was to lay aside those categories, in order that others appropriate to the analysis of the family be developed.²

Without categories specifically developed by analysis of relations within the family, we will only be able to reason about effects upon the family which come from outside. We will be able to say nothing about how the family itself throws up contradictions and forms of struggle between men and women which are critical to its own future. Without categories developed by the specific and changing relations within the family, none of the questions to which its analysis was addressed can be answered. In particular, in the absence of such categories, we must fail to relate the relations of housework to the sex of those who perform it, for all the borrowed categories have been *sex-blind* (Hartmann 1979).

Although the intention behind the analysis of domestic labor was to uncover the material basis for the specific oppression of women, through the examination of the relations of production into which they most frequently entered, all that was uncovered were some aspects of the material basis of the specific oppression of *domestic laborers*. And that only incompletely, because without being able to recognize domestic laborers as women, any analysis must fail to capture those parts of their oppression which turn upon their sex.

PATRIARCHAL THEORIES

In recognition of this failure, though not necessarily sharing the above view of its cause, some Marxist feminists adopted the term "patriarchy," already current in the radical feminist tradition. The acceptance of the term implied an acceptance of a radically changed theoretical program: that of explaining the existence of a *system* of male power over women, a system whose theoretical foundation was not simply to be built upon some other system such as that of class domination.

Of course, naming an object does nothing to explain it. While some early radical feminist writings tended towards biological determinism, with political

conclusions which were, to say the least, depressing, others provided more hopeful theoretical frameworks. Of particular relevance to this paper, Shulamith Firestone's *Dialectic of Sex* (1972) provided an analysis of patriarchy based on sex-class struggle over human reproduction. The form of Firestone's analysis starts, as she acknowledges, as an almost literal parallel of that used by Marx and Engels to analyze class struggle over production. By analogy with class struggle over production there was a sex (class) struggle over reproduction with a dialectic of its own. But she provides no analogy for the central role of the surplus. So there is no definite object of sex (class) struggle and her "dialectic" is but an external dynamic imposed by technology. Firestone's achievement was nevertheless a powerful insight into the possible underpinnings of a materialist theory of patriarchy. But hers was a technological determinist reading of Marx and her analogy allowed only a technological solution to women's oppression. Indeed she drew the analogy further; just as deterministic Marxists had claimed overarching explanatory power for their dialectic (of class), Firestone claimed that the dialectic of sex explained everything (including class).

Other attempts to provide theoretical frameworks for patriarchy revolved around the construction of gender identity in psychoanalytic terms or around notions of male control of female labor power. Psychoanalytic theories provide an analysis of how men's and women's gender identities are formed and how both are thus constructed as individuals (Mitchell 1974; Dinnerstein 1976; Chodorow 1978). This analysis is invaluable to political practice in thinking about how individuals might bring about or react to social change. But it is insufficient to explain the basis of patriarchy as a social system. If the process of gender identity is taken to be anatomically given, psychoanalytic theory falls into the trap of biological determinism. Or if the patterns set up in infancy are taken to be products of the social role of the mother and the father, symbolized in, rather than generated by, anatomical difference, then theory provides an explanation of how individual gender identity is formed only within particular gender structured societies.³ In neither case is a social explanation provided of how society came to be structured by gender, that is, of the patriarchy. The domain of both types of psychoanalytic theory is the psychic development of individuals, and explanations of the structure within which those individuals exist lie outside the domain.

Theories based on male control of female labor power cut across the boundary dividing radical feminism from Marxist feminism. Delphy (1977), a French radical feminist, sees men's control of their wives' labor power as the basis of exploitation in the "family mode of production," a form of exploitation embodied in the marriage contract which can coexist with, and has outlived, many class based modes of production. On the other hand, Hartmann, (1979) a Marxist feminist, sees alliances and accommodations being formed between capitalism and patriarchy. Capitalism adapts to patriarchy when it cedes to working class men the right to control their wives' labor power in the home, rather than claiming for itself the right to exploit male and female wage labor indiscriminately. Both Hartmann and Delphy borrow categories from Marx's analysis of class exploitation: wherein the ruling class's ability to extract a surplus rests on controlling the other class's ability to make use of their own

labor power. Delphy, indeed, takes the analogy further, claiming that men control their wives' labor power in order to exploit them directly. For Hartmann, however, it is the character of wives' labor in the home; that it is a personal service to their husbands, which has led men to claim their wives' labor power for themselves, and to try to limit women's opportunities in the labor market.

Both approaches lead to a narrow definition of what male power, the patriarchy, consists and, hence, have a rather limited view of the causes of women's oppression. By ignoring everything that goes on within the family except labor and production, they too, like psychoanalytic theories, fail to provide a social explanation for the existence of the family, nor for why it is *men* who benefit from *women* in this way (Young 1981).⁴ Production takes place in other units of society and men and women can both labor, so why should the family have remained in existence as production began to move from the precapitalist household out into wage labor? And why should some production have remained within the family? The answer that Hartmann and Delphy would give is that men ensured that the family remained in existence because it benefited them to be able to control their wives' labor power within it.

But they fail to explain why it is males who control female labor power, rather than the other way round, nor why the division of control lies along the lines of sex at all. And why, indeed, should the unit within which such control is exercised (the family) be structured around sexual and kin relationships? Without exploring the basis of those sexual and kin relationships, *either* the answers to these questions can only rest on some universal (and thus innate?) superiority of male power to enforce their wishes on women, *or* equally universal sexual characteristics of male nastiness and female submissiveness must be invoked to explain why men wished to control women and why women let them get away with it.⁵

REPRODUCTION AND PRODUCTION: ANOTHER DUALISM

The attempt to characterize housework as a "mode of production," within which husbands and wives constitute separate classes, had to contend with the family's lack of independence. Although production relations within the family are clearly different from those involved in the capital-labor relation, they are not independent of the latter, depending on a continual flow of money inputs (a wage packet, a dividend check or social security payments) and consumption goods in commodity form emanating from the capitalist relations of that same society. Housework could therefore constitute only a "client" mode of production, implicitly subordinate to the "capitalist mode of production" (Harrison 1973). This client status — that housework was incapable of providing its own conditions of existence — led most writers in the "domestic labor debate" to reject housework's claim to constitute a mode of production, on the grounds that modes of production must at least be capable of independent perpetuation even if, in practice, they coexist with other modes of production in most social formations.

Nor is the dependent relation between housework and capitalist production all one way. Capitalist production relations do not provide their own most vital

input, labor power. If housework needs inputs from capitalist production, capitalist production also needs inputs from housework, notably labor power.⁶ And, without transforming themselves into something different, capitalist relations could not produce labor power. For only commodities are produced under capitalist production relations and labor power, although bought and sold and therefore referred to as a commodity, exists only as an attribute of, and within capitalist relations as the property of, a living juridically free individual. Labor power is an attribute of human beings, and, as capital has found to its own disadvantage in times of militancy, you cannot have labor power without the person of the laborer.

Capital, if it is to remain capital, depends on the exploitation of a class of free wage laborers selling their *own* labor power. Some other social institution is therefore needed to produce people in that free state, so that they alone can dispose of their own labor-power.

THE FAMILY

Predominantly in most advanced capitalist countries today, that institution is the family. Parental responsibility for the birth and rearing of children ensures that adult laborers are free to sell their own labor power. Even if it were technologically feasible for people to be produced by capital for profit, another social institution would be necessary to pay capital to do so; an institution, be it the state or “parents,” which would allow “their” children the freedom to sell their own labor power.

Capital may eventually undermine its own relations of production. However, so long as they remain capitalist, production relations alone do not and cannot constitute a complete, independently self-reproducing system. Capitalist production relations can exist only with the continual input of labor power from outside themselves. This gives one possible answer to the questions posed at the end of the last section. The family continues in existence as a unit separate from other units of production, not because of its role in the production of things, but because it is an essential part, under current social arrangements, of the way labor power is produced. Children born and reared within the family grow up to own, and thus are able to sell, their own labor power.

A full characterization of the historically specific character of our society must therefore encompass the social forms within which reproduction goes on. To specify that it is “capitalist” is inadequate. All that capitalism logically requires is some form of reproduction through which people become free wage laborers. Capitalist production relations do not themselves reproduce people nor do they uniquely determine how people are reproduced. The family is not the only possible adjunct to capitalist relations which can produce labor power. Indeed other forms exist today: orphanages, collective households and single parenthood, to name a few.

The introduction of reproduction relations allows the biological distinction of sex to enter, for in their relation to at least a part of human reproduction, males and females biologically differ. The production of labor power involves not only the day-to-day replenishment of the ability to labor, not only the rearing of future generations of workers, but their birth too. In production,

gender roles are differentiated and reinforced. But the link between gender roles in production and the sex of those who perform them cannot be found by the examination of capitalist production relations themselves, for they are sex, if not gender, blind.

Family reproduction relations, on the other hand, are not at all sex blind. Therefore, if we can show that current reproduction relations are social constructs, then we should be able to link the biological distinction of sex and the social division of gender. This link needs to be made, if we are to explain why it is females who are oppressed as women. In other words, why is it that divisions which we call ‘gender’ divisions (to remind ourselves of their social construction) run along the lines of biological sex. That some form of human reproduction has gone on in all societies, or at least in those that have survived, is unquestionable. But the processes involved are socially specific. Just as production takes social forms which are ultimately connected to the necessity that we must all eat to survive, other necessary and supposedly universal practices can be the subject of social analysis too.⁷

Sexuality is an example of such a necessary and supposedly universal example. Some writers have argued that sexuality in capitalist society is repressed and restricted to appropriate reproductive forms, thus ensuring that human reproduction takes place and that stability is assured for the reproductive unit wherein children are raised. An alternative view, more consistent with that of this paper, argues that sexuality has no essential nature prior to its social construction. Rather, it has been shaped and formed, created even, by the construction of categories and definitions which control and through which we see our own sexual practices (Foucault 1981; Ruehl 1983).

Recognizing socially specific forms, other than those of production, begs the question of the relation between different social forms. Can they all be derived one from the other, with a hierarchy of determinants? Is, for example, sexuality geared to reproduction because of the needs of the capitalist economy for labor power? Or must we displace production from its privileged place in the Marxist materialist dialectic of history, and admit other social forms to be equally determining? Have we indeed got a problem of dualism (or even trialism, quaternism. . . pluralism?) unless we make sex struggle subordinate to class struggle (or the other way round)?

The remainder of this paper will look at this question, returning to the methodological points raised earlier, in order to see if they can help recast the problem, so that the issue is not so much how *we* relate the many potential motors of history, but how they are related *in reality*. In particular, I will examine how production has been ascribed, in reality, the privileged place given to it in Marxist theory.

PRODUCTION AS A REAL ABSTRACTION

To examine production’s privileged place within both reality and Marxist theory, we have first to recognize it as a social rather than a natural construct. That means that its definition is also social. An activity counts as ‘production’ only if it is intended to result in something which can be consumed; something, that is, which is recognized as a ‘use-value.’ Production, therefore, implies

and is implied by another social process, “consumption.” To define an activity as production it must, at least potentially, be the first element of a sequence with separated elements:

production —————> use-value —————> consumption

The separation of the sequence’s elements is not necessarily a temporal one. For example, services are use-values which cannot be consumed except at the time of their production. Not all activities fit into such a sequence; play or noncompetitive sports in which amateurs participate for their own sake, for example, do not and are not therefore considered production. Nor can all needs be met by consumption. The need for something worthwhile to do with one’s life, for example, cannot be met simply by consuming use-values.

The activity out of which a similar material result arises may be considered production in one society and not in another. That is to say, what is a use-value in one society may not be so appreciated in another. For example, the mud pies children make in play are similar to, indeed possibly descended from, the mud bricks from which houses are constructed in many societies. In the latter case, the mud brick is clearly a use-value; in the former, it is only an adjunct to, not the aim of, the process of play which is carried on for its own sake.

Any “production” process involves labor to produce a use-value; this is what Marx called “useful labor”; the aspect of labor which produces the use-value of the product, as opposed to its aspect of abstract labor which produces its value. Similar physical activities may be recognized as production in some societies, but not others. So it is not the physical activity involved which defines an activity as production; it is whether it contains what is *socially recognized* as useful labor.

Even those activities which have a useful labor aspect and can be recognized as production are not in their entirety directed towards the use-value of their product. The category use-value is itself an abstraction, an abstraction of the aspects of the product which on its consumption satisfies particular wants. For example, a camera has the use-value of being able to produce images. In order to perform that function, it must have other properties; a physical existence, weight, color, be made of a particular material, etc. These do not constitute its use-value (taking pictures), though they may be necessary (given the present development of technology) to the camera’s use-value, its ability to take photographs. But only the use-value itself is of use and is thus abstracted from all other properties of the product in the process of consumption.

From this abstraction of use-value from the product is derived another abstraction: that of useful labor from the total activity which resulted in the product. Useful labor is, therefore, the aspect of productive activity which results in the use-value. The character of the producers, the other activities they engage in during or outside the act of production, their thoughts in the meantime, are all irrelevant to the resultant use-value and are thus abstracted from in the category, useful labor.

It is the separation, in reality, of the elements of the above sequence, so that production and consumption are distinct activities, which allows space for use-values to be “produced” and useful labor to be abstracted. Thus the abstractions of use-value from products and useful labor from activity in general are not only *abstractions*, they are *real abstractions* in that they result

from a real social process, production, together with its definitional other half, consumption. Only when the production/consumption dichotomy is present does the abstraction of useful labor have a real existence and consequent meaning.

The introduction to this paper gave the example of another real abstraction, that of value. That abstraction was shown to be carried on by the real process of exchange, which abstracts from all aspects of the commodity other than that of its value. Marx then showed how exchange performs a related abstraction on the labor which produces the commodity, and called the aspect of labor which produces the value of a commodity "abstract labor." This formed the basis on which Marx could show exchange to be a social, not a natural, process; only one of many possible ways of organizing a division of labor. In doing so, he debunked exchange from its naturalistic inevitability in classical political economy, and laid the basis for its examination as a social process, a social process of immense power whose growth has had profound effects as the commodity form has spread to dominate all other forms of production. But only through its recognition as a social process did exchange become a suitable object of materialist analysis, within which its power could be questioned and explained.

By analogy to Marx's treatment of exchange, this section has used the recognition that the separation of production and consumption produces its own real abstraction, that of use-value,⁸ in order to lay the basis for the examination of the separation as a social process. In subsequent sections, I will use this point in order to explain how this social process has had such immense power that the production of use-values has spread to dominate all other activities. The recognition of production/consumption as a social form makes it the suitable object of materialist analysis, within which its power can be questioned. If production relations are powerful, and seem to determine all others, this itself needs to be explained.

CAPITALIST INDUSTRIALIZATION

It is well established among feminists that the creation of wage labor and the taking of "work" out of the family constructed the conceptions of both workplace and home with which we are familiar today. Further, understanding this process is highly relevant to the explanation of gender divisions under capitalism.

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, the basic economic unit had been the household, agricultural or artisanal, in which all resident members, including perhaps some not of the family, worked. There almost certainly was a sexual division of labor within such a household, and it may well have been "patriarchal" in the sense that the male head of household organized the labor of his household and engaged in buying and selling on the market on its behalf (Chaytor 1980; Thompson 1980). But the capitalist factory system, destroyed household production in one area after another, taking family members out of the home into wage labor and leaving behind a residual household, which gradually ceased to be involved in commodity production and within which paid labor for capital ("out" or "home" working) became the exception.

The home then took on a new ideological character. No longer a place of production (or not of commodity production anyway) it was supposed to be the haven, the antidote, to the harsh reality of capitalist work relations; the place where the individualism of exchange and the cash-nexus in the outside world was to be countered by the mutual responsibility and love of family members for each other. If the economy worked by an "invisible hand" co-ordinating the actions of men selfishly seeking to further their own interests, how much better it worked when those interests included the responsibility for financially dependent members of his family, restricting his room for maneuver by the requirement that sufficient daily income be earned. Selfishness could also be redefined as responsibility; charity, beginning at home, could safely be confined within its limits.

The relevance of this for feminism is that men and women were treated differently in this process. In the initial stages of industrialization, it was often women and children who were taken into the factories, whilst their men-folk failed to eke out a living as the prices for the products of their traditional labor were undercut by those of the products of the new factories. But later, as household production became no longer viable, men entered the factories too, replacing or working beside women and children. Eventually men fought for, and in some industries won, the right to be the sole breadwinner; to be paid a wage adequate to support a non-earning family.⁹ For women this meant that the home became more exclusively their domain, the site of their considerable domestic labor for the direct benefit of their families.

The separation of home and workplace also became a separation between men's and women's lives — not a total separation, for some women have always had to take paid employment too — but one with considerable economic and ideological power. Women's access to material goods and to worthwhile employment is inferior to that of men because of the expectation, and the reality for many women, of their financial dependence on a man. Gender roles differ in other respects as well. Women are identified with the values of the home when, ideally, they provide for their men, rather than themselves, the comfort and emotional support absent from the masculine world of paid employment and the individualism of commodity exchange. A notion of "femininity" has thus been constructed around a domestic ideal, an ideal which tends not to recognize the work involved in the home, leaving work to become synonymous with paid employment, and setting up a divided vocabulary reflecting the real separation of two types of labor (Zaretsky 1976; Hall 1980, 1982a, 1982b).

Of these two types of labor, "work" or wage labor has come to predominate more and more. As capitalist relations of production have swept aside other types of commodity production, wage labor for capital has become the only way to bring in a monetary income, and money the only way to obtain access to the increasing proportion of use-values produced as commodities. Men are identified with, if not the sole participants in, wage labor and commodity production, while the domestic labor with which women are identified, and of which women perform the lioness's share, goes largely unnoticed. Therefore, the division between paid and family labor has become an unequal one with divisions between men and women reflecting this inequality.

In the next section I want to extend this argument and show that the effect of

capitalist industrialization was not just the division of production into two types, domestic and waged, but the refinement of the category of production itself. It is this which has led to its dominance over our lives in reality, a dominance reflected in theory.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE DOMINANCE OF PRODUCTION

The development of capitalist production was not only the introduction of particular social relations of production. It also, necessarily, entailed the expansion of production itself, one particular socially specific way of meeting needs. For surplus value can be extracted only if value is produced and value exists only in commodities having a use-value for someone. The continual development of the production of use-values as a way of meeting needs is therefore both a necessity and a result of capitalist expansion.

This has meant that, under capitalism, production activities have come to dominate all others. It has also meant that production activities have themselves become more concentrated around their abstract and useful labor aspects. The purpose of capitalist production is the extraction of surplus value and therefore it is only the abstract labor aspect of production activities which matters to the capitalist controllers of labor. But as abstract labor has come to predominate over other aspects, it has dragged useful labor into predominance as well. For just as a commodity cannot have value without having use-value, abstract labor cannot take place unless useful labor is going on too. Both abstract and useful labor have developed to the detriment of all other human aspects of the production process: the energy expended by the producers, their actions, thoughts or feelings, for example. All these have become irrelevant, to employers, the controllers of production, except in so far as they affect the use-value and hence the value of the product. Production activities have in this way become more like their abstractions, i.e., abstract and useful labor.

The dominance of useful labor, the production of use-values, has involved the imposition of the production/consumption dichotomy on increasing areas of life. Needs, potentially satisfiable by production, have taken precedence in this way over all other needs, and the production of use-values over other activities which satisfy needs.

But the production relations of capitalism are not, as we have seen, capable of providing for their own perpetuation. To enter capitalist production relations, people must be free to sell their own labor power. They cannot, therefore, be produced as use-values for consumption by others. The activity of human reproduction does not, therefore, fit into the first term of the production/consumption dichotomy in its capitalist form. In our society, human reproduction is not a production activity.

The separation of human reproduction from production is not a universal law. For example, in a slave-owning society, the birth of a slave was the production of a use-value because that life could be consumed productively by the slave's owner. The activity of childbirth was therefore valued alongside other production activities, to such an extent that women slaves approaching child-bearing age were sold at prices at least as high as men of that age, despite

their potentially reduced ability to produce nonhuman products (Kessler-Harris 1982).

But in the capitalist wage labor economy of today, childbirth and associated reproductive activities are excluded from the socially defined activity of production. In order for labor power to be a freely owned and sold commodity, some part of the reproductive process must be excluded from the production/consumption dichotomy in its capitalist form. At some point the reproductive process must cross outside the boundary of capitalist production relations in order that the resultant people may re-enter as free wage labor.

Historically the development of separate arrangements for production and reproduction has taken place by assigning the latter to the family, associating reproduction relations with those of "personal" life and individual consumption. The family is not so much what was left behind as production was "removed" but the simultaneously created counterpart of the relations of production.¹⁰

This provides one answer to the problem of dualism. The sort of society in which we live is one in which production is the direct arena of class struggle and only an indirect one for sex struggle, because the activities of production are separated from those of reproduction, the direct arena of sex struggle. But more than that, capitalist relations of production are not only separated from reproduction relations; the former also ensure their own dominance over the latter. The pursuit of profit through production has no limit. Activities which satisfy other needs are highly constrained by, and dependent on, those which can be harnessed to the production of use-values; use-values which can be sold for money and money which can be accumulated as capital. So the dualism between production and reproduction is both a specific product of our society and, if the priorities of society are not challenged, imposes a solution to that dualism; production *does* dominate in our society over all other activities.

Recognizing the terms of the dualism as socially specific allows its consequences to be challenged. Production does not have transhistorical priority. To accept the priority of production based struggles over reproductive struggles, or class struggle over sex struggle, is to accept the priorities and separations of capitalism, rather than of the society we are trying to create. Strategy involves a movement from the present to a desired future. If that future is to be one in which class exploitation and gender oppression and thus the dualism between them disappears, the predominance of production, a social characteristic of capitalism, has to be challenged.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have argued that production is not a universal method of meeting human needs. Rather it has developed as a specific social form by which certain needs, those which can be satisfied by the consumption of use-values, have been met. The dominance of production, as a distinct form of activity, is a product of its development in its capitalist form; it is not a universal law for the analysis of all societies.

This predominance of production has been to the detriment of women. Some activities, for example, those concerned with human reproduction, can never,

under capitalism, be part of production. The household unit, in which reproduction takes place, has developed as the locus of consumption and personal life to such an extent that it has become emptied of activities fully recognized as production. As is well recognized by feminists, the development of the "family" and the subordination of women have gone hand in hand. What is being argued here is that this development is a result of the expansion under capitalism of production, and its consequent domination over reproduction.

The particular turn this development has taken was not inevitable and, therefore, cannot have been achieved without struggle. Men and women have fought over their respective roles and their significance to society, and have shaped the society in which we live today, just as class struggle has done. While class struggle has been over the relations of different groups within production, struggles between men and women can be interpreted as having turned upon the meaning of production itself.

The analysis of this paper demonstrates both the interconnectedness of the two struggles and why they are currently separated. In their ultimate aim they have a great deal in common: to liberate us all from the tyranny of production. But in capitalist society today, the two struggles are separate because the development of production in this capitalist form has meant the development of two sets of social arrangements, those of work and those of the family, in which men and women are differently distributed.

The dualism of sex struggle and class struggle, as rival motors of history, is a socially specific dualism, a product of the separation of production from the rest of life. Recognizing this does not remove or resolve the dualism, but it does show that the problem is not one of whether we ought to give priority to one struggle over the other or try to find some way of theoretically integrating them in our explanations of history. Rather, the problem is recast as the social problem it is: a problem of our society, to which the only solution is political action aimed at transforming that society into one in which production is reabsorbed into life itself.

Today women are beginning to challenge the predominance of production over the rest of our lives. Women are raising questions about whether our only need is for a job, equality in a man's world, and whether we wish to make a world in which there is both more understanding of the needs of the family and personal life at work (crèches, less hierarchical methods of working, a shorter working day, flexible working hours, etc). Women are also recognizing that labor and economic problems are not absent from the family (wages for housework, campaigns for legal and financial independence of women, the domestic labor debate and so on).

The traditional socialist aim of "production for use rather than production for profit" is inadequate to the removal of gender oppression. Rather, we must recognize that not all purposive activity is the production of use-values; neither are the benefits of productive activity to be assessed purely in terms of the use-value of the product. Struggles which challenge the dominance of production over our lives challenge more of the character of the society in which we live than those which remain within the realm of production alone. It is therefore in working class men's interests as much as women's to join in these struggles. Only by challenging the dominance of production can women and

men create for themselves the most fundamental of traditional socialist aims, a society in which, because production has ceased to control us, "labor becomes life's only want."

NOTES

1. The works cited are among the earliest of such synthetic work. Interestingly, while Eisenstein gave the name "socialist feminism" to this trend to distinguish it from the previous more traditional "class first" Marxist feminism, in Britain the terms were reversed. There, "Marxist feminism" became the name adopted by the synthetic current; even though it was distinguished more by its criticism than its adoption of the tenets of traditional Marxist views of women's oppression.
2. Of course Marxism was not unique in this failure. Neoclassical economics fell into the same trap when it ignored the specificity of utility analysis and applied this particular brand of commodity fetishism, regardless, to domestic labor in its "New Home Economics." Marxism was more cautious. It recognized on the whole that the categories of wage labor and commodity production were inappropriate for this analysis, but failed to develop tools which were more appropriate.
3. Traditional psychoanalytic theories favor the former interpretation. Among feminist analyses, Mitchell (1974) is ambiguous while Chodorow (1978) and, implicitly, Dinnerstein (1976) favor the latter view. The determination of what Freud really meant is as much obscured by interpretation and counter-interpretation as that of what Marx's Marxism really consisted.
4. Young's critique of Hartmann starts by recognizing this problem, but she fails to overcome it by substituting "the division of labor" as a more fundamental category on which to base her resolution of capitalism and patriarchy.
5. To posit male control of female labor power as the basis of patriarchy does not, of course, necessarily imply that control depends on superior male power or greater nastiness *in the present*. It can be that residual patriarchal power of a previous epoch allowed new social structures to be set up under which men gained the power to control their wives' labor power. But such historical arguments remain incomplete unless they forge a link between the control of labor power and the sex of those involved, and thereby posit an area where *sexual* difference directly matters. Universal explanations, whether based on male power, male nastiness or female submissiveness, do make such a link but their ahistorical biological determinism makes them unacceptable.
6. This problem turned out not to be unique to housework. See for example discussions on whether South African Bantustans constitute a distinct mode of production or are pathological excrescences of the capitalist mode (Wolpe 1972; Williams 1975).
7. Margaret Mead (1963, first published 1935, and other works) initiated a tradition of anthropological research into the variations within sexual practices, and to a lesser extent, those surrounding childbirth. This variety points to the social construction even of these supposedly natural practices. See also Gordon (1976) and Petscheky (1984).
8. Use-value is a more complex abstraction than value because it is itself multi-faceted. There are qualitatively different use-values to satisfy qualitatively different needs, whereas values can be compared only quantitatively. Nevertheless, both value and use-value are *abstractions*, because both abstract from other aspects of the commodity, and both are *real abstractions*, because the processes by which they are abstracted, exchange and production/consumption respectively, are each social processes being carried out in reality.
9. There has been a valuable debate between feminists on the effects, desirability and existence of the "family wage." See Humphries (1977a, 1977b), Hartmann (1979) and Barrett and McIntosh (1980).
10. Zaretsky (1976) and Hall (1980) note this too, but see it as a product of the development of wage labor rather than production.

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