# BEYOND THE UNHAPPY MARRIAGE: A CRITIQUE OF THE DUAL SYSTEMS THEORY

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Even in its title Hartmann's essay reflects what has been the specific project of socialist feminism: to "wed" the best aspects of the new wave of feminist theory developed in the sixties and seventies to marxian theory, thereby transforming marxian theory. Hartmann argues that this marriage has thus far not succeeded. She recommends that the marriage between marxism and feminism be put on a stonger footing by developing a theoretical account which gives as much weight to the system of patriarchy as to the system of capitalism. Rather than perceiving the particular situation of women as an effect of capitalism, as she believes Engels, Mitchell, Dalla Costa, and Zaretsky do, we should understand that the system of patriarchy is at least of equal importance for understanding the situation of women. Socialist feminist theory thus should seek the "laws of motion" of the system of patriarchy, the internal dynamic and contradictions of patriarchy, and articulate how these interact and perhaps conflict with the internal dynamic of capitalism.

Hartmann's essay is not the first to have proposed this dual systems theory for socialist feminism. On the contrary, the majority of socialist feminists espouse some version of the dual systems theory. I shall argue, however, that the dual systems theory will not patch up the unhappy marriage of marxism and feminism. There are good reasons for believing that the situation of women is not conditioned by two distinct systems of social relations which have distinct structures, movement, and histories. Feminist marxism cannot be content with a mere "wedding" of two theories, marxism and feminism, reflecting two systems, capitalism and patriarchy. Rather, the project of socialist feminism should be to develop a single theory out of the best insights of both marxism and radical feminism, which can comprehend capitalist patriarchy as one system in which the oppression of women is a core attribute.

#### THE DUAL SYSTEMS THEORY

As with most other proponents of the dual systems theory, dissatisfaction with both traditional marxism and radical feminism taken alone motivates Hartmann to develop her conception of the dual systems theory. She states that the categories of traditional

marxism are essentially gender-blind and that therefore marxian analyses of women's situation under capitalism have failed to bring issues of gender differentiation and hierarchy explicitly into focus.

Feminist theory has corrected this failing by developing the concept of patriarchy to describe and analyze gender hierarchy. Radical feminist theory, however, according to Hartmann, has several problems. It focuses too exclusively on child rearing as determining women's situation. It tends to view patriarchy as merely a psychological or cultural phenomenon, rather than as a system having a material base in real social relations. Finally, the radical feminist account tends to view patriarchy as basically unchanging through most if not all of history.

Hartmann then proposes a dual systems theory to remedy the weaknesses both of traditional matxism and radical feminism. We must understand women's oppression in our society as an effect of both capitalism and patriarchy. Patriarchy is defined as

a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women. (Hartmann, p. 14.)

Patriarchal relations are phenomena distinct from the economic relations of production analyzed by traditional marxism. Capital and patriarchy are distinct forms of social relations and distinct sets of interests which do not stand in any necessary relationship and even exist in potential conflict. Even though it is difficult to separate analytically the specific elements of society which belong to patriarchy and those which belong to capitalism, we must do so. We must isolate the specific "laws of motion" of patriarchy, distinct from the mode and relations of production, and understand the specific contradictions of the system of patriarchy in their relation to the specific contradictions the system of capitalism.<sup>1</sup>

All versions of the dual systems theory start from the premise that patriarchal relations designate a system of relations distinct from and independent of the relations of production described by traditional marxism. An account can take two possible directions in describing how patriarchy is separate from the economic system of production relations. On the one hand, one can retain the radical feminist concept of patriarchy as an ideological and psychological structure. The resulting dual systems theory will then attempt to give an account of the interaction of these ideological and psycho-

logical structures with the material relations of society. On the other hand, one can develop an account of patriarchy as itself a system of material social relations, existing independently of and interacting with the social relations of production.

Juliet Mitchell's approach in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* represents an example of the first of these alternatives. She takes patriarchy as a universal and formal ideological structure. "Patriarchy describes the universal culture—however, each specific mode of production expresses this in different ideological forms."

Men enter into the class dominated structures of history while women (as women, whatever their work in actual production) remain defined by the kinship pattern of organization. Differences of class, historical epoch, specific social situation alter the expression of femininity; but in relation to the law of the father, women's position across the board is a comparable one 3

Mitchell's idea seems to be that the patriarchal structures which she claims freudian theory articulates exist as a pre- or nonhistorical ideological backdrop to changes in the mode of production. This ideological and psychological structure lying outside economic relations persists in the same form throughout. She does not deny, of course, that women's situations differ concretely in different social circumstances. We account for this variation in women's situation by the way in which the particular structures of a given mode of production interact with the universal structures of patriarchy.

This version of the dual systems theory inappropriately dehistoricizes and universalizes women's oppression. Representing patriarchy as a universal system having the same basic structure through history can lead to serious cultural, racial, and class biases. Describing the differences in the form and character of women's situation in different social circumstances as merely different 'expressions' of one and the same universal system of patriarchy, moreover, trivializes the depth and complexity of women's oppression.

The main problem with this version of the dual systems theory, however, is that it does not succeed in giving the alleged system of patriarchy equal weight with and independence from the system of a mode of production. It conceives of all concrete social relations as belonging to the economic system of production relations. Thus it leaves no material weight to the system of patriarchy,

which it defines in its essence as independent of the system of production relations. Thus it ends by ceding to the traditional theory of production relations the primary role in giving an account of women's situation. The theory of patriarchy supplies the form of women's oppression, but traditional marxist theory supplies its content, specificity, differentiation, and motors of change. Thus this version of the dual systems theory fails in undermining traditional marxism because it cedes to that marxism theoretical hegemony over historically material social relations.<sup>5</sup>

Recognizing these weaknesses in the first option for a dual systems theory, Hartmann chooses the second. She emphasizes that patriarchy has a material base in the structure of concrete relations, and maintains that the system of patriarchy itself undergoes historical transformation. Precisely these strengths of Hartmann's account, however, weaken her argument for a dual systems theory which conceives of patriarchy as a system distinct from the relations of production. If, as Hartmann maintains, "the material base upon which patriarchy rests lies most fundamentally in men's control over women's labor power," and if "men maintain this control by excluding women from access to some essential productive resources' (Hartmann, p. 15), then it does not seem possible to separate patriarchy from a system of social relations of production even for analytical purposes. If, as Hartmann states, patriarchal social relations in contemporary capitalism are not confined to the family, but also exist in the capitalist workplace and other institutions outside the family, it is hard to see by what principle we can separate these patriarchal relations from the social relations of capitalism. Hartmann concedes that "the same features, such as division of labor, often reinforce both patriarchy and capitalism, and in a thoroughly patriarchal capitalist society, it is hard to isolate the mechanisms of patriarchy" (Hartmann, p. 29). Yet she insists that we must separate patriarchy. It seems reasonable, however, to admit that if patriarchy and capitalism are manifest in identical social and economic structures they belong to one system, not two.

Several dual systems theorists who take the second approach, conceiving of patriarchy as a set of distinct material relations, solve this problem by positing patriarchy as a system or mode of production itself, which exists alongside the mode of capitalist production. Ann Ferguson, for example, argues that the family through history is the locus of a particular type of production distinct from

the production of material goods. She calls this type of production sex-affective production with its own relations of production distinct from capitalist relations. Men exploit women in the contemporary nuclear family by appropriating their sex-affective labor without reciprocation. Women thus constitute a distinct class in the traditional marxian sense. The interaction of patriarchy and capitalism in contemporary society consists in the mutual interaction of these two modes of production which both overlap and stand in tension with one another. 6 Socialist feminists who regard the family under capitalism as a vestige of the feudal mode of production, hold a similar position with regard to women's situation in contemporary society (that is: structured by the interaction of two modes of production) as do those who wish to distinguish mode of reproduction from mode of production.8 Hartmann similarly distinguishes between two different "types" or "aspects" of production, the production of people and the production of things. She does not, however, posit the "production of people" as a distinct mode of production, however, nor does she want to restrict this type of production to the family, though it is not clear where or how it takes place, nor how it can be distinguished from relations in which people produce things.

In order to have a dual systems theory which conceives patriarchy as a system of concrete relations as well as an ideological and psychological structure, it appears necessary to posit patriarchy in this fashion as a distinct system of production. Almost invariably, however, this approach relies on what Rosalind Petchesky calls a "model of separate spheres" which usually takes the form of distinguishing the family from the economy, and in locating the specific relations of patriarchy within the family. 10 There are, however, a number of problems with the model of separate spheres.

One of the defining characteristics of capitalism is the separation of productive activity from kinship relations, and thereby the creation of two spheres of social life. Making this point, and showing how this separation has created a historically unique situation for women, has been one of the main achievements of socialist feminist analysis. 11 The model of separate spheres presupposed by many dual systems theorists tends to hypostasize this division between family and economy specific to capitalism into a universal form. 12 Even within capitalism, moreover, this separation may be illusory. In their paper, "The Other Side of the Paycheck," Batva

Weinbaum and Amy Bridges argue, for example, that contemporary capitalism has not only rationalized and socialized production operations in accordance with its domination and profit needs, but that it has also rationalized and socialized the allegedly private work of consumption<sup>13</sup>

Because the model of separate spheres assumes the primary sphere of patriarchal relations is the family, it fails to bring into focus the character and degree of women's specific oppression as women outside the family. For example, it is difficult to view contemporary capitalism's use of women as sexual symbols to promote consumption as a function of some separate sphere distinct from the economic requirements of monopoly capitalism. More mundanely, a dual systems theory does not appear to have the theoretical equipment to identify and analyze the specific forms of sexist oppression which women suffer in the contemporary workplace. When more than half the women over sixteen in the U.S. are at work at any one time, and when over 90 percent work outside the home at some time in their lives, such a failing may serve the interests of contemporary capitalism itself.

This, more generally, is the ultimate objection to any dual systems theory. However one formulates it, the dual systems theory allows traditional marxism to maintain its theory of production relations, historical change, and analysis of the structure of capitalism in a basically unchanged form. That theory, as Hartmann points out, is completely gender-blind. The dual systems theory thus accepts this gender-blind analysis of the relations of production, wishing only to add onto it a separate conception of the relations of gender hierarchy. Thus, not unlike traditional marxism, the dual systems theory tends to see the question of women's oppression as merely an additive to the main questions of marxism.

As long as feminists are willing to cede the theory of material social relations arising out of laboring activity to traditional marxism, however, the marriage between feminism and marxism cannot be happy. If, as Hartmann claims, patriarchy's base is a control over women's labor that excludes women from access to productive resources, then patriarchal relations are internally related to production relations as a whole. Thus traditional marxian theory will continue to dominate feminism as long as seminism does not challenge the adequacy of the traditional theory of production relations itself. If traditional marxism has no theoretical place for analysis of gender relations and the oppression of women, then that theory is an inadequate theory of production relations. Our historical research coupled with our feminist intuitions tells us that the labor of women occupies a central place in any system of production, and that sexual hierarchy is a crucial element in any system of domination. <sup>14</sup> To correspond to these intuitions we need a theory of relations of production and the social relations which derive from and reinforce those relations which takes gender relations and the situation of women as *core* elements. Instead of marrying marxism, feminism must take over marxism and transform it into such a theory. We must develop an analytical framework which regards the material social relations of a particular historical social formation as one system in which gender differentiation is a core attribute.

#### DIVISION OF LABOR ANALYSIS

In this essay I will propose that gender division of labor must be a central category for such a theory, and I will sketch how that category might function in a feminist historical materialism. In my reading, many concrete socialist feminist analyses, including some propounding a dual systems theory, do not actually take patriarchy, but rather gender division of labor, as their central category. Thus in arguing for gender division of labor as a central category of feminist historical materialism I believe I am making explicit a characteristic of socialist feminist theory which already exists.

Traditional marxism takes class as its central category of analysis. Feminists have rightly claimed that this category does not aid the analysis of women's specific oppression, or even its identification. The concept of class is indeed gender-blind. Precisely this conceptual flaw of the category class helped bring about the dual systems theory. Since class functions as the core concept of the marxian theory of social relations, and since it provides no place for analysis of gender differentiation and gender hierarchy, there appears to be no alternative but to seek another category and another system in which gender relations can appear. I suggest that there is another alternative, however. Agreeing that the category of class is gender blind and hence incapable of exposing women's situation, we can nevertheless remain within the materialist framework by elevating the category of division of labor to a position as fundamental as, if not more fundamental than, that of class. This

category can provide us with means of analyzing the social relations of laboring activity in a gender differentiated way.

The division of labor category appears in Marx's own work almost as often as the class category, and he uses both in an equally ambiguous and equivocal fashion. One wonders, then, why the category of class has been taken up, refined and developed by the marxist theoretical tradition, while the category of division of labor has remained undeveloped. In The German Ideology division of labor operates as a category broader and more fundamental than that of class. 15 Division of labor, moreover, accounts for specific cleavages and contradictions within a class. 16 The category of division of labor can not only refer to a set of phenomena broader than that of class, but also more concrete. It refers specifically to the activity of labor itself, and the specific social and institutional relations of that activity, rather than to a relation to the means of labor and the products of labor, as does class.<sup>17</sup> The specific place of individuals in the division of labor explains their consciousness and behavior, as well as the specific relations of cooperation and conflict in which different persons stand. 18

These attributes of division of labor as a category both more concrete in its level of analysis and broader in extension than the category of class, make it an indispensible element in any analysis of the social relations involved in and arising from laboring activity. Each category entails a different level of abstraction. Class analysis aims to get a vision of a system of production as a whole, and thus asks about the broadest social divisions of ownership, control, and the appropriation of surplus product. At such a level of abstraction, however, much pertaining to the relations of production and the material bases of domination remains hidden. Division of labor analysis proceeds at the more concrete level of particular relations of interaction and interdependence in a society which differentiates it into a complex network. It describes the major structural divisions among the members of a society according to their position in laboring activity, and assesses the effect of these divisions on the functioning of the economy, the relations of domination, political and ideological structures.

I believe that raising division of labor to a level of precision and centrality as important as class can have implications for analysis of phenomena in addition to gender differentiation. For example, questions surrounding the role of professionals and state workers in contemporary capitalism might be better resolved through division of labor analysis than class analysis. Analysis of racial tension in the contemporary working class as well as in the society as a whole, to take another example, might benefit from inquiring into the correlations of race with aspects of the contemporary division of labor. Finally, the indubitable presence of relations of domination in existing socialist societies might be better analyzed in terms of division of labor than in terms of class. <sup>19</sup>

I am here concerned, however, with the implications of division of labor analysis for feminist theory. I have argued thus far that a complete analysis of the material relations of a social formation requires specific analysis of the division of labor and that this analysis neither derives from nor reduces to class analysis. A crucial aspect of the division of labor in every hitherto existing society is an elaborate gender division of labor that affects the entire society. Thus a complete analysis of the economic relations of production in a social formation requires specific attention to the gender division of labor.

#### GENDER DIVISION OF LABOR

With the term "gender division of labor" I intend to refer to all structured gender differentiation of labor in a society. Such traditional women's tasks as bearing and rearing children, caring for the sick, cleaning, cooking, etc., fall under the category of labor as much as the making of objects in a factory. Using the category of production or labor to designate only the making of concrete material objects in a modern factory has been one of the unnecessary tragedies of marxian theory.20 "Relations of production" or "social relations arising from laboring activity" should mean the social relations involved in any task or activity which the society defines as necessary. Thus in our own society, for example, the relation between female prostitutes and the pimps or organizations they work for is a relation of production in this sense. Use of the gender division of labor category provides the means for analyzing the social relations arising from the laboring activity of a whole society along the axis of gender.21

At a minimum, it seems to me that a gender division of labor analysis would attempt to answer the following questions: What are the major lines of gender division of labor in a particular social formation, and what is the nature and social meaning of the gender specified tasks? How does gender division of labor underlie other

aspects of economic organization, and how does it underlie relations of power and domination in society, including gender hierarchy? How does gender division of labor relate to the organization of sexual and kinship relations? What accounts for the origin and transformation in this particular structure of gender division of labor? How have transformations in gender division of labor led to changes in the relations of men and women, other economic relations, political relations, and ideological structures?

Gender division of labor analysis can have a number of advantages over the approach of the dual systems theory. It brings gender relations and the position of women to the center of historical materialist analysis. A marxian account of the social relations of production must bring women's specific situation into focus through gender division of labor analysis. Failure to do so results not merely in diminishing or ignoring the significance of male domination, which is bad enough, but also in missing crucial elements of the structure of economic and social relations as a whole. For example, it surely makes a difference to the economic organization of Greek and Roman society, and to the slave mode of production there, that women managed the households. Women thus had the most direct relationship with family slaves while men had mobility for trade and warfare, as well as leisure for the production of culture and participation in politics. 22 A similar point might be made about the women of the ruling class in medieval Europe.<sup>23</sup>

Gender division of labor analysis may provide a way of regarding gender relations as not merely a central aspect of relations of production, but as fundamental to their structure. For the gender division of labor is the first division of labor, and in so-called primitive societies it is the only institutionalized division of labor. The development of other forms of social division of labor, such as the division between mental and manual labor, may thus be explicable only by appeal to transformations in the gender division of labor and the effect such changes have on the relations between members of each sex, as well as potentialities such changes make available to them.

More importantly, serious empirical investigation may reveal that the radical feminist account of class as based on sex—an account which the dual system theory abandons—may turn out to be appropriate for historical materialist theory. To do so one would not argue that class domination derives from sex oppression, as Shulamith Firestone does is the *Dialectic of Sex.*<sup>24</sup> Rather one

would give an account of the emergence of class society out of changes in the gender division of labor. Engels, in the Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, suggests something along these lines though he fails to recognize its implications, a failure which biases the whole account. More recently, in The Underside of History, Elise Boulding has suggested a connection between the rise of class stratified society and the fact that at a certain point in early societies men began to specialize in one trade while women did not.<sup>25</sup>

Gender division of labor analysis can also explain the origins and maintenance of women's subordination in social structural terms. Neither a biological account nor a psychological account, for example, can show how men in a particular society occupy an institutionalized position of superiority in a particular society. Men can occupy such an institutionalized position of superiority only if the organization of social relations arising from laboring activity gives them a level of control over and access to resources that women do not have. Gender division of labor can help explain this differential access to the means of labor and control, and thus can help explain how the institutions of male domination originate, are maintained, and change.<sup>26</sup>

Biological and psychological elements have their place, of course, in an account of women's situation and oppression. One among many factors conditioning the gender division of labor in most societies, for example, is women's biological reproductive function. Any account of the gender division of labor, moreover, presupposes that there are genders—that is, socio-cultural division and classification of people according to their biological sex. Since any particular gender division of labor presupposes gender identification and symbolic elaboration, we need some account of gender. Such an account, I think, must be psychological. The best account we have thus far of the origins, symbolic and ideological significance, and implications of gender differentiation is the feminist appropriation of the freudian perspective in such works as Dorothy Dinnerstein's The Mermaid and the Minotaur and Nancy Chodorow's The Reproduction of Mothering. Such works have cogently argued that women's relation to young children determines the development of gender differentiation as we know it, and explains why women signify "the other" in most cultural ideologies. 27 One must not confuse such biological accounts of the

origins of gender identity and its symbolic structure, however, with accounts of the social power men have over women and their position of relative privilege...While these different accounts may reinforce one another, they belong to different levels of analysis.

Hartmann herself appears to take the division of labor by sex as the foundation of male domination, perhaps even of gender itself.

The strict division of labor by sex, a social invention common to all known societies, creates two very separate genders and a need for men and women to get together for economic reasons.... The sexual division of labor is also the underpinning of sexual subcultures in which men and women experience life differently; it is the material base of male power which is exercised (in our society) not just in not doing housework and in securing superior employment, but psychologically as well. (Hartmann, p. 16.)

Gender division of labor analysis allows us to do material analysis of the social relations of labor in gender specific terms without assuming that all women in general or all women in a particular society have a common and unified situation. I believe this to be one of the primary virtues of such an analysis. Because the dual systems theory posits a distinct system underlying the oppression of women, it tends to claim that qua women we are in an identical situation whatever our historical location or situation. Gender division of labor analysis, however, can avoid this false identification while still focusing on the gender specific situation and oppression of women. Gender division of labor analysis notices the broad axes of gender structuration of the relations of labor and distribution, and notices that certain tasks and functions in a particular society are always or usually performed by members of one sex. This does not necessarily commit it to any claims about the common situation of all members of that sex. In some societies every woman must perform some tasks, but in most societies the tasks and positions of women vary, even though they are gender specific.

Not only can gender division of labor analysis take account of specific variations in the situations of women in its descriptions, but it can better explain such variations than can the dual systems theory. In particular, explaining variations in the kind or degree of women's subordination in a society requires reference to what women concretely do in a society. For example, it is not surprising

that women tend to stand in a more equal position to men when they have access to weapons and warfare than when men have a monopoly over these. <sup>28</sup> Gender division of labor analysis, moreover, may prove fruitful in giving an account of why in a few societies—the Iroquois, for example—women do not appear to occupy a subordinate position. <sup>29</sup>

In giving centrality to phenomena of gender division of labor I am not claiming that gender division of labor can explain all the aspects of women's situation in a particular society. I am claiming only that in giving an account or explanation of some particular phenomenon of women's situation one should articulate its relation to the gender division of labor. I conceive that gender division of labor should always be a part—but almost never the only part—of an explanation of some aspect of women's situation.<sup>30</sup>

In proposinggender division of labor analysis for a feminist historical materialism, moreover, I am claiming that understanding the economic structure and relations of domination of a social formation as a whole requires paying attention to the structure of the gender division of labor. Through this category socialist feminists can view phenomena of class, domination, relations of production and distribution, on the one hand, and phenomena of women's oppression, on the other hand, as aspects of the same socio-economic system. In this way we can demand of all marxists that they consider issues of women's situation and oppression as integral to their analysis of a social formation.

The major purpose of material in this section has been to suggest some directions for a feminist materialist theory which regards gender differentiation as a crucial element in an account of social relations of production in a society. The need for a theory that regards the position of women as crucial to the understanding of the system of capitalism should by now be clear. In the following section I will sketch a historical account of women's situation in capitalism which might correspond to such a theory.

# GENDER DIVISION AND CAPITALIST PATRIARCHY

Any historical account is an interpretative reconstruction within a specific theoretical framework. This holds true for women's history as much as any other form of history. Since one's theoretical approach already influences the way one gives the historical account, that account cannot confirm or disconfirm the

theory. Hartmann poses her account of the role of the family wage in the history of capitalism as though it were empirical evidence supporting the claim that patriarchy exists alongside capitalism as an independent structure, at times conflicting with capitalism. But her account actually presupposes the dual systems theory.

In her essay as well as her paper, "Capitalism, Patriarchy and Job Segregation by Sex," <sup>31</sup> Hartmann has offered us incontrovertible evidence that women's oppression within the modern era is complex and pervasive. In her historical accounts she has carried marxist feminism forward by giving us solid accounts of the structures and changes in women's role in the labor process and the economy as a whole under capitalism. After this work no one would dare claim that women's oppression under capitalism either does not exist, is a mere epiphenomenon, or is withering away.

The issue rather is not whether the specific sexist oppression of women exists in capitalist society, but how we should construe women's special oppression. Hartmann and many others claim that women's oppression in capitalist society does not have its foundation in the structure and dynamic of capitalism, but in an independent set of structures and dynamic of patriarchy. Others, such as Ehrenreich and English in For Her Own Good, argue that the specific situation of women under capitalism is a function of the structure of the commodity economy and the needs of bourgeois ideology. The issue turns on whether male dominance under capitalism should be understood as a separate system or as part of the internal structure of capitalism itself.

In her account of women's oppression within capitalist society, Hartmann assumes a model of the structure and dynamic of capitalism as gender-blind. In her view nothing about the logic of capitalism itself requires differentiation among workers along lines of ascribed characteristics like sex (or race). Indeed, Hartmann shares an assumption about the nature of capitalism held by liberal and marxist theorists alike: that capitalism's inherent tendency is to homogenize the workforce, reducing the significance of ascribed statuses based on sex, race, ethnic origin, and so on. She claims that the development of capitalism from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century undermined male dominance over women and threatened to make women independent from and equal to men. "The theoretical tendency of pure capitalism would have been to eradicate all arbitrary differences of status among laborers, making all laborers equal in the marketplace." 33 Given that the internal

dynamic of capitalism tends toward such homogenization, she argues, only the operation of a separate system of patriarchy can explain women's continued subordination and unequal status.

I believe that abandoning the assumption of a gender-blind capitalism allows one to approach the history of women's status in capitalist society in a more revealing light. A gender division of labor analysis of capitalism, which asks how the system itself is structured along gender lines, can give an account of the situation of women under capitalism as a function of the structure and dynamic of capitalism itself. My thesis is that marginalization of women and thereby our functioning as a secondary labor force is an essential and fundamental characteristic of capitalism.

In her book, Women in Class Society, Heleieth Saffioti argues that the marginalization of women's labor is necessary to capitalism and is the key to understanding women's situation under capitalism. Capitalism emerges as the first economic system whose nature dictates that not all potentially productive people be employed, and which also requires a fluctuation in the proportion of the population employed. The existence of the system thus requires, she argues, that some criteria be found to distinguish the core of primary workers from marginal or secondary workers. The preexistence of patriarchal ideology, coupled with the necessity that women be near small children, operated to make sex the most natural criterion by which to divide the workforce. A Capitalism uses criteria of race and ethnicity as well, when these are present in the society, but the sex division is always the most obvious and permanent; women are not likely to be "assimilated."

Hartmann cites the indisputable fact that women's social subordination existed before capitalism as evidence that our subordination under capitalism has its source in a separate system of social relations that interacts with the capitalist system.<sup>35</sup> We need not draw this conclusion, however. A marxist would not assert that the existence of class society prior to capitalism demonstrates that all class societies have some common structure independent of the system of capitalism. Class societies undergo systemic historical transformation. The weakness of the ahistorical view of patriarchy which sees it as essentially the same through changes in other social relations has already been pointed out. Once we admit, with Hartmann, that the form and character of women's oppression have undergone fundamental historical transformation, then the existence of precapitalist patriarchy need no longer count as

evidence that male domination in capitalist society has its foundation in a structure of social relations independent of the system of capitalism itself.

While women in precapitalist society were by no means the social equals of men, all the evidence points to the conclusion that our situation deteriorated with the development of capitalism. In precapitalist society women dominated a number of crucial skills, and thus their labor and their knowledge were indispensible to the family, the manor, and the village. In many craft guilds of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries women were members on equal terms with men, and even dominated some of them. Women engaged in industry and trade. Precapitalist culture understood marriage as a economic partnership; men did not expect to "support" women. The law reflected this relative equality of women by allowing them to make contracts in their own name and retain their own property even in marriage.<sup>36</sup>

By the nineteenth century women's economic independence had been almost entirely undermined and her legal rights were nonexistent. Capitalism thrust women for the first time in history to the margins of economic activity. This marginalization of women's labor by capitalism never meant that women's labor was jettisoned entirely from the socialized economy. In 1866 in France, for example, women comprised 30 percent of the total industrial workforce.<sup>37</sup> Rather, women were defined as a secondary labor force which served as a reserve of cheap labor.

Throughout the history of capitalism women have served the classic functions Marx describes as those of the reserve army of labor. 38 They have served as a pool of workers who can be drawn into new areas of production without dislodging those already employed, and as a pool which can be used to keep both the wages and militancy of all workers low. Whenever in the history of capitalism large numbers of new workers have been needed in new and expanding industries, it is women more often than not who fill the need. The early textile mills in New England, for example, actively recruited women, as did the printers. 39 Many of the occupations which today are considered "women's jobs" were areas of employment which opened in huge numbers during the nineteenth century and which required relatively skilled workers. This is true of nursing, for example, as well as saleswork, telephone workers, and clerical workers. 40

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Employers have always tended to exaggerate divisions among workers in order to keep wages low and to maintain worker docility. Women have been used consistently for such purposes. Throughout the history of capitalism women have served as a ready pool of strikebreakers. In the history of industrialization capitalists consistently replaced men with women and children when they mechanized the production process. Then once the will and expectations of the men had lowered, they rehired the men and removed the women and children.41 A similar pattern seems to have operated during the depression of the 1930s. Employers replaced high priced men by lower priced women until the wage expectations of the men had fallen, at which point the employers once again replaced the women with men. 42 The literature on sex segregation of the contemporary labor force often suggests that sex segregated jobs are new to the twentieth century. A close look at the history of capitalism, however, reveals that a sexually mixed occupation has been rare. Those jobs in which women have dominated at any particular time, moreover, have usually been accorded less pay and prestige than male jobs of comparable skill. 43 In this way as well women have always served as a secondary labor force.

Preexistent patriarchal ideology and the traditional location of women's labor near the home initially made possible the marginalization of women's labor, according it secondary status. Bourgeois ideology, however, greatly expanded and romanticized. at the same time that it trivialized, women's association with a domestic sphere and dissociation with work outside the home. The ideology of femininity which defined women as nonworking emerged as a consequence of and justification for the process of marginalization of women that had already begun. Not until well into the nineteenth century did treatises appear arguing that the true vocation of women was motherhood, that women were too frail to engage in heavy work, that women's proper activity was to nurture and create an atmosphere of shelter and comfort for her family.44

Capitalists actively promoted, and continue to promote, the ideology of domestic womanhood to justify low wages for women, arguments for their indispensibility, and to keep women from organizing. 45 Because only the bourgeois or petty bourgeois woman could live a life that corresponded to the ideology of femininity, that ideology acted as a powerful force in the upwardly mobile desires of the working class. Women internalized the image of femininity and both men and women took the "nonworking" wife as a sign of status. One should note here that among the working class a wife who was not a wage worker was freed to bring in income through petty commodity production or to produce food and clothing which would make buying less necessary.

Without question male workers had sexist motivations and used sexist arguments in the struggle for the family wage which Hartmann discusses and in the struggle for protective legislation for women and children which occurred at about the same time. Given the history of capitalism up until that time, however, one can see these motives and arguments as an effect and consolidation of the capitalist gender division of labor which accorded women a marginal and secondary position. One can, that is, explain the sexism of male workers without appealing to a system of social relations independent of capitalism, by seeing the essentially patriarchal character of the system of capitalism itself. One explains it by seeing how capitalism is an economic system in which a gender division of labor having a historically specific form and structure which by marginalizing women's labor gives men a specific kind of privilege and status.

Capitalism does not merely use or adapt to gender hierarchy, as most dual systems theorists suggest. From the beginning it was founded on gender hierarchy which defined men as primary and women as secondary. The specific forms of the oppression of women which exist under capitalism are essential to its nature.46 This does not mean, of course, that gender hierarchy did not exist prior to capitalism, nor does it mean that the development of capitalism's gender division of labor did not depend on the prior existence of sexist ideology and a feudal gender division of labor. Many other aspects of capitalism developed out of feudal society, but at a certain point these developments took a specifically new form.

If we could find one instance of a capitalist society in which the marginalization of women's labor did not occur, we might be entitled to consider it a characteristic external to the structure of capitalism. We can find no such instance, however. In her book Women's Role in Economic Development, Ester Boserup documents in detail that the situation of women in third world economies seems to worsen with the introduction of capitalist and "modern" industrial methods. Even where capitalism enters a

society in which women's work is the center of the economy, it tends to effect the marginalization of women's labor.<sup>47</sup> In claiming that the capitalist economy requires the marginalization of women, I am not claiming that we cannot logically conceive of a capitalism in which the marginalization of women did not occur. I am claiming, rather, that given an initial gender differentiation and a preexisting sexist ideology, a patriarchal capitalism in which women function as a secondary labor force is the only *historical* possibility.

## PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

A theory must be evaluated by standards of coherence, consistency, simplicity, explanatory power, etc. A social theory, however, in addition to these, should be judged according to its practical implications. A theory intended as part of a political movement should be judged according to how well it may be expected to further the goals of that movement. Thus in this concluding section I argue that the dual systems theory has some undesirable practical implications which further indicate the need for a feminist materialist theory which is an integral part of a revised marxism, rather than merely married to marxism.

The dual systems theory originally developed for a determinate practical reason. The left was male dominated, blatantly sexist and dismissed feminist concerns as merely bourgeois. Angry and frustrated socialist women began forming all women's groups and arguing for the need for an autonomous women's movement to correct the problems of the left and to develop the practice and theory of feminism. The dual systems theory arose in part as an element in this argument for an autonomous women's movement. If capitalism and patriarchy, classism and sexism, each have a source in distinct social systems, then the necessity for a women's movement autonomous from the mixed left follows most reasonably.

Let me make clear that I believe that an autonomous women's movement is absolutely necessary both for women and the left today, for all the practical reasons usually articulated by feminists. Women must have the space to develop positive relations with each other, apart from men. We can best learn to develop our own organizing, decision making, speaking and writing skills in a supportive environment free from male dominance or

paternalism. An autonomous women's movement can best reach women who see the need for the struggle against sexism, but have not yet seen that struggle as integrated with the struggle for socialism. And so on.

The indubitable practical necessity of an autonomous women's movement, however, does not show the need for a dual systems theory. The different positions of men and women within the capitalist patriarchal gender division of labor creates the strategic necessity for women to organize separately so that we are in a position to develop our own skills, make our own decisions, and struggle against men and their sexism. One need not draw the conclusion from this necessity which many socialist feminists draw, namely that these are two separate struggles against two separate systems.

I have some trouble conceiving what struggle against patriarchy as distinct from the struggle against capitalism might mean at a practical level. The issues of women's reproductive rights, for example, are unquestionably on the front lines of the struggle for women's liberation. If any cluster of issues could be singled out as involving specifically the struggle against patriarchy as distinct from the struggle against capitalism, one would think this would be it. Yet the actual struggle has been and must be against the integrated and virulent *capitalist* patriarchy we live in. In light of the recent supreme court ruling on the Hyde Amendment we know more than ever that the reproductive rights of poor and Third World women are more seriously threatened than those of other women. Not recognizing this has in the past been a serious failing of the women's movement. In raising issues of women's reproduclive freedom, women confront the reality of the capitalist patriarchal medical system. Current struggles for reproductive rights, morever, necessarily involve confronting the structures of the capitalist patriarchal state, which is presently in the midst of a fiscal crisis. From a practical perspective, then, it is simply not possible to separate this most central aspect of the struggle against patriarchal structures from the struggle against capitalist structures.

One might propose the feminist struggle against the sexual abuse of women as a struggle against patriarchal structures which does not entail struggle against capitalism. A few actions in this struggle need not have an explicitly anticapitalist thrust, such as tape counseling, or "take back the night" patrols. But sexual harrassment and abuse in the workplace, for example, cannot be

In my view what distinguishes the politics of socialist feminism is adherence to the principles that engaging in feminist organizing projects in itself counts as valid socialist political work, and that all socialist political work should have a feminist dimension at least to the extent that explicit questions have been raised about the implications of the work for women's oppression of women's relation to a socialist movement. The dual systems theory cloes not provide the theoretical basis for justifying this claim about the meaning of socialist feminist politics. Only a theory which regards the conditions of women's oppression as located in one system in which that oppression is a core element can give that basis.

separated from the total system of hierarchy and subordination essential to contemporary capitalist production relations. Sexual harrassment of one form or another is a routine way of dealing with women workers, and is an integral part of the superior-subordinate relation in many factory and office settings. The larger structure of the sexual objectification of women certainly cannot be separated from the capitalist sales effort which constantly exploits and exposes women's bodies as symbols of pleasure, luxury, and convenience.<sup>48</sup>

There are urgent practical reasons, in my opinion, for rejecting the notion that patriarchy and capitalism are separate systems entailing distinct political struggles. Such an approach continues to see feminist political action as over and above anticapitalist socialist political action. This puts a double burden on those who identify themselves as socialist feminists, while it fails to confront other socialists directly.

As a result of the influence of feminism, many socialist individuals and organizaitons have become more self-conscious about examining their own sexist prejudices and practices, and they are more aware of the need to organize women and deal with women's issues. By and large, however, socialists do not consider fighting women's oppression as a central aspect of the struggle against capitalism itself. The dual systems theory encourages this by insisting that women's specific oppression has its locus in a system other than capitalism. As a result, within the socialist movement women's issues remain segregated, generally dealt with only by women, and the mixed socialist movement as a whole fails to take issues related to women's oppression as seriously as others.

A theory of women's oppression under capitalism which showed capitalism as essentially patriarchal could change the relation between feminist political practice and the struggle to transform capitalist institutions and relations. If it is the case that the marginalization of women and our functioning as a secondary labor force are central to capitalism as it developed historically and as it exists today, then the struggle against the oppression of women and our marginalization in this society is itself anticapitalist.

Barbara Ehrenreich has defined a socialist feminist as a socialist who goes to twice as many meetings.<sup>49</sup> This definition is not entirely tongue in cheek, for the present understanding of socialist feminism still tends to see the feminist practice as additional to the

### **FOOTNOTES**

1. For some other statements of the dual systems theory, see Linda Phelps, "Patriarchy and Capitalism," Quest, Vol. II, no.2, Fall 1975; Zillah Eisenstein, "Developing a Theory of Capitalist Patriarchy," in Eisenstein, ed., Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979), pp.5-40.

2. Juliet Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), p.409.

1. Ibid, p. 406.

4. See Mina Davis Caufield, "Universal Sex Oppression: A Critique from Marxist Anthropology," Catalyst, nos. 10-11, Summer 1977, pp. 60-77.

5. Compare McDonough and Harrison's criticism of Mitchell in "Patriauchy and Relations of Production," in Kuhn and Wolpe, ed., Feminism and Materialism (London: Routeledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 12-25. 6. Ann Ferguson, "Women as a New Revolutionary Class," in Pat Walker, ed., Between Labor and Capital (Boston: South End Press,

1979), pp.279-312.

/. This is basically the position Mitchell articulates in Women's Estate (New York: Vintage Books, 1973); see also Sheila Rowbotham, Women's Consciousness, Man's World (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1973), pp.61-63.

R See Jane Flax, "Do Feminists Need Marxism?" Quest, Vol. III, no.1, Summer 1976, p.55.

There are clear problems with Ferguson's attempt to describe the muclear family as a distinct *mode* of production, but I do not wish to take

up space in the paper analyzing them. Firstly, in her idea of sex-affective production it does not seem that any material goods are produced; it is difficult to grasp the notion of a mode of production, in the marxian sense, which does not produce any material goods. Second, her idea presupposes that sex-affective mode of production could have some kind of independent existence from the capitalist mode of production. Given that no material goods are produced in it, however, such independence is not viable.

- 10. See Rosalind Petchesky, "Dissolving the Hyphen: A Report on Marxist Feminist Groups 1-5," in Eisenstein, ed., op. ait., pp. 373-387.
- 11. See Eli Zaretsky, Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life (New York: Harper and Row, 1976); Ann Oakley, Women's Work: The Housewife Past and Present (New York: Vintage Books, 1974); Roberta Hamilton, The Liberation of Women: A Study of Patriarchy and Capitalism (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978).
- 12. In his Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, which is the starting point for many of these analyses, Engels manifests the same tendency. He divides all labor through all historical periods into private labor and public labor.
- 13. Batya Weinbaum and Amy Bridges, "The Other Side of the Paycheck: Monopoly Capital and the Structure of Consumption," in Eisenstein, ed., op. cit., pp.190-205.
- 14. For an incisive and persuasive recent account of the basis of class society and the state in the patriarchal family, see Sherry B. Ortner, "The Virgin and the State," Feminist Studies, Vol. 4, no.3, October 1978. pp.19-36.
- 15. Karl Marx and Frederich Engels, The German Ideology, C.J. Arthur, ed. (New York: International Publishers, 1970), p.43; p.54.
- 16. Ibid, p.65.
- 17. Ibid, p.52.
- 18. Ibid, p.68. For more complete accounts of the meaning of the concept of division of labor in marxian theory, and especially in the German Ideology, see Andreas Hegedus, "The Division of Labor and the Social Structure of Socialism," in Peter Berger, ed., Marxism and Sociology (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1979), pp. 128-145; see also Bertell Ollman, Alienation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1971), Chapter 24.
- 19. See Hegedus, op. cit.
- 20. See Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature (Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 75-95.
- 21. In previous versions of this paper I have designated this category "sexual division of labor," in conformity with common usuage. I have since come to the conclusion, however, that "gender division of labor" better captures the phenomenon, because through the concept of "gender" it

focuses on the social meaning of the division, rather than a biological or "natural" division.

- 22. For an account of the economic and political implications of women's relation to the household in ancient Greek society, see Marilyn Arthur, "'Liberated' Women: The Classical Era," in Bridenthal and Koonz, ed., Becoming Visible (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), pp.60-89; see also Elise Boulding, The Underside of History (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1976), pp.257-263.
- 23. See JoAnn McNamara and Suzanne F. Wemple, "Sanctity and Power: The Dual Pursuit of Medieval Women." in Bridenthal and Koonz, ed., op. cit.; see also Elizabeth Janeway, Man's World, Woman's Place (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1971), pp.13-22.
- 24. In The Dialectic of Sex (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), Firestone took herself to be giving a materialist account of women's oppression. The problem with her account, I am suggesting, may not be this project of explaining class by sex, but the completely psychologistic manner in which she does so.
- 25. Boulding, op. cit.
- 26. There is much evidence, for example, that whether a society is matrifocal or patrifocal depends in large measure on the gender division of labor. See Bette S. Denich, "Sex and Power in the Balkans," in Rosaldo and Lamphere, ed., Woman, Culture and Society (Stanford University Press, 1974).
- 27. Nancy Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering (Berkeley: Berkeley University Press, 1978); Dorothy Dinnerstein, The Mermaid and the Minotaur (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).
- 28. Boulding, op. cit.
- 29. Much of Judith Brown's account of Iroquois women's relatively high status depends upon looking at their role in production and the control over resources they have by virtue of that role. See "Iroquois Women: An Ethnohistorical Note," in Rayna Reiter, ed., Toward an Anthropology of Women (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976).
- 30. Mary Ryan's book, Womanhood in America from Colonial Times to the Present (New York: New Viewpoints, 1975) might be taken as an example of the application of the approach I am recommending. In her accounts and explanations she always makes reference to the economic situation of women and their laboring activity, both in and outside the home. She never reduces the totality of the situation at any time to this division of labor analysis, however, and always includes other elements in a particular account.
- 31. Heidi Hartmann, "Capitalism, Patriarchy and Job Segregation by Sex," in Eisenstein, ed., op. cit., pp.206-247.
- 32. Barbara Ehrenreich and Dierdre English, For Her Own Good (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Press, 1978).

- 33. Hartmann, op. cit., p.207.
- 34. Heleith Saffioti, Women in Class Society (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), especially Chapter 12.
- 35. Hartmann, op. cit., pp.209-211.
- 36. Ehrenreich and English, op. cit., pp. 6-9; Alice Clark, Working Life of Women in the 17th Century (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and How, 1920); Ann Oakley, Women's Work, op. cit., Chapter 2; Kathleen Case, "The Cheshire Cat: Reconstructing the Experience of Medieval Women," in Berenice A. Carroll, ed., Liberating Women's History (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1976), pp. 224-249; Mary Ryan, op. cit., pp. 19-82.
- 37. Saffioti, op. cit., p.53.
- 38. Marx, Capital, Vol. I (New York: International Publishers, 1967), pp.631-639.
- 39. Elizabeth Faulkner Baker, Technology and Women's Work (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), Chapter 1.
- 40. *Ibid*, see also Alice Kessler-Harris, "Women, Work and the Social Order," in Carroll, ed., op. cit., p.335.
- 41. Baker, Chapter 1; Kessler-Harris, "Stratifying by Sex: Understanding the History of Working Women," in Edwards, Reich, and Gordon, ed., Labor Market Segmentation (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1975), pp.217-242.
- 42. Jane Humphries, "Women: Scapegoats and Safety Valves in the Great Depression," in *Review of Radical Political Economics*, Vol. 8, no.1, Spring 1975, pp.98-121.
- 43. Baker, op. cit. and Kessler-Harris, "Stratifying by Sex..." both detail the degree of sex segregation in the U.S. in the nineteenth century; for a comparable account for Europe, see Teresa M. McBride, "The Long Road Home: Women's Work and Industrialization," in Bridenthal and Koonz, ed., op. cit.
- 44. Ehrenreich and English, op. cit.; Ryan, Chapter 3; Ann D. Gordon and Mari Jo Buhle, "Sex and Class in Colonial and Nineteeth Century America," in Carroll, op. cit.
- 45. Kessler-Harris, "Women, Work and the Social Order," pp.333-337. 46. Ann Foreman argues that the specific type of domestic labor which is allocated to women under capitalism is a form of labor peculiar to and definitive of capitalism. Wage labor, that is to say, is not the only form of labor that capitalism creates; it also creates privatized househould labor, and Foreman argues that this is an integral element of the capitalist mode of production. See Femininity as Alienation (London: Pluto Press, 1977). 47. Ester Boserup, Women's Role in Economic Development (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970); see also E.M. Chaney and M. Schmink, "Women and Modernization: Access to Tools," in Nash and Safa, ed., Sex and Class in Latin America (New York: Praeger, 1976).

- 48. See Ryan, op. cit., pp.251-304.
- 49. Working Papers in Socialist Feminism, pamphlet available from the New American Movement.

- 33. Hartmann, op. cit., p.207.
- 34. Heleith Saffioti, Women in Class Society (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), especially Chapter 12.
- 35. Hartmann, op. cit., pp.209-211.
- 36. Ehrenreich and English, op. cit., pp. 6-9; Alice Clark, Working Life of Women in the 17th Century (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and How, 1920); Ann Oakley, Women's Work, op. cit., Chapter 2; Kathleen Case, "The Cheshire Cat: Reconstructing the Experience of Medieval Women," in Berenice A. Carroll, ed., Liberating Women's History (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1976), pp. 224-249; Mary Ryan, op. cit., pp. 19-82.
- 37. Saffioti, op. cit., p.53.
- 38. Marx, Capital, Vol. I (New York: International Publishers, 1967), pp.631-639.
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- 41. Baker, Chapter 1; Kessler-Harris, "Stratifying by Sex: Understanding the History of Working Women," in Edwards, Reich, and Gordon, ed., Labor Market Segmentation (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1975), pp.217-242.
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- 44. Ehrenreich and English, op. cit.; Ryan, Chapter 3; Ann D. Gordon and Mari Jo Buhle, "Sex and Class in Colonial and Nineteeth Century America," in Carroll, op. cit.
- 45. Kessler-Harris, "Women, Work and the Social Order," pp.333-337. 46. Ann Foreman argues that the specific type of domestic labor which is allocated to women under capitalism is a form of labor peculiar to and definitive of capitalism. Wage labor, that is to say, is not the only form of labor that capitalism creates; it also creates privatized househould labor, and Foreman argues that this is an integral element of the capitalist mode of production. See Femininity as Alienation (London: Pluto Press, 1977). 47. Ester Boserup, Women's Role in Economic Development (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970); see also E.M. Chaney and M. Schmink, "Women and Modernization: Access to Tools," in Nash and Safa, ed., Sex and Class in Latin America (New York: Praeger, 1976).

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