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<p>Roman Rosdolsky</p> <h1>THE MAKING OF MARX'S 'CAPITAL'</h1> <p>Translated by Pete Burgess</p>
<p>The Conference of Socialist Economists, in association with Pluto Press, are making the English-language edition of this classic work available directly to readers before publication, at 2/3 of the bookshop price.</p> <p>Originally published in German in 1968, <i>The Making of Marx's 'Capital'</i> is the only serious study to date of how Marx reworked and developed his understanding of the categories of political economy. Its systematic comparison of the drafts of <i>Capital</i> provides a comprehensive basis for the re-evaluation of a number of contentious issues in marxist theory. Rosdolsky himself draws out the implications for many themes in marxist 'political economy', dealing in particular with the realisation problem, schemes of reproduction, skilled and unskilled labour, the role of use-value and the critique of Marx's concept of value. Rosdolsky's reconstruction of Marx's method and theoretical system has laid the foundation for much of the recent renaissance in marxist theory.</p> <p>Roman Rosdolsky remained a committed revolutionary, active in Eastern Europe from the first world war until his imprisonment by the Gestapo and his exile in the United States. He died in 1967. In 1948 he discovered one of the then extremely rare copies of Marx's <i>Grundrisse</i> which inspired almost two decades of work embodied in <i>The Making of Marx's 'Capital'</i>. Ernest Mandel's <i>Late Capitalism</i> is dedicated to Rosdolsky, his 'friend and comrade'.</p> <p>600 pages ISBN 0 904383 37 7 hardback only. £18.00</p>
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### Conceptualising Women

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### I INTRODUCTION

We have written this paper as an attempt to bring together discussions we have held over the past year on women's subordination and how it is to be theorised. In our discussions, which were initially based around a consideration of Meillassoux's work on the interrelationship of production and reproduction, we have tried to confront the ambiguities of the major concepts used both by him and by other writers on the same topics.

What we shall do then, is to look at some of these concepts and to suggest that given the unrigorous way in which they are used, with analytically different meanings conflated under single terms, they can only hinder our attempts to analyse women's position. In what follows we shall cover a wide territory of discussion, and deal only superficially with a whole range of topics which deserve detailed discussion. The only justification for this is that the concepts we are dealing with are obviously related to one another, and that the process of analysis has to proceed both at the level of detail and at a wider level. Only an appreciation of the total range of possibilities will give us an understanding of the significance of an empirical situation. While we cannot pretend to have covered all the important areas of debate, we hope at least that the questions we are asking, and the way they are posed, will stimulate others to proceed further than we have been able to. In consequence we have assumed a certain degree of familiarity with anthropological data, but nonetheless hope that the questions we have asked are of general relevance to feminists trying in different areas to define a similar problem.

The core of the problem, as we see it, lies in the unhistorical, atemporal nature of the category 'women'. If what defines women as women is the eternal fact of biology, this definition will intrude into any attempt at historical and theoretical specificity (1). Following from this, a major dilemma in trying to theorise women's position is the need, on the one hand, to provide a universal explanation for what is perceived - rightly or wrongly - to be a universal subordination of women, and on the other to periodise that same subordination. The problem seems exemplified by Engels, whose proclamation of a 'world historical defeat of the female sex' virtually ends his discussion of women, and by Meillassoux, who seems to suggest that women were at some (very questionable) evolutionary stage simply raped and battered into subjugation, to remain forever mute and unprotesting (1975, pp52 and 67).

historical periods and because of the problematic nature of the concept of reproduction. Since it is in this area of reproduction that Meillassoux's book is of most relevance to Marxist feminists, and since this concept is so central in the attempts to explore and explain women's subordination, we shall start by considering some of the fundamental problems involved in its use.

We shall distinguish three different levels at which the term reproduction is used and discuss possible interrelations between these different uses. Then we turn to production, and look at particular aspects of the sexual division of labour. Overall, we want to show how one might set about moving beyond the unproblematic way in which such concepts are usually treated. In particular, however, we want to stress that a fuller understanding of the way we think about women is a necessary part of women's struggle to transform their position in society.

## II REPRODUCTION

The concept of reproduction has been taken up both by Marxists concerned to account for succession and change which are not given in the static concept of the mode of production, and by those attempting to theorise the situation of women, in such a way that the particular biological tasks of women are frequently conflated with the overall process of social reproduction. At first sight this appears to be a straight-forward case of nominalism, conflation based on the homonymous term reproduction, but it does lead to a mis-representation of the problem. Within Marxism, use of the term has been closely associated in recent years with the debate over the concept of mode of production (see especially Althusser and Balibar 1970). In what follows we do not address ourselves directly to this debate, and we have tried to avoid the terminology associated with it, except insofar as we discuss the work of those who do employ the concept. The uncritical adoption of the term reproduction thus gives rise, we would argue, to theoretical error in three respects:

- (1) An over-simplistic reading of reproduction leads to the assumption firstly that social systems exist to maintain themselves through time (to reproduce themselves), and secondly that all levels of the system must be maintained through time in the same way. From this point of view, reproduction becomes closely allied to the functionalist concept of static equilibrium. Further, using reproduction as a blanket term subsumes many analytically distinct elements.
- (2) It is assumed that biological reproduction is merely one, unproblematic, aspect of reproduction as a whole. Human reproduction is analysed as a fundamental part of total social reproduction and analysed within the same conceptual framework. This conflation can be seen in the discussions on the lineage mode of production: women

On the other hand, the attempts that have been made to periodise women's subordination have their own weaknesses, particularly in their adherence to over-simple models of social evolution. We feel that even where such models are useful to increase our understanding of history and of the effect of the changing levels of development of productive forces in different environments, women cannot be just fitted in to models evolved for other purposes. The position of women cannot be simply deduced from a specification of the relations of production for any given case. In addition, taking an evolutionist approach easily leads not only to a teleological form of reasoning, but also a sort of speculative psychologism, usually based on an implicit model of 'human nature' in which men 'naturally' try to subdue women, or to ensure that 'their' property is handed on to their own children, and where women 'naturally' want to protect themselves from excessive sexual attention of males (eg Engels 1972, Meillassoux op. cit, Goody 1976).

Many of the current explanations for women's subordination by feminists, whether Marxist or not, seem to us to depend on concepts of apparently universal applicability. Terms such as reproduction, the sexual division of labour, the family, marriage, domestic, are used too often with scant regard for historical or cultural specificity. To take the concept of patriarchy as an example: although developed within a specific psychoanalytical discourse, it is used by Mitchell in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* to refer to the perceived universal subordination of women (1974). This usage has been taken up by many feminists: Mackintosh, for example, writes that patriarchy is 'the characteristic relation of human reproduction' (1977, p122). However, such a concept, appealing as it does to hypothetical universals at the level of psychoanalytical theory, is unable to provide any solution to the problem of why the relations of human reproduction should take the form they do nor why the consequences for women in other spheres of social production can sometimes be so dire.

Psychoanalysis clearly has much to offer in terms of exploring the mechanisms of ideological reproduction of relations between the sexes. Although we are not going to address psychoanalytic explanation directly, one of our main themes does concern the social construction of maleness and femaleness - that is of gender identity. The way gender categories are constructed in culture has the effect of rendering them non-comparable, and whatever the reasons for the origin of the cultural elaboration of gender difference, its significance changes with the later development of productive forces.

In *Femmes*, Greniers et Capitaux Meillassoux advances an account of women's subordination based on the importance of human reproduction in certain pre-capitalist modes of production. This can be seen as an attempt to provide a theory which is both universal and yet historically specific. But it again has considerable drawbacks - both because of the way in which Meillassoux theorises his different

are termed 'means of reproduction' by various authors (2) and control over them, because of its assumed significance for social reproduction, is seen as crucially important. Although Hindess and Hirst have recognised this as being 'an astonishing play on the word reproduction' (1976(a), p54), nonetheless they make no attempt to analyse in exactly what way this error is so serious.

(3) It has also been assumed that human reproductive practices will be empirically similar in all modes of production. This has had quite serious consequences. For example, in the analysis of the capitalist system, elaborations of the concept of reproduction have led to a conceptual separation between the mode of production's economic level, i.e. the labour process brought into being by the relation capital/labour, and the other levels which function to reproduce that relation. Thus various types of labour have been termed reproductive insofar as they serve to maintain the labour force. The best example of this is what is termed domestic labour. Since domestic labour is not set in motion directly by capital it is easy to lump together such 'reproductive' tasks as cooking, washing and cleaning with the biological reproduction of human beings, and thus to allow autonomy to the 'process of reproduction'. Again, given the empirical association of such activities with women's share of the sexual division of labour, the reproduction of the labour force is easily seen as a specifically female activity, separate from the process of production.

Domestic labour can be treated as an analytically distinct category under capitalism because it is not subject to the law of value, unlike most other labour. To treat as domestic labour the superficially similar tasks performed by women in other productive systems, in which little or no labour is valorised, is confusing. It is a distortion brought about by transferring concepts developed in the analysis of capitalism to non-capitalist systems (cf. Rosaldo 1973).

We have found it useful to clarify the concept of reproduction by isolating three different 'reproductions' which correspond to different levels of theoretical abstraction: social reproduction; reproduction of the labour force; human or biological reproduction. In what follows we are going to discuss each of these different usages, although some of them are more clearly relevant to the discussion of the position of women than others.

If we employ a more rigorous definition of the concept of reproduction we will be in a better position to answer three different kinds of questions. Through a greater understanding of the dynamics of social reproduction as a whole we will be able to decide to what extent women's position and male-female relations are crucial for the reproduction of the social totality. Through elaborating the concept of the reproduction of the labour force we should be able to determine the extent to which women's involvement in this sphere is important

to an understanding of their position within the society, and the extent to which this varies from one productive regime to another. Finally through looking at the problems involved in the area of human reproduction, we will be able to understand how women's reproductive capacities are controlled and whether this control determines the position they occupy in any given group.

#### A Social reproduction

If we are to attempt to gain some understanding of the extent to which women's position or male-female relationships are basic to social reproduction as a whole, we clearly need to understand what social reproduction means, and at what level of analysis we can work. It is thus in this context that we must review some of the debate.

Insofar as the concept is to be useful, it must refer to the reproduction of the conditions of social production in their totality and not to the reproduction of only certain levels of the total social system. Even though this formulation may be generally accepted, the way in which social reproduction occurs remains a matter of debate. The specification of what structures have to be reproduced in order that social reproduction as a whole can take place is the fundamental issue. Any theory of social reproduction has therefore to reveal what the basic structures of a given mode of production are, and then to demonstrate the necessity for their continued existence in order to ensure the continued existence of the mode of production itself. It is thus at the level of establishing the identity of such structures that the concept of social reproduction is constructed and challenged.

A few examples will give some indication of various positions that have recently been adopted. Balibar (1970) takes the Althusserian construct of mode of production, with its three instances and its structure in dominance, with determination in the last instance by the economic, as the 'structure' which has to be reproduced (3). While this conceptualisation allows for considerable empirical variation in how each level is reproduced, it can also lead to a structural teleology: all modes exist to reproduce themselves, and the potential for change is not contained within the account of the structure of the mode of production. However, in this discussion Balibar elaborates on a contradiction which could ultimately lead to the non-reproduction of the mode of production and thus to its transformation. Such contradiction, however, is not contained within the structures of the mode of production as a whole, rather it is to be located within the economic instance. For Balibar the economic instance is comprised of two elements - the forces of production and the relations of production - and it is the growing contradiction over time in the relationship between these two elements which provides the motor for change. The concept of contradiction for Balibar is thus at a different conceptual level to that of reproduction. Hindess

and Hirst (1977a and b) reject the concept of mode of production altogether, largely because they cannot accept the Althusserian definition of reproduction. Instead they suggest that reproduction can only be located in those relations and practices which reproduce the conditions of existence of the relations of production; in other words, at the level of political, juridical and ideological relations which create the conditions in which the economic relations of production are able to operate.

Finally Friedman (1976) in the most radical post-Althusserian re-evaluation of the concept also rejects mode of production as a theoretical object. He suggests that social reproduction requires a far wider social field than is given by the concept of mode of production; the latter imposes too restricted a boundary to the area within which social reproduction, or the complete cycle of production-circulation-reproduction, takes place in any given productive system.

While the debate is perhaps not immediately relevant to the problem of the subordination of women and their control by males, it is important to be able to establish whether a particular position of women, or relationship between the sexes, is necessary in any social unit; in particular whether this position or this relationship must be reproduced for the social formation as a whole to be reproduced. To do this we must be able to define the nature of the unit we are analysing and the nature of the boundaries within which its reproduction can actually take place. We must also understand the implications of the claims made as to the primary importance of the control of women's generative powers, and it is thus in this context that the theoretical debates are obviously relevant.

#### B Reproduction of the labour force

The reproduction of the labour force is clearly of a different theoretical order to that of social reproduction, and the empirical activities associated with it cannot be equated with the concept of social reproduction, despite the numerous sleights of hand in recent writings on the subject. However, the reproduction of the labour force is itself an underdeveloped concept. Firstly, it has to be distinguished from human or biological reproduction, and then within the concept we must distinguish two further meanings: on the one hand, maintenance of the labour force in the here and now, on the other allocation of agents to positions within the labour process over time. The debate over domestic labour in particular concerns reproduction of the labour force in the first sense (e.g. C. SE 1976) and in this paper we shall not be considering this debate nor the questions it raises for the analysis of women's position in all modes of production. This inevitably means that our discussion of the reproduction of the labour force is restricted to what we have defined as the second meaning of the concept. In this field, the allocation of agents to

positions in the labour process, we want to concentrate on the work of Meillassoux (1975) and O'Laughlin's review of it (1977), since their analyses involve quite radically opposed positions. While Meillassoux argues that reproduction is a key element for all modes of production at a certain level of development of the productive forces, O'Laughlin argues that it cannot be.

To take O'Laughlin first; she advances two theses which in fact have quite different implications:

- (1) that production and reproduction are a unified process - production of consumption goods is also reproduction, and (biological) reproduction is also production insofar as it produces use-values (i.e. babies) (1977, p21).
- (2) that the production of the means of subsistence is necessarily determinant while the reproduction of the labour force is 'fundamentally indeterminate' and 'contingent' upon production (pp6 & 9).

The first thesis seems to derive very much from Marx's statement that 'every social process of production is, at the same time, a process of reproduction', which she quotes (p6). She then simply conflates the production of new human beings and their continued 'reproduction' throughout their lives into the general process of social production. There is apparently no significance in a possible distinction between use-value (baby) and use-value (means of consumption).

The second thesis on the other hand does not seem to admit of such a distinction but nonetheless asserts that the only way to understand the production of babies is in its contingent, phenomenal forms. This in turn seems to imply that we can allow no analytical autonomy to human reproduction.

Even though O'Laughlin derives her argument largely from her analysis of capitalism, she fails to take account of the difference between the significance of the means of production in capitalist and pre-capitalist systems of production. Under capitalism, the reproduction of the labour force can be considered indeterminate because the producers are separated from their means of employment (i.e. capital). O'Laughlin talks instead of the means of subsistence, whose production determines the relations of production in many pre-capitalist systems in a way which it does not under capitalism.

To argue from the case of capitalism that the reproduction of labour is contingent in all modes of production is thus, we suggest, incorrect both methodologically and in theory.

As Meillassoux himself argues, the primacy of the ownership of the means of production cannot be extended wholesale from the analysis of capitalism to that of pre-capitalist formations where concepts of

ownership and control have a very different significance. Under productive regimes where the level of development of productive forces is such as to provide tools which are extensions of the human body rather than subordinating it - human labour - to inanimate means of production, the analytical significance of labour as a means of production is quite different from that under capitalism. In advanced capitalism, labour is subordinated to machinery and the employment of labour is regulated by the capitalist labour market which is highly uneven in its demands, not only for numbers of workers but the specific levels of skills required.

In pre-capitalist formations labour is not generally 'free' in the same way that it is under capitalism. Thus the situations we are trying to confront are those in which the means of production are set in motion in a quite different type of labour process than that of capitalism. Where tools are an extension of the human body, there is no reason to separate them analytically from the labour that sets them in motion. In the case of land, seeds and livestock, which are the obvious examples of potentially 'privatised' means of production before the age of machines, they do not dominate the labour process as machines do. And where labour is not 'free' in Marx's sense, access to labour is controlled by quite other mechanisms than that of the capitalist labour market. As a corollary, the forms in which that labour is produced and reproduced has a different significance too. That is to say, the means by which labour is allocated both in the present and the future through differing kinship forms, or the social relations of human reproduction, is of critical importance.

Meillassoux does not argue from within the confines and structures of capitalism (in fact he makes a strong plea for analytical tools to be developed which do not derive from those used for the analysis of capitalism). However, he seems to us to be guilty in his analysis of conflating meanings of reproduction which need to be analytically distinguished. Social reproduction is thus seen by Meillassoux in terms of the reproduction of labour power and this is in turn identified with control over human reproduction, and with the 'means' of that reproduction: women. Moreover, he sees the reproduction of labour power as the central contradiction of the capitalist mode of production; the logical implication of his analysis is that when capitalism has run out of other modes of production upon which it can practise the primitive accumulation of labour power, it will collapse since it cannot cover the cost of its own reproduction.

In his argument what he calls domestic community plays a crucial role. Although the domestic community is basically an empirical concept, referring to a group of individuals living together, it is never defined with precision, nor is the nature of the cooperation between its different members. This lack of specificity is in part due to the fact that the concept refers to a series of rather different

units: it is present in all modes of production with a certain level of development of the productive forces (essentially cereal agriculture), when it acts as a basic unit of production and consumption, and is also present in capitalism (in the form of the nuclear family). Meillassoux's main concern is the domestic society, where the domestic community is defined as the basic unit of production. However, even within the context of the domestic society, the domestic community varies considerably in size, from a small polygamous household headed by an elder to a very large complex of household units linked together under one elder. The domestic community thus bears a close resemblance to the household as constituted in Sahlins' 'domestic mode of production' (1972). In his account of the structure and the dynamics of the domestic community, Meillassoux gives reproduction of the labour force as important a role as production of the means of subsistence in the operation of the system as a whole, i.e. in social reproduction. In order to understand his concern with the dynamic of human reproduction as the motor of social reproduction it is important to examine the way in which the domestic community is theorised. For Meillassoux the continued existence of 'domestic society' depends upon the necessary reproduction of each empirically given productive unit, each domestic community. Power in the domestic society is vested in the elders and their power comes directly from their role in organising and controlling the reproduction of their own groups (a domestic community) which in his analysis means controlling the exchange of women, the means of reproduction. Although the existence of the domestic society is allowed for, it only exists because it meets the productive units' needs for biological reproduction. That is, each productive unit needs to find reproductive partners outside its own boundaries, merely because demographic hazards would make biological continuance over time problematic. The argument is circular. The analysis of the structure and dynamics of the domestic society thus begins and ends with each individual productive unit; there is no system, no structure beyond that of the domestic community and the relations it establishes for the sole purpose of biological reproduction.

Meillassoux is also concerned to analyse the ways in which individuals are allocated to different productive units and to positions within the labour process (although his interest in this is cursory); that is, with access to and control over the means of production and distribution. This basic concern however again emphasises the primacy of reproduction. In this regard the weakness in his argument arises out of the fact that he sees control over women's reproductive power as being the same as control over differential allocation of labour power. There is however no necessary relationship between the two. Even less is the former the only means of achieving the latter, which is in effect what he is arguing.

Meillassoux here makes the error, also found elsewhere, of implying that different social forms are organised primarily for the purposes of their reproduction, that this ensures that they not only continue to exist through time but are also unchanging; from this position he slides into assuming that women's reproductive powers must be socially appropriated through various social institutions (marriage, force etc), and since these are assumed by him to be controlled by men, women must inevitably be subject to men's control.

Meillassoux assumes throughout his book that the reproduction of the labour force is synonymous with human reproduction. He shows no theoretical awareness that the labour force is socially constituted; that certain categories of people become members of it while others are removed from it. But we would argue that understanding the means by which individuals are allocated to it is an essential element in analysing how it is reproduced. The constitution of, and control over, productive and non-productive members of any given social group has to be analysed. This is particularly crucial in the analysis of class societies but in pre-capitalist societies individuals are also categorised according to the position they occupy in the labour process (elders/juniors, men/women, slaves/freemen) and this categorisation has to be analysed before reproduction of the labour force can be understood. Because he does not recognise the importance of this, Meillassoux can only see women as reproducers and ignores their equally important role as producers - a role in which they are under just as much social constraint as they apparently are as reproducers.

As we have already argued, Meillassoux is only interested in looking at each unit of production, thus he almost completely ignores the division of labour operating within them and across the boundaries of the different productive units. Since for him women as producers are isolated within the domestic community and have no individual 'public' existence, they disappear from his discussion of the labour force, from the analysis and from theoretical interest, except in their role as producers of children. In Meillassoux's attempt to make control over human reproduction and reproduction of the labour force the total explanation for all other kinds of control over women, the concept becomes overloaded and unconvincing. If we cannot accept that control over women's reproductive powers is the only means for controlling labour, we obviously cannot accept this as a sufficient explanation for the exercise of control over women.

To sum up this section briefly: we have suggested that in part Meillassoux's argument is unsatisfactory because of a conflation of the control over women as biological reproducers and as means of controlling labour. While there is an association of these forms of control in some cases, we have argued that they must nonetheless be kept analytically separate. Furthermore human reproduction can obviously be subsumed, for general theoretical purposes, under the

general notion of reproduction of the labour force, but for the specific analysis of women's situation, the two must be kept separate. Even where kinship systems typically order both human reproduction and the allocation of labour, the determinations of these two activities may be quite distinct, though correlated. What has to be borne in mind is that the production of new human beings is a distinct labour process.

### C Human or biological reproduction

Until the development of the forces of production under advanced capitalism, there has probably been very little significant change in the material conditions of the production of human labour, i.e. childbirth and lactation. The social relations of human reproduction, that is the conditions of possession of both the means of (re)production and of control over the product have not been so immutable. To apply the terminology developed for the analysis of the productive process to that of biological reproduction may be thought reductionist: a failure to understand the specificity of human reproduction. Many writers on the subject have tried to avoid such a reductionism by positing a sort of parallel structure or reproduction, separate from that of production. Rubín, for example, institutes a 'political economy of sex' (1975); Smith suggests that the articulation of the mode of production and the mode of reproduction should be analysed (1977, p21). Engels implies the parallelism in his well-known phrase about production of the means of subsistence and the reproduction of human life (1972, p71). Intuitively, such an approach is appealing, partly because the categories imposed on us by the particular organisation of the capitalist mode of production separate the sphere of 'reproduction' from that of production to the extent that the law of value is strictly kept out of the home. A whole set of fetishes and taboos protect certain activities, especially those concerned with the reproduction of the labour force, from the wholesale penetration of the law of value. O'Laughlin certainly oversimplifies when she asserts that production and reproduction are analytically indistinguishable (at least at this level) (p21). However, to argue for the development of a whole set of new concepts in order to understand human reproduction seems to fall into a fetishism surrounding it under capitalism.

We do not need to understand the dynamics of human reproduction so as to explore their implications for the supposed necessity of the control of women's reproductive powers. Many anthropologists, including Meillassoux, work with the implicit assumption that it is the imperative of all populations to expand, and further that they expand more or less constantly. This framework is also shared by some demographers and probably derives from the social darwinist heritage of the social sciences. A linked assumption is that some sort of correspondence exists between population levels and technical and social systems. This has led many people to suggest that population growth or 'pressure'

causes technical and social change. Although these arguments are quite closely linked, we will here treat each of them separately and thus ask first whether it is correct to assume that the normal condition of human populations is expansion. We will then look at the problem of how population size and density affect and are affected by particular forms of productive regimes and socio-political organisation, so as to see whether any connection can be made between control over women's generative power and changes in productive regimes.

The debate on the nature of pre-industrial population increase is quite complex; but the available evidence indicates that they probably did not rise constantly, rather than periods of rapid growth were followed by periods of stability or even decline (cf. White 1976). This does not mean, of course, that within any one of these periods there might not be rapid fluctuations - periods of demographic collapse owing to disease, famine or warfare, followed by rapid recuperation. Looking not at individual populations but the world population as a whole, it has been suggested that there have been three great leaps in the stepping-stone pattern of population growth, which were responses to three great human 'revolutions': the tool-making and -using revolution; the neolithic revolution, and the industrial revolution. Between these leaps population stabilises out.

Until recently many demographers, following Malthus, assumed that rapid growth in pre-industrial populations was held in check by high mortality levels, thus a swift rise in population would imply a decline in its customary levels of mortality. Recent evidence seems to disprove this; rather the rate of population growth appears to be the result of controlling fertility, though it is not clear whether such control is the result of conscious choice or not. Polgar (1972) suggests that it is not necessary to hypothesise perception of population pressure because 'cultural practices' limiting population growth would have 'enough adaptive advantage to be maintained with sufficient strength so as to prevent situations of scarcity arising in the first place' (p206). (The difficulty with this argument is that it begs the question of why there should be such cultural practices in the first place.)

That there is a vast number of such practices is clear: they range from taboos on sexual intercourse, including post-partum taboos, on early marriage, on childbirth late in life, on multiple births, to withdrawal of women temporarily or permanently from childbearing, to abortion, infanticide and child neglect. What is also noticeable is that most of these practices affect women rather than men and that they have differing implications. For example, only infanticide and child neglect permit a degree of sex selectivity. Since infanticide is widely found in pre-industrial societies one of the areas that needs research is why and under what conditions certain sex ratios may be desired.

An attempt to answer this question in part is made by Harris (1975) who gives considerable weight to ecological factors. He notes that 'primitive groups' consistently stabilise out at a lower than bearing capacity of the land, with a given level of development of technology often as much as 30% below. This presumably gives them a sufficient margin to ensure survival in years of poor food supplies. But how is this population stability achieved? Harris suggests that as a consequence of a constant tension between these groups population growth potential and their resources, they practise female infanticide, often reducing their potential female population by up to one half. This ensures that the reproductive capacity of the group remains within its resource capacity (4). This approach is not without problems, particularly since the societies from which the data are taken are in marginal areas and are unable to expand, thus severe population control may be a recent phenomenon. Nonetheless it does receive some support from growth estimates for pre-industrial populations which suggest that growth was very slow, surprisingly so according to their projections. If this low growth were achieved principally by selective female infanticide, one should expect to find disbalanced sex ratios, especially among young adults. Unfortunately this data is extremely hard to come by especially for the earlier periods and non-literate societies. Harris does cite the highly disbalanced population of a New Guinea group in which the sex ratios among young adults was 148 males to 100 females; and ratios of only 3 women to every four men have been noted for England in the periods of population stability before and after the Black Death (cf. Russell 1948). Clearly these are very tenuous clues but they would point to the need for research into possible correlations between population stability and high rates of female infanticide.

An allied line of approach would be to ask under what conditions human populations restrict their numbers to their resource base. One such case would be where a population was for whatever reasons a restricted resource base and an unchanging technology: rapid population growth not accompanied by a rapid expansion of subsistence production would result relatively quickly in the adults of the community becoming aware of a poor resource-to-population fit, i.e. through the effects of malnutrition. Unless severe, malnutrition of women in their fertile years does not generally lead to a decline in conceptions, but it does lead to fewer pregnancies being brought to full-term, and to a shortening of the female fertile period. It also increases vulnerability to disease. Can we then see the common practice that food is offered to men, then to children and young adults, before women as an unconscious fertility inhibitor? A rapid feedback between resources and population may be the hallmark of many pre-industrial productive regimes but we still do not know under what conditions such a mechanism is absent. Further research is clearly needed in this area. Where the feedback for whatever reasons does not operate, there could well be a rapid expansion of population. Such an approach may help us to understand some of the dramatic population booms that have occurred when pre-

capitalist groups are integrated into the capitalist system of production and local populations, are able to expand beyond their subsistence base, both because of local and outside employment opportunities (6).

It seems clear that the growth of human populations is both uneven and fluctuating and is subject to considerable social manipulation and control. Findings such as those outlined above, and the theories used to explain them, seem to indicate that a central interest of any social group - whether in times of expansion, when presumably increased female fertility is encouraged/enjoined, or in times of stability when some proportion of the female population is withdrawn from reproduction - may well be the social appropriation of women and the regulation of their generative powers. This seems to confirm Meillassoux's position; however, we are challenging his simplistic assumption (echoed by many others) that women have to be controlled (whether by direct action, or by creating particular internalised dispositions) because the needs of reproduction are constantly unchanging. Rather we are arguing that it is precisely because of the differing requirements over time of human groups vis-a-vis reproduction that women's generative powers must be regulated. What has to be investigated, therefore, are the conditions under which women are forced, or socially programmed, to accept the role of intensive breeders, and the conditions under which some women become 'surplus', either segregated into productive undertakings and not allowed to reproduce, or killed at or near birth (5).

This leads us to our second problem: that of how population is linked to productive systems. It is assumed that each type of subsistence technology is accompanied by a range of corresponding types of social systems and by corresponding ranges of demographic levels at which human societies tend to operate, both in terms of the absolute size of the total unit and in terms of the density of population in a given environment. Hence we get the characterisations of 'typical' population densities of hunting and gathering, swidden, subsistence agriculture (cf. Wolf 1966). In both Engels and Meillassoux there is an assumption that increased control over nature and the development of the forces of production necessitate increasing inputs of labour and thus control over labour.

However, there is no a priori necessity for the increasing input of labour. Rather the evolution of increasingly intensive agricultural systems should reduce, not increase, cultivators' labour inputs. This could in turn lead to increasing leisure for all cultivators, and possibly lower reproductive profiles for women. In fact the opposite appears to happen: cultivators spend more time in production in more intensive systems than in extensive ones, but the reasons for this are social or political pressures on production, not an inevitable logical outcome of an increased control over nature. Cultivators have to maintain levels of production over and above their own subsistence

needs for a variety of reasons. They have to maintain a non-productive class, or a class of non-agricultural specialists; they need a surplus for prestige; or have to meet tribute, rent or tax obligations. Do such demands require higher population levels? If so how do they get feedback in such a way as to influence the fertility patterns of both individuals and groups?

One way to analyse the complex relationship of productive regime to population is to try to establish what we call demand for labour schedules. Soviet demographers used a similar framework in their attempts to relate changes in European population to changes in the demand for labour at each stage of capitalist development (cf. Coontz 1957). While this gives some insight into certain demographic processes (including migration), the means by which demand for labour and population are historically related cannot thereby be determined. Only by relating the nature of productive labour to specific types of productive units (for example the family) and the economic functions of these units, can this gap be bridged. One such attempt was made by Coontz (1957) who tried to show that changes in the economic function of the family and fertility were related to the changing demands of developing capitalist industry. In the initial accumulation process the family was reduced to a unit of consumption, there was a reduction in the quality of the labour-power demanded and the substitution of the unskilled labour of women and children for that of adult men (i.e. the cost of producing labour power fell). Population grew rapidly while chronic unemployment and pauperism became a feature of the working population. Coontz then postulated a relation between differing patterns of fertility of differing classes to their differing economic functions: middle-class families with their typical male breadwinner and female housewife/dependent, were the first to show a decline in fertility (around the late 19th century) impelled by the high cost of education for children if they were to take up middle-class occupations. With the transition from 'progressive' to monopoly capitalism and imperialism, competition among domestic capitals was reduced, lessening the tendency for wages to rise. At the same time a rise in the level of skills needed even among the semi-skilled labourers brought proletarian families under economic pressure to decrease their fertility. In both cases Coontz's explanation for demographic change is that the cost of producing labour-power rose, leading to a reduction in its production (7). Although Coontz's formulation today seems somewhat crude, it does provide a framework for trying to analyse the interconnection between socio-economic systems and population dynamics. Particularly between changes, both qualitative and quantitative, in the 'means of employment' or mode of gaining a livelihood, and in the forms of the unit through which these changes are transformed into changing fertility rates (8).

What are the conclusions then from this brief incursion into demography? They would seem to be, as we earlier indicated, that in



situations of both growth and stability, women's reproductive capacities are subject to social order, but this order may either involve direct control or depend on mediating factors. Moreover, there is immense room for manoeuvre in the way that demographic patterns are worked out in the short term. Even if one does posit control over human reproduction as 'necessary', this does not in itself a priori entail that such control will be inimical to the interests of women themselves, nor that men, or some categories of men, will be the controllers. The argument discussed above, that the control of women is necessary for control of labour in general, must also be viewed with caution. Increasing control over labour is essentially concerned with the allocation and distribution of labour power, and this can be done in many ways - through organisational and managerial functions, exclusive or extensive kinship obligations, a more elaborate division of labour - as well as through control over women. Quite apart from this, the very term 'control' conceals many different types of mechanisms. Women clearly often are reduced juridically to the status of objects, but it is also clear that control can be exercised at a generalised level, through diffuse ideological mechanisms, or politically, for example through the systematic use of violence against them (cf. Young and Harris, 1976). Lastly, although both Engels and Meillassoux assume that once controlled women never thereafter free themselves, nor even actively protest or combine against their controllers, this must be questioned. The 'world historical defeat of the female sex' is a stirring battlecry but historically inaccurate. Clearly in some empirical situations particular categories of women are in a position to 'control' other women.

### III THE SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOUR

In what has preceded, we have tried to distinguish various meanings of the term reproduction, and to look more closely at the dynamics of human reproduction. A discussion of the sexual division of labour follows naturally from this since human reproduction, and the labour process it involves, are so frequently used as an explanation, or at least justification, of this division of labour. But while any discussion of it must inevitably start from a consideration of human reproduction, most discussions tend to end there too (9).

The starting-point for an understanding of the sexual division of labour must be a recognition of its complexity, of the multiple levels at which it functions. The division of labour is normally analysed as an economic phenomenon, deriving both from regional and craft specialisations, and from the characteristics of particular labour-processes that demand different degrees of cooperation between producers. From this two-fold derivation the distinction between a social and a technical division of labour is made. However, the sexual division of labour cannot be analysed in strictly economic terms: not only productive (and reproductive) tasks are allocated

by it, but also political and religious activities. Of course, the same could be said of any division of labour which has reached a certain level of specialisation - take for instance the separation between manual and mental labour - but in the case of the sexual division of labour task allocations are mediated by a particularly powerful ideological operator. We have called this the social construction of gender identity (cf. Rubin 1975).

In this section, then, we shall try to distinguish functions within the single concept of the sexual division of labour. We shall start by looking at some of the uses to which the concept has been put, and examine it as an essential component of the social construction of gender. We shall then look at some arguments concerning the distribution of tasks on the basis of sex, and the unequal value that is attached to different tasks. Lastly we look at the interplay between the sexual division of labour and specific forms of the productive unit.

#### (a) The concept of the sexual division of labour

In discussions on the sexual division of labour one is confronted with the same sort of atemporality that we have mentioned above in connection with treating women as an object of study. In most Marxist texts the sexual division of labour is taken as a given, requiring no further analysis, as though it were a constant factor throughout history. It is used to explain the different roles of men and women, or the differences in the way the penetration of capital affects women and men (cf. Boserup 1970). In our own society, it is also often used as a justification for the wholly unequal participation of men and women in the labour market.

The sexual division of labour plays a particularly significant role only within the characterisation of primitive communism in Marxist theory. Marx comments: 'Within a family, and after further development within a tribe, there springs up a natural division of labour, caused by differences of age and sex, a division that is consequently based on a purely physiological foundation' (1970, p351). If we turn to Engels there is a clear failure to integrate the sexual division of labour into the importance he attaches to the division of labour in general in tracing the development of civilisation. The sexual division is characterised as 'purely primitive': men and women are 'each master in their own sphere: the man in the forest, the woman in the house. Each is the owner of the instruments which he or she makes or uses: the man of the weapons, hunting and fishing implements; the woman of the household gear' (1972, p218). Engels' account of the development of private property on the basis of this 'natural' division of labour is well-known, but it is interesting to note how much explanatory power is thus assigned to the sexual division which in itself is never questioned.

It is noticeable that while both Marx and Engels, in their characterisation of the sexual division, appeal, by implication to the specificity of human reproduction, in mentioning physiological characteristics, the concept of human reproduction itself is of little significance to either of them. Engels' attempt to trace the development of family forms depends on certain psychological assumptions, that are never explained, and is not, at least in his early stages of evolutionary development, integrated with the rest of his argument. Is this because human reproduction is for both Marx and Engels part of the general process of social reproduction and thus not worthy of special mention, or because it is so distinct, analytically, from production of the means of subsistence that it is of no theoretical significance? Or did they consider it to be 'naturally' unproblematic? Whatever the answer, it is certainly the case that few Marxist writers have elaborated on Marx and Engels' treatment of the subject.

Marx, in the same passage as the piece cited above, does seem to be arguing that the natural division of labour based on age and sex, with the development of exchange value and the commodity form, eventually breaks up the organic unity of the tribe, until the 'sole bond still connecting the various kinds of work, is the exchange of products as commodities' (p352). Now it is possible that Marx was being particularly foresighted in seeing the development of the sexual division into a relation of pure commodity exchange between men and women. But if this is so, we have to ask ourselves why such a development has not happened so far in the history of capitalism, and why certain manifestations of the sexual division of labour have in fact usually been rigidly protected from the development of commodity relations. Again this point does not seem to have been further developed by other Marxist writers.

Writers of other persuasions, on the other hand, have often made the specific dynamics of human reproduction the basis for their understanding of the sexual division of labour. For example, those writing within the social darwinist tradition argue that it derives in large part from the inheritance of traits which were supposedly adaptive for our earliest ancestors in the struggle for survival. Males are thus genetically disposed toward co-operation and bonding with other males, as well as aggressive behaviour, while females are disposed towards nurturing and submissiveness (e.g. Tiger 1969). Such arguments can do very little to enlighten us on the specificities of sexual divisions of labour across time and space, nor can a generalised appeal to the idea of adaptivity encompass satisfactorily the plethora of different organizational principles by which gender identity is defined.

How is it that we can refer at all to 'the' sexual division of labour when patently its content changes radically from one environment and historical period to another? At a certain level of abstraction

it is the fact of differential assignment of tasks according to sex that is significant: at such a level one is merely stating in another way that gender differentiation is realised in specific social activities. This type of generality is quite different from trying to analyse on what basis tasks other than those of procreation and lactation are assigned to one sex or the other, i.e. the content of the sexual division of labour, and of the nature of appropriation of, and exchange between, sex-specific products.

(b) The sexual division of labour and gender differentiation

Since the biological basis for the sexual division of labour derives from heterosexual coupling, it is understandable that the construction of gender difference should be based on the conjugal role. However, even a model of conjugality - husband and wife, or mother and father - must be viewed with caution. Definitions of femaleness are far more often associated with the roles of wife and mother than those of maleness are with the roles of husband and father; maleness is often more associated with roles like hunter or fighter. We have to understand the specific historical circumstances under which male = father, or even adulthood, equals institutionalised heterosexual partnership.

Such associations are particularly clear in situations where no productive work is being performed (except that of childbirth), for example among high-status groups such as European aristocrats, who are entirely separated from the sphere of production, and even from tasks such as lactation and housework, and yet whose gender identification depends on a rigid demarcation of activities. At its most tenuous, the sexual division of labour can refer to women having babies and men hunting and/or fighting, but in most circumstances it is clear that the assignment of tasks on the basis of sex has an ideological origin. That is, it is often an affirmation and reiteration of difference, of otherness.

This point is particularly clear in societies where subsistence is obtained through direct appropriation from nature, i.e. certain types of hunting and gathering societies. There is usually an inviolable rule that prevents women from carrying weapons or hunting large game, even where it would not interfere directly with their role as biological reproducers. This is the case even though, as we have mentioned above, recent demographic work suggests that the maintenance of stable population levels may require that a high proportion of live female births should not be permitted to bring their reproduction potential to term. In contrast to the strictness of gender roles among hunting and gathering groups, primatological studies have found that for example chimpanzee organization is not so strict. Female chimpanzees, both young and old, who are not carrying children can and do join in 'male' activities such as large-scale hunting (Williams 1971 and 1973).

A monopoly on violence, weapons and large game hunting is often seen as the male specialisation comparable to that of bearing and rearing children for females. This comparison is apparently explicit in the cultural practices of at least some pre-class societies (10). In the Peruvian Amazon the women combine together if they feel that there has not been enough meat circulating through the village, and cajole the men to go out hunting. In exchange, when the men return with the meat, the women will grant sexual favours to men who are not their regular partners. The capacity of males for violent behaviour has often been used as explanation of their superior social position (11). But to treat male violence as a constant factor throughout history makes it impossible to understand how it has been socially defined and controlled. Only certain sorts of male violence will be acceptable in any social context: both the form it takes and the possible recipients will normally be limited by cultural rules. The matter is clearly a complex one, but we must start from the premise that even if male violence is a central aspect of gender definition, women's capacity for defending themselves, and for retaliating, is a product of their social position. Though the potential of male violence against women must be seen as a limiting condition of their existence, we feel it is misleading to treat women as archetypal victims. The extent to which male violence is an effective mechanism for keeping women in their place must be a product of women's roles in social production, and of the way a given society organises human reproduction.

It is thus not possible to theorise male violence outside of a specific society any more than it is possible to provide general statements on human reproduction as a limiting condition of female gender definition. It is however clear that male violence against women is much more widespread than anthropological literature would lead us to imagine, and is consistently less reported than violence between males, which is labelled as 'warfare', 'feud', 'disputes', even 'politics'. For this reason it is often hard to know whether systematic violence against women is to be understood as a necessary feature of social reproduction, or as contingent and sporadic - the result of the general social superiority assigned to men. But it certainly is the case that, where women's freedom and autonomy is strictly circumscribed, the incidence of male violence against them should be seen as a repressive mechanism to quell signs of revolt, whereas in other types of society in which some juridical autonomy is granted to women, male violence can be interpreted as an open manifestation of conflict of interest between men and women.

One writer who has analysed the sexual division of labour in terms of gender assignation is Rubin (1975). She argues that the sexual differentiation emphasised in the sexual division of labour exists in order to reinforce the heterosexuality on which any kinship system depends. 'Far from being the expression of natural differences,

exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities' (p180). 'Individuals are engendered in order that marriage be guaranteed' (ibid). Her argument is useful in that it questions the idea of a 'natural' division of labour 'springing up' (Marx's words) out of natural/physiological differences. However, to replace 'nature' with the needs of the 'kinship system' seems to us to be equally suspect. The implication of her argument is that primates too, and even non-primates, have 'kinship systems' which enjoin strict heterosexuality, unless she is positing a model of human sexuality in which only the pre-Oedipal infant with its polymorphous drives can be considered 'natural'.

Rubin's notion of kinship is derived largely from Levi Strauss, who argues not only that the exchange of women marks the beginning of human society, of humanity (1969), but also that 'the sexual division of labour is nothing else than a device to institute a reciprocal state of dependency between the sexes' (1971). It seems highly questionable that an institution as multifaceted as the sexual division of labour should be reduced to such a functionalist explanation. It is also premised on a model of the conjugal bond which pays scant regard to the variety of practices known even from contemporary ethnology. While it undoubtedly is the case that the sexual division of labour and the cultural elaboration of gender difference do under most circumstances promote heterosexual bonding, and can be assumed by their very universality to have given early hominids some adaptive advantage, a univocal functionalist explanation such as these two writers seem to be advocating, effectively removes it from discussion, and so prevents an understanding of the quite radical consequences of rigid gender differentiation in the higher development of the productive forces. The need for coercion into heterosexual unions - whether this takes an ideological or more directly physical or juridical form - may only arise when the conditions of marriage or bonding are so disagreeable or exploitative as to discourage it.

(c) The sexual division of labour and the distribution of productive tasks

When we turn to the more strictly economic aspects of the sexual division of labour, we have to start by trying to understand its relation to other divisions of labour. Is the sexual division of labour analytically separate, or does it share the characteristics of other types of division of labour? We have already made the distinction between a division of labour in which there is direct cooperation in a single labour process, from one in which finished products are exchanged between specialised producers. In the latter case a distinction must be made also between the exchange of products as use values within a single enterprise, and their exchange between groups or individuals who are defined as distinct and separate (12).

If we apply the first distinction to the sexual division of labour, it is clear that complex cooperation can constitute a sexual division of labour whereas simple cooperation can not. That is to say where cooperation consists of more than one person performing identical tasks, e.g. helping to lift a heavy weight, or harvesting a crop rapidly, it cannot be a specifically sexual division of labour. On the other hand, where the two sexes are assigned different tasks in a single labour process, it obviously can.

It seems, however, that the sexual division of labour more often assigns separate productive tasks to each sex. In this case we have to determine the basis of exchange and distribution of products. While the terms in which the sexual division of labour is frequently discussed encourages us to think always of a conjugal unit, there are clearly examples of societies where some products of each sex are exchanged with the other on the basis of perceived equivalence or reciprocity. In traditional Amazon basin groups, for instance, the exchange of food at communal feasts suggests a reciprocity between meat (male product) and vegetables (female product) (13). In some parts of West Africa, too, women sell the produce of their own fields to their own husbands.

The notion of complementarity seems usefully to typify sexual divisions of labour where there is a recognition of exchange between the sexes; the essential precondition for such exchange is that the producer control his or her own product. This can be contrasted with situations in which the product is appropriated by some type of enterprise, such as a lineage or a household. We shall look at some aspects of this type of productive unit in the following section: what must be emphasised here is the importance of looking at the sexual division of labour in terms of how the products of that labour are allocated and controlled, not solely in terms of the criteria by which certain tasks are made sex-specific.

The latter aspect has dominated much of the recent discussion on the sexual division of labour which thus centres around the competing demands of production and human reproduction. On the one hand it is argued that the type of work assigned to women in the sexual division of labour depends upon the needs of childcare and socialisation. Brown (1970) for example, maintains that it is the limitations imposed by young children, not by pregnancy, that restrict women's activities; this means that tasks undertaken at the same time as child-rearing have to be repetitive, neither requiring prolonged concentration, nor extensive mobility, and they must be easy to stop and resume. Proponents of another view argue that, at least under certain productive regimes, the reverse is the case, i.e. women's capacity to bear and raise children is circumscribed by their role in acquiring the means of subsistence or other productive activities (Friedl 1975, Draper 1975).

We feel that any attempt to look for a single determinant of women's productive activity is doomed to failure. Biological reproduction can never be wholly autonomous from production, but the interrelationship is complex and, as we argued in the section on human reproduction, the importance given to women's role in one rather than the other sphere is historically variable.

Again it is clear that the activities of some women must be determined by the requirements of childbirth and socialisation; equally the empirical convenience of mothers doing 'domestic' tasks can be understood. But how are we to explain the rigidity of separation between the tasks assigned to one sex or the other? Again, the sexual division of labour is premised, as we noted, on women as mothers, yet the requirements of demography do not in all cases at all times require all women to bear and raise children - quite the reverse. Why are childless women so rarely freed from the specificity of their gender role?

The association of women with domestic tasks again does not explain of itself why such tasks should be consistently undervalued within the process of social production, nor why, by extension, whatever tasks are assigned to women tend to be less highly valued than those undertaken by their male counterpart. In other words it does not explain the sex hierarchisation of tasks, nor the intensity of labour performed by particular social categories (14). Marxists might well argue that for the capitalist women's work is least valued because it produces less value for society as a whole, or because women's labour is less productive than their male counterparts! While the Marxist concept of value cannot be easily used in the analysis of non-capitalist societies, yet we feel that it may be possible to identify a quite systematic 'non-valorisation' of women's labour, which derives from the nature of the social relations between the sexes. This again points to the importance of distinguishing different types of productive regimes in which the spheres of men and women are complementary - and therefore there is no hierarchisation of tasks and those in which a single man and woman, or a few members of each sex, form together a productive unit and the roles of the sexes are no longer strictly complementary.

#### (b) The productive unit

In the context of the sexual division of labour the nature of productive units presents particular problems. This is because many of the functions that we have been trying to separate analytically in what has preceded are empirically carried out within single units. While it is obviously important to look at the different dynamics of women's labour in all sorts of productive units, we shall consider here only one type - that of the peasant household as discussed by Chayanov (1966), which seems to form the basis of Marshall Sahlins' 'domestic mode of production' (1974).

discussion is premised on the assumption that we are dealing with a single model of humanity. Both exploiter and exploited in a class system share identical characteristics as members of a single species, and their differentia specifica are easily distinguishable as products of socialization and of ideological expressions of their class position. In the case of race, again, the difference is explicitly 'cultural'. When we analyse relations between the sexes, however, the very strength of the categories impedes the easy comparability of the different social tasks assigned to each.

Even within the household the differential distribution of products is often concealed ideologically by the sexual division of labour, but the inequality of distribution is perhaps clearer in the case of communal appropriation of a certain part of the surplus product, for such purposes as political and ritual activities. As Meillassoux points out (1975, p67), where women are controlled they become socially invisible, hidden behind their husbands who embody the unit vis-a-vis other similar units in the society. Women appear to have no independent social relations but are integrated into society through the mediation of their menfolk. As such, whole areas of activity which reproduce the social relations of production, plus the power and the conspicuous consumption that go with them, are kept from women, located exclusively within the household (cf. O. Harris, 1976).

This leads to a further point, related to the extent to which any given productive unit acts as an important factor in the social construction of gender and its reinforcement. We must understand to what extent individuals' positions within the productive unit gives them political, rural and ideological identity. For this we must analyse what the unit represents in political/jural and ideological terms and the way in which its surplus product is used - whether by one exclusive category of individuals or by an inclusive group.

One of the explanations for the disappearance of women from conventional social analysis lies in our uncritical acceptance of the way that social relations between the sexes are represented in structures such as the household. We cannot accept that because women are not visible, they are not of importance or that their only significant social relations are mediated through their menfolk. Some feminist anthropologists have gone astray. In order to 'make women visible' they have looked behind the male, public world, at the women's hidden private world, and seen it as something separate, with a distinct although parallel structure. They have hastened to demonstrate how women in fact wield both power and influence over the visible male world. Although such a perspective is useful in pointing to the absence of women from the majority of ethnographic studies, nonetheless it should not be uncritically adopted since it reinforces the notion that men and women can best be analysed separately. In other words it is

In empirical terms, it is quite common to find a type of unit which functions simultaneously as a production unit, initiating a distinct labour process; and as a distinct property-owning body (often the property is known as a conjugal fund); a unit of consumption, e.g. with a single hearth and a single residential area; and a unit of biological reproduction. The degree to which any empirical case fits this model is varied, partly dependent on the level of productive forces, but census-taking, rapidly followed by taxation, on the basis of 'households' is a familiar feature of the imposition of state-systems onto non-state systems. A particularly intense form of co-operation is enjoined on the conjugal pair, one that binds them into a frequently indissoluble unit, on which their social identity depends (cf. Kula, 1972 (15) as an example of this). It seems reasonable to hypothesize that this form of social organization is particularly suitable for the intensive exploitation of its labour, given its prevalence particularly in systems of feudal and state exploitation of agriculture.

The difficulty in analysing such a form is partly due to the fact that it seems to be found in social formations where the unit as such is giving up a part of its surplus to outsiders, whether feudal lords, the petty commodity market, colonial states or asiatic monarchs. Thus any exploitation that takes place within this productive unit will be theoretically subordinate to the form of class exploitation which produces such a unit. In addition, it is hard to know how to analyse the relations that obtain within the unit; they are usually described as relations of distribution: the product of the household is distributed according to local cultural criteria of need after outside obligations have been met. The assumption is generally made that an equal distribution is made between all active members of the household.

It is under such conditions that the sexual division of labour may be said to acquire a new significance. Where spheres of male and female production are kept fairly separate, there is some basis for analysing the inter-sex relationship as one of exchange. However, where a man and a woman are brought together in a single enterprise, and where often both sexes share in some of the major productive activities, the sexual division of labour acquires an ideological function of rendering non-comparable the different tasks performed by men and women, and correspondingly the portions of the product that are assigned to each sex.

If the ideological representation of these activities insists on the difference, on the complementarity, of tasks, then it is correspondingly harder to use concepts like exploitation or even inequality, when talking of relations between the sexes. This point can be illustrated by comparing the discussion of sex-based oppression with that of class relations, or racial discrimination. In the latter two cases

misleading because it can then be argued that women are only of marginal relevance in the analysis of fundamental social structures and relations.

In contrast to this we would argue that the relations between men and women are crucial in determining many social structures and practices and, in order to 'see women', it is not necessary to behind manifest social forms. Rather these practices and structures have to be analysed to reveal the significance of women's absence, to see whether this absence is not in fact a critical feature. The fact that women are not present in many visible public activities, or do not take part in political, jural and ideological practices, cannot be assumed to indicate that their absence lacks significance. It is particularly in the context of such representations that statements about political and economic power, about gender, and male and female roles, are mostly clearly being made. When such statements and representations in a particular society are contrasted to the actual sexual division of labour in production, the ways that they distort and misrepresent social relations becomes clearer. Such statements are not just comments on a situation, they are the means by which certain relations are reaffirmed and even created. Thus women's exclusion from certain forms of representation is yet another means by which they are controlled, by which their invisibility is created. Women do not naturally disappear, their disappearance is socially created and constantly reaffirmed; often men's solidarity is created precisely on the basis of this absence of women (cf. Edholm forthcoming). Keeping women out of public roles is in fact a positive and time-consuming aspect of social organisation. This point clearly applies more directly in some cases than in others.

This leads to the question of the degree to which women accept their subordination, their invisibility, their otherness. In part the collusion of women can be achieved through constant reaffirmation of their exclusion from public status; but in part it is also due to a high level of correspondence between the sex/gender system with the sexual division of labour. That is to say, women's perception of themselves, their position in production and distribution, their exclusion from public social participation, often have a high degree of congruence. So on all levels, the way in which women are enabled to see themselves and their position reinforce each other. Under what conditions is it likely that women will not accept their situation as natural, and 'god ordained'? We would suggest that this occurs principally when changes in the productive process bring the sex/gender system into contradiction with the sexual division of labour, when there is no longer congruence between the two. This incompatibility provides the potential for struggle and questioning, for sexual hostility and antagonism. The direction that such struggle takes, however, cannot be 'read off' in advance.

## CONCLUSIONS

If there is a unifying argument in this paper, it is that the concepts we employ to think about women are part of a whole ideological apparatus which in the past has discouraged us from analysing women's work, women's spheres, as an integrated part of social production. The strength of gender categories is such that we are prevented from comparing the tasks of men and women. While at first sight it seems absurd to suggest that women's role is often presented as unchanging, the gender categories founded in the ideas of biological reproduction and the sexual division of labour have a magnetic power of attraction: even as we recognise the important differences between women's roles in differing cultures, classes and historical periods, we are drawn back to universals.

What we have done in this paper amounts to setting out a programme for future work. The great wealth of empirical material on women which has been produced over the last ten years provides us with the wherewithal to refine our conceptual tools, and it is worth emphasising the degree of our dependence on empirical material. There are many different levels of discourse within Marxism, and what we have to say about women is not to be located at the most abstract levels of theory. Indeed Balibar seems to be claiming that 'men' are not proper objects of theory either (cf. footnote 1). Nonetheless the way in which empirical material is produced is also dependent on the concepts employed, and our debt to Marxist theory is obvious in this respect. Hopefully the questions being asked by feminists will lead to a reformulation of some of the concepts that have in the past only served to mystify the discussion of women.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Notes

- 1 This is apparently the same point as Balibar is making about men in a masterpiece of contorted writing:  
 'Finally, these same comments are valid for the concept "men": the "men" who support the whole process... The "obviousness", the "transparency" of the word "men" (here charged with every carnal opacity) and its anodyne appearance are the most dangerous of the traps I am trying to avoid. I shall not be satisfied until I have either situated it and founded it in the necessity of the theoretical system to which it belongs, or eliminated it as a foreign body, and in this latter case, replaced it by something else.' (1970, p207)
- 2 Cf. Meillassoux (1975) and Taylor (1975) for examples of this usage.
- 3 Cf. Balibar (1970), in particular Chapter II 'The Elements of the Structure and their History'.

division of labour here seems to operate in a highly conservative way, in an ideological promotion of gender difference.

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- 4 Cf. Harris 1975, p267: 'In order to achieve the net reproduction rate necessary to maintain a stable population as many as 50 per cent of the females born per generation under a regimen of modest fertility and health must be prevented from reproducing.' A corollary of this is that males are thrown into competition for the scarce women (cf. Harris' discussion of this point, op. cit. Ch. 13).
- 5 Wrigley (1969) provides examples of exceptionally high fertility rates among 17th-century Genevan bourgeoisie and the Hutterites of the contemporary USA. As examples of women segregated into productive activities one can cite domestic servants in 19th-century England, 14th-century Tuscan textile workers, Inca aallas, and many monastic institutions (viz lacemakers in 18th-century France).
- 6 Cf. White (1973) and Young (forthcoming, 1978).
- 7 Here recent work done on the need for the poorest families (often landless) for abundant labour upon which to depend for a livelihood is relevant, as is work on the effects of the intervention of capital into non-capitalist productive systems on fertility. Cf. White 1973, Young 1978.
- 8 In the discussion on demography we have drawn heavily on White 1976.
- 9 See Judith Brown (1970) for a useful summary of some of the best-known arguments.
- 10 A clear example is the special hunt of the Peruvian Amazon Sharanahua (siskind 1973).
- 11 Simone de Beauvoir relies heavily on the significance of violence in her existentialist account of the construction of gender: 'Many kinds of masculine behaviour spring from a root of possible violence. 1 for a man to feel in his fists his will to self-affirmation is enough to reassure loyalty to himself...' (1972, p354). Again, Juliet Mitchell states: 'Historically it has been women's lesser capacity for violence, as well as for work, that has determined her subordination.' (1971, p103)
- 12 These distinctions are based on those made in Capital Vol. I, chapters XIII and XIV.
- 13 Cf. Christine Hugh-Jones' discussion of the Barasana of Columbia (1977).
- 14 For example the same term domestic tasks is used to refer both to the highly labour intensive transformation of raw materials into edible food (for example the pounding of cereals and tubers), and to the quite highly mechanised housework of the housewife under late monopoly capitalism.
- 15 It is clear that certain features of this type of productive unit are contained in the nuclear family under capitalism, although the family is no longer a productive unit in the same sense, where the sexual division of labour is an important technical division of labour. As capitalism itself reduces more and more of human labour to abstract labour and different labour powers are rendered more easily interchangeable, including that between men and women, gender identity is strictly preserved in the home. The sexual

## Male Rationality in Economics - a critique of Godelier on Salt Money

by Barbara Bradby

This critical note arose from my dissatisfaction with Godelier's article "Salt Currency" and the Circulation of Commodities Among the Baruya of New Guinea' (Godelier 1971). I first read the article hoping that it would help me develop some ideas about the growth of exchange and of exchange-value in particular, about the origins of money as a general equivalent of all other commodities in exchange. It seemed a promising place to start, for, in Godelier's words, 'Baruya salt is ... a primitive form of money and precisely because it is "primitive", this money offers us an exceptional opportunity to explore the mysteries of the theory of value.' The problems of using the concept of value for pre-capitalist economic systems are enormous and complex, but Godelier compounds them by failing to explain how an investigation of exchange-value can uncover the mysteries of value - rather the terms are continually elided.

His method raises further problems: he sets out, not to use one empirical example to come to some conclusions about the place of money within marxist value-theory, but to use it to measure up the marxist theory of value against that of neo-classical supply and demand theory. The blatant empiricism of this method of exploration is one that we have been taught to think by the French was our national malaise. Godelier offers no justification for taking one particular empirical study of a primitive economy and then using it to test the superiority of neo-classical economics against marxist theory.

What he does is to calculate the labour-time embodied in the exchange of salt for bark-cloths and uses this to answer the theoretical question: Does exchange value come from labour or scarcity? Because he finds the exchange to be unequal, the labour theory of value is thus 'proved' to be invalid. He suggests the way forward is in the widening of the 'restrictive hypothesis' of neo-classical economics, which, together with the 'powerful stimulus' of the formalist school, will provide the theoretical apparatus of the 'new' economic anthropology' (p70).

My intention here is not primarily to defend the labour theory of value against Godelier's attack. Rather what I shall question is Godelier's assumption that under non-capitalist social relations all labour counts equally for purposes of establishing the rates at which goods are exchanged. In other words, despite the problems involved in applying the concept of value in primitive societies, I am going to use it in what follows simply as a heuristic device. Following Godelier, I shall use it to refer to the average labour-time embodied in particular products which are then commensurated through exchange. I shall make use of his detailed empirical data to suggest that where products are exchanged at systematic rates, it is sometimes social relations

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