

BUILDING ON THE STRENGTHS OF THE SOCIALIST FEMINIST TRADITION

SUE FERGUSON

Socialist feminism as a vibrant intellectual and political current has come and gone. It stalled in the mid-1980s, unable to muster a cohesive response to the critics of dual systems theory (the theory that social power was bifurcated into a patriarchal system of gender oppression and a parallel, though intersecting, capitalist system of economic class exploitation).¹ A few erstwhile socialist feminists retreated into an economic reductionism while others moved increasingly toward a purely cultural explanation of women's oppression that has culminated in feminist postmodernism. In the late 1990s, however, with globalization foisting upon us a host of unwelcome economic realities, even many postmodern feminists have begun to search for a materialist explanation.² Although economic reductionism has little to offer in this regard, one often neglected strain of socialist feminism—social reproduction theory—is more promising. If socialist feminism is to exist as anything more than an intellectual artifact, it is essential to engage with the anti-capitalist insights promoted by those working within the social reproduction framework.

The promise of social reproduction theory lies in its commitment to a materialist explanation of women's oppression that rejects economic reductionism without forfeiting economic explanation. Its premises, if fully developed, are essential to a renewed socialist feminism, for they can provide a coherent theoretical underpinning to an anti-capitalist coalition politics. They have, however, rarely been articulated as such. Instead, those who ground their work in social reproduction theory tend to rely on, as I will show, certain structural functionalist concepts and logic, reproducing many of the shortcomings that plagued dual systems theory. In the process, they undermine their theory's innovations and emancipatory potential.

This article begins by locating social reproduction theory within the overall trajectory of socialist feminist thought, emerging out of the debate

Article reprinted with permission from *New Politics*, Winter 1999, Volume 7, Number 2 (Whole Number 26).

over dual systems theory as a materialist alternative to cultural feminism. I then explain the theory's central innovations in terms of its foundation in historical materialism; these Marxist roots prompt its proponents to question the economic materialism that has dominated the tradition and the left in general. By conceiving the material foundation of social life as the productive and reproductive activities of everyday life, social reproductionists offer a materialist understanding of social relations that is better able to take account of contradictions and complexity than one based on the market alone and, in so doing, they open the door to an anti-capitalist feminist coalition politics. This door is, however, only ever partially opened, since, I go on to argue, proponents of social reproductionism do not fully incorporate and develop the theory's central innovations. I conclude with an argument about the need to more clearly establish the specific impact capital accumulation and class exploitation have on the overall process of social reproduction and bring to this analysis an historical and political conception of class. Only then, I argue, can the promise of this strain of socialist feminism be developed.

The Socialist Feminist Tradition

Since the early 1990s, a number of works have been published telling the story of socialist feminism.³ While the details differ to some degree, the broad contours of the stories told are consistent. From its activist origins in the New Left, through the domestic labor debate to the theoretical cul du sac of dual systems theory and challenges issuing from black feminism, socialist feminism underwent a number of ground-breaking transformations before it began its relatively rapid decline as an influential political and intellectual current in the early 1980s. At that time, the activist/academic ties that had forged the tradition were strained to the point of breaking, sending individual socialist feminists in a number of different directions.

The festering (and ultimately unresolved) issue fueling these developments centered on the place of Marxist analysis within the socialist feminist perspective. One tendency, which explained women's oppression in terms of the functional requisites of capital's drive for profit, constantly pushed up against a second tendency, which understood women's oppression in terms of men's socio-biological drive for mastery—a drive that intersected with, but nonetheless operated independently of, a co-existing economic system. In the former (economic reductionist) camp, class analysis and its attendant form of resistance, class struggle, are considered “fundamental” to women's emancipation. In the latter (dual

systems) camp, Marxism is at best a secondary consideration; at worst, it is irrelevant.

The inability to move beyond these two inadequate formulations has, over time, prompted a number of one-time socialist feminists to abandon not only Marxism, but materialist analysis in general. By the mid-1980s, the Althusserian socialist feminism represented by Michele Barrett's *Women's Oppression Today* (published first in 1980 and republished three times in the ensuing eight years) was the dominant current. Barrett's attention to patriarchal ideology, and its "relative autonomy" from the economic system, has been aptly criticized for reproducing that which it claimed to redress: dualism and economic reductionism.⁴ Barrett has attempted to answer that criticism by moving in an increasingly anti-materialist "post-Marxist" direction by essentially, according to one critic, "substituting discursive determinism for what [Barrett rejects] as an economic determinism in classical Marxism."⁵ Thus, those socialist feminists who followed Barrett's critique find themselves reincarnated as postmodernists, with little or no use for Marxist concepts and theory.

Others, however, remained committed to a materialist framework, often viewing that framework through a lens critical of Marxism, or of the Marxism espoused by early socialist feminists (an important distinction to which I will return). Many outside academic corridors persisted in bringing class analysis to feminist organizations and struggles and/or feminist analysis to class organizations and struggles.⁶ Inside the academy, a significant minority continued to explore women's history, politics and sociology from a materialist perspective, enriching socialism's and feminism's intellectual heritages. In some instances, socialist feminists have struggled, with more or less success, to incorporate aspects of an anti-racist perspective as well.⁷

But much of this scholarly and activist work has been carried out on vague theoretical foundations. Although broadly framed by a social reproduction perspective, it seems to stem more from an empirically grounded conviction that capitalism and sexism (and, at times, racism) are integrally related than from a rigorously constructed, coherent social theory. In fact, over the course of this past decade, the work of theorizing has too frequently been turned over to feminist Foucauldians and Derridians; the domination of academic postmodernism, and its insistence on the fragmented, fictional nature of experience, has led many materially-inclined socialist feminists to shy away from developing a broad, unifying perspective. Ilene Philipson's and Karen Hansen's comment in 1990 remains largely true today: "While many . . . socialist-feminist contributions have enormously enriched our understanding of

the world and women's place within it, none provides the all-encompassing theoretical framework that both dual systems theory and [Gayle Rubin's] sex/gender system attempted to elicit."⁸ As a result, materialist feminists today make do either with tired, if not entirely worn out, principles and convictions or with loose formulations about social reproduction.

But social reproduction theory was, in the first instance, an attempt to develop precisely that elusive theoretical coherence. In the early 1980s, a small number of socialist feminists argued that a unitary, materialist social theory was indeed possible.⁹ Dissatisfied with simply "adding gender or race on," theorists of social reproduction aimed for a truly integrative analysis. They suggested such a theory could avoid the pitfalls of economic reductionism and functionalism if its materialist foundations were conceived as social and historical, not abstract, narrowly-defined economic relations.

According to the proponents of social reproductionism, early socialist feminism relied on an unduly narrow, ahistorical conceptualization of the economy; it treated the economy as a self-sufficing arena of commodity production existing independently of the daily and generational production of people's lives.¹⁰ In so doing, it uncritically accepted and abstractly reproduced what was, in fact, a defining historical feature of capitalism: the separation of production from consumption (or reproduction). It is not necessary, social reproductionists argue, to abandon Marxism in order to move beyond this point. Rather, only by returning to the basic premises of Marxist methodology—its historical materialist premises—can socialist feminism provide a materialist explanation of women's oppression that overcomes both the dualist and economic reductionist tendencies of the tradition's earlier work.

The Innovations of Social Reproduction Theory

Historical materialism, Pat and Hugh Armstrong wrote in 1983, begins from the conviction that "the ways people co-operate to provide for their daily and future needs, combined with the techniques and materials at their disposal, establish the framework within which all human activity takes place."¹¹ They went on to argue that the economy, in this view, is not simply that arena in which goods (commodities) are produced; rather, it is that system through which people organize to meet all their human needs. And a (perhaps the) central element of this organization is the daily and generational production of individuals, which, in the capitalist era, takes place largely in households (and, as more recent social reproductionists stress, in the community). The material

basis of women's oppression can be understood by exploring the different ways women and men contribute to the production of individuals—contributions which are not only socially, but also biologically, determined.

The historical nature of this broadly defined economy is important to emphasize. By the beginning of the seventeenth century in Britain, the process by which goods are produced to meet subsistence needs begins to be separated out from the consumption of those goods and the generational production of individuals. That process, which takes place through the market in labor and goods, is not primarily organized around the goal of meeting human need but around the capitalist mandate to accumulate. And as Marx explains, the logic of the capitalist mandate is to commodify everything in sight—including, or especially, labor power. As more and more people work outside of their households for a money-wage, they become increasingly dependent on the market for the items they once produced at home (or obtained through the informal economy of bartering, lending and giving). But that dependence simply intensifies people's dependence on waged work, for without a wage, they cannot obtain crucial subsistence goods. It is because of this cycle of dependence that the market actually comes to dominate social reproduction in general.¹² Quite simply, people's ability to sustain themselves and others—to materially reproduce themselves—comes to depend upon their ability to earn a wage to feed, clothe and shelter themselves and their family.

The denomination of the market is unique to capitalism and it leads to some important developments in political theory. For one, the market is increasingly equated with the economy, and a whole science (Political Economy and later, Economics) develops to explain its laws of operation. Rather than understanding the economy as the historical and human organization it is, political economists reify it, imbuing it with a dynamic (the laws of supply and demand) apparently devoid of human relations. This is what Marx identified as the fetishization of commodities and the market, and his critique of political economy is, in fact, an effort at defetishization—that is, an attempt to reveal the social reality behind this narrowly construed economy. As a sphere of exchange cut off from the acts of production/reproduction, the market effectively obscures that reality (the nexus of which is the exploitative relationship between capitalist and laborer).

Marx's critique revealed those social relations which are immediately wrapped up with the sphere of commodity production: those between laborers and capitalists. That he did not analyze in any detail the social relations of human reproduction is problematic from a feminist point

of view. It has tended to reinforce the message among those struggling to change the world that the only (or perhaps the most) important arena of human activity is the formal economy, or the market; thus, reproductive activities, in which women have historically played a central role, have been neglected as sites for political struggle. Moreover, much existing Marxism has not incorporated its founder's critique of commodity fetishism. Many 20th-century Marxists have deployed key concepts such as class, exploitation and capital in ahistorical and abstract ways, using them as a sort of counter-science to political economy rather than as a means of revealing the social relations they represent. In other words, Marxist economics is often just that, another form of Economics—not the defetishizing social critique of political economy it was intended to be. By placing them outside the sphere of inquiry, much modern Marxism reinforces the tendency to neglect those social relations that underpin the formal economy. Arguably, it is this Marxism that informed early socialist feminism and it is this Marxism with which social reproduction theorists began to take issue in the 1980s.

By returning to the maxims of historical materialism, the Armstrongs and others suggested that, while the market is the linchpin of the “the ways people co-operate to provide for their daily and future needs” in the age of capitalism, it is not a self-sustaining entity; capital accumulation, the market's mandate, depends upon the prior existence of the free waged laborer (prior because the market has no internal mechanism for creating the laborer). In other words, the capitalist drive to commodify stops short of the system's most basic need: the production of people.¹³ The production of people occurs primarily within the household and implicates men and women in very different ways. Because households have historically been organized around a sexual division of labor, men and women have developed distinct interests and constructed power relations to those ends.¹⁴

Thus, a functional relationship between the formal economy and households exists insofar as the latter ultimately supply the laborers on which the former rests. But, and this is where social reproduction theorists depart from the economic reductionist socialist feminists, households are not merely units geared toward feeding the capitalist system with labor. And, by extension, women are not mere breeding machines, spitting out future laborers for capitalists to exploit. Rather, women's reproductive labor and household relations in general are as much a part of “the ways people co-operate to meet their daily and future needs” as is the market. Unlike the market, however, households are oriented to fulfilling human need—a mandate antithetical to capital

accumulation. As a result, households are not purely functional units but are themselves the source of a distinct set of dynamics put in motion by the impulse to meet the human needs of social reproduction—that is, the human need to reproduce daily and, in the case of households with children, generationally.

The inevitable connection between households and the formal economy is manifest in two fundamental ways: capitalists' requirement for a healthy, renewed workforce each day and over the long term; and households' dependence on wages as the crucial, if not the only, means of reproducing themselves. Still, the reproduction of life cannot be reduced to the imperatives of the market. People co-operate to meet human needs through the market, but also through households and communities and these social activities together form the material basis of life—a material basis whose relations are at once complex and contradictory. This is the foundation of the social reproductionist claim to an integrative social analysis that provides an alternative to the shortcomings of dual systems theory.

By emphasizing the importance of the market and the household/community in determining social relations, social reproductionists point to a method of grounding analysis in material reality without resorting to economic reductionism. To insist on bringing the underlying reality of households and communities, without which the formal economy could not exist, to the fore analytically is a long overdue corrective to the Marxist economics and socialist feminism of an earlier era. And, in suggesting that these processes are socially integrated (as the Armstrongs put it: "Patriarchy and capitalism are not autonomous, nor even interconnected systems, but the same system"¹⁵), social reproduction theory clears the way for a materialist model of production and reproduction that is much more comprehensive than the market model that has dominated feminist discussion and debate in the past.

Another important innovation social reproductionists offer is related to their commitment to defetishization. Far from engaging with Marxism as an abstract science that offers only economic laws of motion, they take up the historical materialist project of deconstructing the social relations that make those laws possible. And in exploring the social foundations of economic organization, they uncover a web of experiences that throw up contradictory interests and needs that are constantly evolving. For that reason, social reproductionists offer an alternative to the traditional approach to social theory (employed as much by Marxists as nonMarxists), in which concepts like the economy, class, gender and race are treated as just that—concepts, emptied of social content and

historical specificities. One of the central upshots of this recognition is the attempt to retheorize class as a lived experience, beginning with the acknowledgment that class never exists outside of the other fundamental relations of lived reality (i.e., race, gender, age, ability, etc.). In the words of Wally Seccombe and David Livingstone: “We seek to break with a “class first” framework that treats gender, generational, and race relations as subsidiary to, or something derived from, class relations.” Rather, class, like other interests, take form because of the forces of human agency (people making “common cause with one another”) reacting to the “multidimensional structures of inequality” that subject people to “similar treatment, hardship, or risk.”¹⁶

These insights of social reproduction theory are significant politically because they provide a potential foundation for an anti-capitalist politics. Meg Luxton and Heather Jon Maroney suggest that activists working within the social reproduction paradigm have been able to offer the following “working answer to the intricacies of the gender/race/class question: because the class structure of capitalism “maintains and perpetuates” racism, sexism, and heterosexism, it must be “overturned before such problems can be entirely eradicated,” by means of coalition politics, in which all the partners’ goals are “truly integrated” as part of the same struggle and also as part of a struggle for socialism.”¹⁷ By explaining oppression in terms of a materialist foundation that is defined in part, though not exclusively, by the capitalist dynamic of accumulation that drives the formal economy, social reproduction theory makes it possible for left women’s groups, for example, to find common ground with the radical elements of the labor movement, without the politics and struggle of one set of interests being given a higher priority than the other—or without the one being seen as more “fundamental” to overturning the socio-economic system as a whole than the other.

Similarly, if class is not treated simply as a formal-economic category, a “thing” to which people either belong or do not belong, but rather as one inevitable condition of existence that people experience through other inevitable conditions of their existence (such as race or gender), it becomes possible to look for ways in which left anti-racist or anti-sexist politics are, at one and the same time, anti-capitalist class politics. It also becomes possible to distinguish between those elements of race- or gender-based politics that have more to do with propping up the socio-economic system than dismantling it.¹⁸

Slipping Back Into Dualism

After almost 20 years of scholarly and activist work by committed social reproductionists, however, such possibilities remain unrealized. Instead, its tenets have served largely as a loose framework for socio-historical and empirical studies often catalogued under the heading Feminist Political Economy. Studies, ranging from explorations of women's (re)productive work in the fur trade to globalization's effects on women's lives as workers and mothers, convincingly illustrate the integration of productive and reproductive processes. While these are significant insofar as they serve to highlight a set of important issues which have been ignored by traditional political economy (about, for instance, the super-exploitation of homeworkers, for whom unpaid domestic labor merges with underpaid waged labor), they stop short of pushing forward and developing the theoretical innovations necessary to build a solid anti-capitalist feminist politics.

This is partly due to the radical rupture between academic and activist feminism that is the legacy of socialist feminism. While the goodwill to heal that rupture exists in some quarters, the socio-political conditions have mitigated against it.¹⁹ Over the past two decades, the left has experienced limited, uneven and isolated successes; as a result, it has been fighting a largely defensive battle to prevent the dissolution of programs and benefits won in previous years; thus, it has not been in a position to define the political terrain. In this context, many of the hard questions about moving the struggle forward simply do not get asked, and the momentum for activists and academics to learn from and work with one another is difficult to establish.

But the possibilities of social reproduction theory elude many of its proponents for another important reason: despite, and in contradiction to, an avowed commitment to understanding the materialist foundation of social relations as an integrated and unified process, some of the basic theoretical concepts used to elucidate that process recall the structural functionalist approach that characterized dual systems theory. This is abundantly clear in the formulations employed by many proponents of social reproduction theory today. Isabella Bakker, for instance, explaining the social reproduction paradigm in an introduction to a popular text on Canadian political economy, could be tearing a page from Heidi Hartmann's classic elaboration of dual systems theory, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism," when she writes: "Gender differentiation is universal and of fundamental importance on par with class divisions . . . There is a co-determination with economic structures of sex/gender systems."²⁰

But this slippage is not simply linguistic; it is, in fact, conceptual and can be traced to some of the earliest contributors to social reproduction theory, including the work of Wally Seccombe, whose 1983 flagship paper on social reproduction, “Marxism and Democracy,” is widely cited. Seccombe calls for an “all-embracing” approach that conceptualizes “the integration of the socio-economic with politico-legal relations of state and the cultural formation of groups and classes.”²¹ He goes on to develop what he argues is the theoretical tool required for this project, a “reworked” mode of production that takes account of the (re)production of both commodities and labor power. From this promising beginning, however, he quickly moves to the more problematic claim that two distinct logics of social development come to dominate: “economic” laws governing the consumption of labor power and “demographic” laws regulating its production; domestic groups or households, he informs, mediate the relationship between the two sets of laws, which are drawn together essentially as a result of the capitalist’s need for labor power.²² While Seccombe points to the contradictions that permeate the relationship between the economic and demographic processes (insisting that one cannot be understood solely and directly in terms of the needs of the other), his basic conceptual tools recall the structural functionalism of dual systems theory.²³

The weaknesses of this approach are carried over into current social reproduction literature. To begin, there is lingering unease about how an analysis of race is to be integrated into a two-sided process of social reproduction. The authors of a 1997 book, *Recast Dreams*, a study of working class families in a Canadian steel industry town, do not attempt to theoretically integrate the experience of race and racism into their perspective. While they acknowledge this as a weakness of the study, their explanation—that the study’s subject is a White working class community—is both questionable and telling, given current discussions in anti-racist theorizing about the need to problematize Whiteness.

Another difficulty that emerges in the social reproduction literature is an ambiguity about the precise nature and locus of power within society. In particular, proponents of the theory tend to sidestep the twin issues of capital accumulation and class exploitation. For example, the authors of *Recast Dreams* illustrate empirically the interdependency of households, communities and formal economy, but their analysis of the way the social forces they identify interact is difficult to decipher. In one tantalizing passage, David Livingstone and Meg Luxton refer to a “hierarchy of determination” and suggest that of the three primary spheres of activity, “workplace production relations tend to constrain

the autonomy of household activities . . . while communities . . . take up more discretionary parts of people's time and energies."²⁴ This passage, which stands without further elaboration, could suggest that the dynamic of capital accumulation impinges unevenly on all sets of social relations, shaping their interaction in specific ways. But this position is neither clearly argued nor developed and would seem to fly in the face of other passages in the book that treat the three sets of relations, in dual systems fashion, as equally determining.

Strategies for feminist resistance are also disappointing. Two recent collections dealing with globalization and the dismantling of the welfare state serve as good examples.²⁵ While some authors acknowledge the limits of state reform, they continue to advocate it as a solution with little or no discussion about why this is a limited strategy (that is, because the state is a capitalist state) or what steps might be taken to overcome those limitations. Others advocate building militant local resistance that focuses its energies outside accepted political channels while attempting to forge international links. But here too, no clear conception of how such a strategy can confront the power of capital is on offer, nor is there in-depth discussion of what, if any, role organized labor can play in the struggle. Given the historic antagonisms between movement politics and labor (and a theoretical framework that asserts their social integration) this lacuna is especially glaring.

Building Upon the Strengths

To move beyond the weaknesses of a structural functionalist approach and develop a truly integrative and historical understanding of social reproduction involves two crucial tasks: clarifying the role of capital accumulation in the overall process; and further developing the notions of class and class consciousness as a political and lived experience—that is, returning to the premises of social reproduction theory outlined above.

Here, it is useful to engage more thoroughly with the Armstrongs' contributions, for they, more clearly than their social reproduction colleagues, integrate the process of capital accumulation to the overall process of social reproduction. Beginning from the notion that the overall dynamic of social reproduction is tied to the ability of people to meet certain physiological and historical needs, they essentially argue that those needs will be thwarted so long as one fundamental means of reproducing ourselves—the production of subsistence goods—is commandeered by the forces of capital accumulation in an effort to generate profit, not goods. Thus, in their model, the formal economy plays

a decisive role and capital accumulation is clearly a powerful social force. It asserts its mandate over the whole process of social reproduction precisely because people's lives (meeting subsistence needs) are dependent upon its *modus operandi*, the market. These insights, which get lost among the dualist formulations of other theorists, suggest that the goal of democratic control of the process of social reproduction must involve confronting the power of capital. Social movements must look for ways to link their struggles with those which confront the power of capital directly, at the workplace.

Still, although the capitalist economy is intimately connected with—if not absolutely determinative of—the social relations of daily and generational reproduction, the capital/labor relation is not the most important or fundamental axis of struggle; rather, the Armstrongs and others suggest, class relations are, like gender, race, age and ability, an inescapable condition of people's lives. As such, they are reciprocally implicated: class is constituted in and through the experience of gender and race, and vice versa. It follows that neither production relations nor gender relations can be assumed to be more progressive or valid fronts of resistance.²⁶ Struggle and strategy must be, therefore, assessed within the specific contexts. And if gender and class, etc., are not separate systems, so much as they are a series of layered experiences, it is essential to move away from framing analysis in terms of structures and functions and begin instead with the real social relations and the human agents that produce, shape and sustain those structures and functions. The defetishizing critique of social reproduction theory is a promising beginning, and Secombe, Livingstone and others have advanced this key innovation in significant ways, particularly around the issues of class consciousness.²⁷ But as long as social reproductionists retain elements of dual systems analyses, their efforts in this regard will be stunted. As Himani Bannerji suggests in her provocative discussion of socialist feminist political economy, a structuralist framework ultimately treats (re)producers as “functional assumptions of the production process,” rather than the “living, conscious agents” they actually are.²⁸

The theoretical framework for an anti-capitalist materialist feminist theory and politics has already been sketched. If the strengths of the socialist feminist tradition are to be developed today, it is necessary to draw those contours more boldly.

Notes

1. That dilemma evolved out of two main criticisms: a functionalist account of the intersector of patriarchy and capitalism; and a failure to incorporate an explanation of other (specifically racial) oppressions. For a key text of dual systems theory, see Lydia Sargent, ed., *Women & Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1981). A good summary of the limits of dual systems theory is provided by Iris Young, *Throwing Like a Girl and other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), especially pp. 21–35.

2. See, for example, Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, *Materialist Feminisms* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1993).

3. Two important books are: Karen V. Hansen and Ilene J. Philipson, eds., *Women, Class, and the Feminist Imagination: A Socialist-Feminist Reader* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990) and Rosemary Hennessy and Chrys Ingraham, eds., *Materialist Feminism: A Reader in Class, Difference, and Women's Lives* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997).

4. See Johanna Brenner and Maria Ramas. "Rethinking Women's Oppression," *New Left Review* 144, 1984.

5. Teresa L. Ebert, "Critiques for a Red Feminism," in *Post-ality: Marxism and Post-modernism*. Spring 1995, p. 114. Ebert is engaging Barrett's book, *The Politics of Truth: from Marx to Foucault* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

6. The examples are numerous; they include struggles like that waged in the late 1980s by the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics or, more recently, the Common Threads project set up to help the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE!) organize LA garment workers.

7. See, for example, Linda Carty and Dionne Brand, "'Visible Minority' Women—a Creation of the Canadian State," *Resources for Feminist Research/Documentation sur la recherche féministe*, 17:3, Sept. 1988: 39–42; or Christina Gabriel and Laura MacDonald, "NAFTA and Economic Restructuring: Some Gender and Race Implications," in *Rethinking Restructuring: Gender and Change in Canada*, ed. Isabella Bakker (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1996): 165–186.

8. Hansen and Philipson, Introduction to *Feminist Imagination*, p. 25.

9. I focus in this paper on Canadian contributors to social reproduction theory, among whom the following can be listed: Pat and Hugh Armstrong, Isabella Bakker, Patricia Connelly, Bonnie Fox, David Livingstone, Meg Luxton, Martha MacDonald, Heather Jon Maroney, Wally Seccombe and Dorothy Smith. Other important American and British contributors include Stephanie Coontz, Lise Vogel, Sheila Rowbotham and Iris Young.

10. Contributors to the domestic labor debate, whose purpose was to draw attention to the processes of reproduction in the household, are especially open to this criticism. See Wally Seccombe, "Reflections on the Domestic Labor Debate and Prospects for Marxist-Feminist Synthesis," in *The Politics of Diversity: Feminism, Marxism and Nationalism* (Montreal: Book Center Inc., 1987): 190–297.

11. Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong, "Beyond Sexless Class and Classless Sex: Towards Feminist Marxism," in *Studies in Political Economy* 10, Winter 1983, p. 9.

12. Stephanie Coontz offers an excellent historical account of these changes in *The Social Origins of Private Life: A History of American Families 1600–1900* (London and New York: Verso, 1988), pp. 116–209. Market domination of the process of human reproduction is not just evident in meeting basic subsistence needs; as capitalism advances, the means of satisfying human needs for leisure time, intellectual stimulation, sport and sex are increasingly commodified too.

13. Aspects of biological reproduction are commodified, particularly for those who experience difficulty conceiving without technological intervention. On this see, Kathryn Russell, "A Value-Theoretic Approach to Childbirth and Reproductive Engineering," in

Science & Society 58.3, Fall 1994: 287–314. The process as a whole, however, can never be fully dominated by capital as it conflicts with one of the key conditions of capitalism, the existence of the “free” laborer (see Armstrong and Armstrong, “Beyond Sexless Class,” p. 28).

14. The production of people occurs in communities as well; insofar as communities and households exist within nation states that are themselves racially stratified and insofar as people-production is not just a physical/biological process, but also cultural and psychological, there is a great deal of scope for understanding racial oppression in these terms. I focus here on gender, not because I think it is more important or fundamental form of oppression, but because this is the central concern of social reproduction theory to date (for reasons I suggest below). I recognize, however, that there is no such thing as a non-raced woman, that is a woman who is not also equally defined by her place within a system of racial oppression.

15. Armstrong and Armstrong, “Beyond Sexless Class,” p. 29.

16. Wally Secombe and D. W. Livingstone, “‘Down to Earth People’: Revising a Materialist Understanding of Group Consciousness,” in *Recast Dreams: Class and Gender Consciousness in Steeltown*, ed. Livingstone and J. Marshall Mangan (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1996), p. 133.

17. Meg Luxton and Heather Jon Maroney, “Gender at work: Canadian Feminist Political Economy since 1988,” in *Understanding Canada: Building on the New Canadian Political Economy*, ed. Wallace Clement and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), p. 97. The citations are from Carolyn Egan *et al.*, “The Politics of Transformation: Struggles with Race, Class and Sexuality in the March 8th Coalition,” in Frank Cunningham *et al.*, eds., *Social Movements/Social Change: The Politics and Practice of Organizing* (Toronto: Between the Lines and Winnipeg: Society for Socialist Studies/Société d’études socialistes, 1988.): 20–47.

18. For instance, as Himani Bannerji has convincingly argued, the multi-cultural politics introduced by the Trudeau government in Canada is essentially conservative—aimed at channeling anti-racist resistance into “safe” cultural forms without class content, “On the Dark Side of the Nation: Politics of Multiculturalism and the State of “Canada,”” *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d’études canadiennes* 31:3, Fall 1996: 103–128.

19. The faltering relationship between academics and activists has been an issue of concern. Interesting discussions can be found in: Jeri Dawn Wine and Janice L. Ristock, eds., *Women and Social Change: Feminist Activism in Canada* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1991); and Hansen and Philipson, eds., *Feminist Imagination*, pp. 25–31.

20. Isabella Bakker. “The Political Economy of Gender,” in *The New Canadian Political Economy*, ed. Wallace Clement and Glen Williams (Kingston, Montreal and London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989), p. 100, emphases added.

21. Seccombe, “Marxism and Demography,” p. 28.

22. Seccombe, “Marxism and Demography,” p. 44. In raising this criticism, I do not want to detract from Seccombe’s unquestionable strengths. In this and other works, he develops a rich historical analysis of class and families that illustrates a real appreciation for human agency. See both: *Family Forms and Modes of Production* (London: Verso, 1992) and *Weathering the Storm: Working-Class Families from the Industrial Revolution to the Fertility Decline* (London: Verso, 1993). In suggesting his work recalls the structural functionalism of dual systems theory, I am referring to his *theoretical* explication of the framework in which he situates those historical actors. Seccombe’s later publications do not stray from these theoretical premises.

23. The integration social reproductionists favor is often asserted rather than argued—we are asked to conceive of a unitary social totality, but understand that it is one characterized by two distinct dynamics.

24. Livingstone and Luxton, “Gender Consci

25. 109.

26. I am referring here to Bakker, ed., *Rethinking Restructuring* and contributions by

social reproductionists to Patricia M. Evans and Gerda R. Wekerle, eds., *Women and the Canadian Welfare State: Challenges and Change* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

27. Himani Bannerji offers a compelling explication of this thinking in *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism And Anti-Racism* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1995).

28. See the final three chapters of *Recast Dreams*, written variously by Livingstone, Seccombe, Luxton and Elizabeth Asner.

29. Bannerji, "But Who Speaks For Us?" in *Thinking Through*, p. 77.